

Culminating Writing Task

Prompt:

How do the various texts in the unit treat the topic of the American Dream as described by Cullen?

Write an explanatory essay in response to the question that conveys complex ideas clearly and accurately through the effective selection, organization, and analysis of the various texts. Be sure use proper grammar, conventions, spelling, and grade-appropriate words and phrases. Cite several pieces of strong and thorough textual evidence that is integrated while maintaining the flow of ideas and including proper citation.

1. Underline the main task(s) and box other directions of the prompt.
2. In your own words, what two things is this task asking you to do?

In this task, I must discuss Cullen's treatment of the topic of the American Dream. I must also explain how other texts in the unit treat that same topic.

3. Look over the Cullen central idea analysis handout for Cullen's text. Read through your notes. List three of Cullen's central ideas in the space below.
 - The American Dream is not one idea, but can mean many things to many different people.
 - What people see as the American Dream is often an illusion based on material possessions.
 - The American Dream is based on the notion of making one's life better or making life better for others.
4. What texts from the unit will you connect to Cullen's central ideas?

The Great Gatsby, "The Egg," "Quilt of a Country," "I Hear America Singing," "Hollywood Dreams of Wealth, Youth, and Beauty"

5. Use your American Dream Anchor Chart to complete the chart below:

Central Idea from Cullen	Text that connects to this central idea	How does this text connect to Cullen’s central idea? Use textual evidence to support your claim.
<p>1. The American Dream is not one idea, but can mean many things to many different people.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “Quilt of a Country” • “I Hear America Singing” 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “A mongrel nation built of ever-changing disparate parts, it is held together by a notion, the notion that all men are created equal”(Quindlen). • “There is that Calvinist undercurrent in the American psyche that loves the difficult, the demanding, that sees mastering the impossible, whether it be prairie or subway, as a test of character, and so glories in the struggle of this fractured coalescing”(Quindlen). • “Each singing what belongs to him or her and to none else/ The day what belongs to the day—at night the party of young/ fellows, robust, friendly, /Singing with open

		<p>mouths their strong melodious songs”(Whitman).</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • •
<p>2. What people see as the American Dream is often an illusion based on material possessions.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “Hollywood Dreams of Wealth, Youth, and Beauty” • <u>The Great Gatsby</u> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “Hollywood's not called a dream factory for nothing. It manufactures optimism, and in the process of selling it, can make the possibility of success feel wondrously real”(Mondello). • “Hollywood had long been inspiring immigrants to come to the U.S. with images that filled them with overstated optimism about what they'd find here”(Mondello). • “Gatsby was overwhelmingly aware of the youth and mystery that wealth imprisons and preserves, of the freshness of many clothes and of Daisy, gleaming like silver, safe and proud above the hot struggles of the poor”(Fitzgerald). • “They were careless people, Tom and Daisy--they smashed up things and creatures and then retreated back into their money or their vast carelessness or whatever it was that kept them together, and let other people clean up the mess they had made”(Fitzgerald). • “It’s a bona fide piece of printed matter. It fooled me. . . .What thoroughness! What realism!

		Knew when to stop, too--didn't cut the pages."(Fitzgerald).
3. The American Dream is based on the notion of making one's life better or making life better for others.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • "The Egg" 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • For herself she wanted nothing. For father and myself she was incurably ambitious"(Anderson). • "She wanted me to rise in the world, to get into a town school and become a man of the towns"(Anderson).

6. Compose a working thesis:

In Jim Cullen's book, *The American Dream: A Short History of an Idea that Shaped a Nation*, the author claims that the American dream is varied, but that it is often based on the idea of improving one's life; however, Cullen also points out that the idea of the "good life" can often be based on an illusion. These ideas about the American Dream are also seen in the informational texts, "Quilt of a Country" and "Hollywood Dreams of Wealth, Youth, and Beauty," as well as the literary texts "The Egg," *The Great Gatsby*, and "I Hear America Singing."

7. Organize your essay:

Introduction:

Interesting intro: The notion of the American Dream is an idea that is as old as America itself. From its earliest beginnings as a group of colonies to its current existence as a national superpower, America and the people who have inhabited her have subsisted on the hope that springs from dreams.

Thesis: In Jim Cullen's book, *The American Dream: A Short History of an Idea that Shaped a Nation*, the author claims that the American dream is varied, but that it is often based on the idea of improving one's life; however, Cullen also points out that the idea of the "good life" can often be based on an illusion. These ideas about the American Dream are also seen in the informational texts, "Quilt of a Country" and "Hollywood Dreams of Wealth, Youth, and Beauty," as well as the literary texts "The Egg," *The Great Gatsby*, and "I Hear America Singing."

Body Paragraph 1 Topic: The American Dream means different things to different people.

Topic sentence: In the introduction to his text, Cullen explains that “there is no *one* American Dream. Instead, there are many American *Dreams*, their appeal simultaneously resting on their variety and their specificity”(Cullen).

Texts to discuss/Quotations to use:

- “A mongrel nation built of ever-changing disparate parts, it is held together by a notion, the notion that all men are created equal”(Quindlen).
- “there is no *one* American Dream. Instead, there are many American *Dreams*, their appeal simultaneously resting on their variety and their specificity”(Cullen)
- “Each singing what belongs to him or her and to none else/ The day what belongs to the day—at night the party of young/ fellows, robust, friendly, /Singing with open mouths their strong melodious songs”(Whitman).
- “the Dream is neither a reassuring verity nor an empty bromide but rather a complex idea with manifold implications that can cut different ways”(Cullen)

Body Paragraph 2 Topic: The American Dream is founded on the idea of obtaining “the good life” through Upward Mobility.

Topic Sentence: Though the idea of the American Dream is complex and diverse, Cullen maintains in several chapters that it is usually built around the idea that through the Upward Mobility that freedom allows, all can achieve “the good life.”

Texts to discuss/Quotations to use:

- The Puritans had a “confidence--in themselves, in their sense of mission for their children, and in a God they believed was on their side--impelled them with ruthless zeal to gamble everything for the sake of a vision”(Cullen)
- “a testament to how democracy could elevate Everyman” (Cullen 76)
- For herself she wanted nothing. For father and myself she was incurably ambitious”(Anderson).
- “She wanted me to rise in the world, to get into a town school and become a man of the towns”(Anderson).
- “American passion for getting up in the world”(Anderson)

Body Paragraph 3 Topic:The “good life” is often built on an illusion.

Topic Sentence: Cullen does not, however, ignore the flaws in this idea that everyone can get ahead. He examines the way in which the “good life” is often founded on an illusion.

Texts to discuss/Quotations to use:

- “Millions of Americans became devotees of a fruit most had never seen a few years earlier. . .in a sense, they became even more devoted to the *image* that Sunkist promoted . Crates containing the oranges were illustrated with vivid, idyllic lithographs of Southern California landscapes” (Cullen 171).
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- “The values embodied in Pickfair are a fraud, and we all know it. Fairbanks and Pickford did not live happily ever

after in a storybook romance. . . Franklin and Carnegie left behind libraries that remain with us; the principal legacy of Pickford and Fairbanks is made of deteriorating celluloid, fading pictures of a world that never was”(Cullen 178).

- “Hollywood’s not called a dream factory for nothing. It manufactures optimism, and in the process of selling it, can make the possibility of success feel wondrously real”(Mondello).
- “Gatsby was overwhelmingly aware of the youth and mystery that wealth imprisons and preserves, of the freshness of many clothes and of Daisy, gleaming like silver, safe and proud above the hot struggles of the poor”(Fitzgerald).
- “They were careless people, Tom and Daisy--they smashed up things and creatures and then retreated back into their money or their vast carelessness or whatever it was that kept them together, and let other people clean up the mess they had made.”

Conclusion:

Cullen’s text reveals that the American Dream is as diverse in its people. The American Dream may look like many different dreams to some, but it is almost always founded upon a vision of a life that is better than the life that one is currently living.

8. Draft your paper.

9. In your small groups:

- Trade papers with another student.
- Read one paragraph from his/her paper.
- Add one-two independent or dependent clauses that will add clarity to the paragraph.
- Find two places that lack cohesion. Make suggestions of words or phrases to add to the paragraph to increase cohesion.
- Switch papers with another student and repeat this process.

8. Self-Evaluation. Read your paper and ask yourself these questions:

Self- Evaluation Checklist	
Did I:	✓
fully discuss the text’s meaning? Did I go beyond summarizing?	
include information that was stated in the text and information that was inferred?	

address the prompt?	
make a claim that was specific and precise?	
include support for my claim?	
balance information from various texts (i.e. did not include too much from one source)?	
include language that created cohesion (i.e. transitional words and phrases)?	
vary my syntax and use specific vocabulary?	
maintain a formal tone throughout the paper?	
maintain correct language conventions throughout my paper?	
use correct MLA citations throughout the paper?	
include a Works Cited page listing all of my sources?	

9. Make any corrections needed after your self-evaluation.

10. Write your final draft.