**Subject area/course**: English/Language Arts

**Grade level/band**: 11–12

**Task source**: Inquiry by Design in collaboration with Stanford Center for Assessment, Learning, and Equity (SCALE); Authors: Dennie Palmer Wolf and John McMillan

**Portraits of Americans Dreaming**

**TEACHER'S GUIDE**

**A. Task overview:**

In this task students will read, analyze, and write about a range of documentary texts from American art and literature that portray the American dream and how people pursue, secure, or are disappointed in their quest for it. Students will then research the life of a person *they know* who has pursued his or her dreams in America, using a range of strategies (e.g., interviewing, analyzing photos and objects, using the internet to research the time period in which their subject lived, etc.) and write a short expository portrait of that person that examines the complex idea of the American dream, drawing on the evidence they collected about their subject’s life and times.

**B. Aligned standards:**

**1. Primary Common Core State Standards**

CCSS.ELA-­‐Literacy.RL.11-­‐12.2 Determine two or more themes or central ideas of a text and analyze their development over the course of the text, including how they interact and build on one another to produce a complex account; provide an objective summary of the text.

CCSS.ELA-­‐Literacy.RI.11-­‐12.6 Determine an author’s point of view or purpose in a text in

which the rhetoric is particularly effective, analyzing how style and content contribute

to the power, persuasiveness or beauty of the text.

CCSS.ELA-­‐Literacy.RI.11-­‐12.7 Integrate and evaluate multiple sources of information presented in different media or formats (e.g., visually, quantitatively) as well as in words in order to address a question or solve a problem.

CCSS.ELA-­‐Literacy.W.11-­‐12.2 Write informative/explanatory texts to examine and convey complex ideas, concepts, and information clearly and accurately through the effective selection, organization, and analysis of content.

CCSS.ELA-­‐Literacy.W.11-­‐12.7 Conduct short as well as more sustained research projects to answer a question (including a self-­‐generated question) or solve a problem; narrow or broaden the inquiry when appropriate; synthesize multiple sources on the subject, demonstrating understanding of the subject under investigation.

**2. Secondary Common Core State Standards (optional)**

CCSS.ELA-­‐Literacy.RL.11-­‐12.1 Cite strong and thorough textual evidence to support analysis of what the text says explicitly as well as inferences drawn from the text, including determining where the text leaves matters uncertain.

CCSS.ELA-­‐Literacy.RL.11-­‐12.3 Analyze the impact of the author’s choices regarding how to develop and relate elements of a story or drama (e.g., where a story is set, how the action is ordered, how the characters are introduced and developed).

CCSS.ELA-­‐Literacy.RL.11-­‐12.4 Determine the meaning of words and phrases as they are used in the text, including figurative and connotative meanings; analyze the impact of specific word choices on meaning and tone, including words with multiple meanings or language that is particularly fresh, engaging, or beautiful. (Include Shakespeare as well as other authors.)

CCSS.ELA-­‐Literacy.RL.11-­‐12.5 Analyze how an author’s choices concerning how to structure specific parts of a text (e.g., the choice of where to begin or end a story, the choice to provide a comedic or tragic resolution) contribute to its overall structure and meaning as well as its aesthetic impact.

CCSS.ELA-­‐Literacy.RL.11-­‐12.10 By the end of grade 12, read and comprehend literature, including stories, dramas, and poems, at the high end of the grades 11-­‐CCR text complexity band independently and proficiently.

CCSS.ELA-­‐Literacy.RI.11-­‐12.5 Analyze and evaluate the effectiveness of the structure an author uses in his or her exposition or argument, including whether the structure makes points clear, convincing, and engaging.

CCSS.ELA-­‐Literacy.W.11-­‐12.2a Introduce a topic; organize complex ideas, concepts, and information so that each new element builds on that which precedes it to create a unified whole; include formatting (e.g., headings), graphics (e.g., figures, tables), and multimedia when useful to aiding comprehension.

CCSS.ELA-­‐Literacy.W.11-­‐12.2b Develop the topic thoroughly by selecting the most significant and relevant facts, extended definitions, concrete details, quotations, or other information and examples appropriate to the audience’s knowledge of the topic. CCSS.ELA-­‐Literacy.W.11-­‐12.2c Use appropriate and varied transitions and syntax to link the major sections of the text, create cohesion, and clarify the relationships among complex ideas and concepts.

CCSS.ELA-­‐Literacy.W.11-­‐12.2d Use precise language, domain-­‐specific vocabulary, and techniques such as metaphor, simile, and analogy to manage the complexity of the topic.

CCSS.ELA-­‐Literacy.W.11-­‐12.2e Establish and maintain a formal style and objective tone while attending to the norms and conventions of the discipline in which they are writing. CCSS.ELA-­‐Literacy.W.11-­‐12.2f Provide a concluding statement or section that follows from and supports the information or explanation presented (e.g., articulating implications or the significance of the topic).

CCSS.ELA-­‐Literacy.W.11-­‐12.4 Produce clear and coherent writing in which the development, organization, and style are appropriate to task, purpose, and audience. CCSS.ELA-­‐Literacy.W.11-­‐12.5 Develop and strengthen writing as needed by planning, revising, editing, rewriting, or trying a new approach, focusing on addressing what is most significant for a specific purpose and audience.

**3. Critical abilities**

Analysis of Information: Integrate and synthesize multiple sources of information (e.g., texts, experiments, simulations) presented in diverse formats and media (e.g., visually, quantitatively, orally) in order to address a question, make informed decisions, understand a process, phenomenon, or concept, and solve problems while evaluating the credibility and accuracy of each source and noting any discrepancies among the data.

Research: Conduct sustained research projects to answer a question (including a self-­‐ generated question) or solve a problem, narrow or broaden the inquiry when appropriate, and demonstrate understanding of the subject under investigation. Gather relevant information from multiple authoritative print and digital sources, use advanced searches effectively, and assess the strengths and limitations of each source in terms of the specific task, purpose, and audience.

Interpersonal Interaction and Collaboration: Develop a range of interpersonal skills, including the ability to work with others, to participate effectively in a range of conversations and collaborations.

**C. Time/schedule requirements:**

• Four to five class days for Parts 1-­‐4

• Five additional days out of class to complete Parts 5-­‐6

• One additional in-­‐class day for peer review of Part 6 before final draft is submitted

(optional)

**D. Materials/resources:**

Core Texts:

• “Introduction to Bearing Witness: Portraits of Americans Dreaming” text

• Langston Hughes, “Let America Be America Again”

• F. Scott Fitzgerald, “Winter Dreams”

• Dan Barry, “At an Age for Music and Dreams”

Materials:

• Interview Support Sheet

Optional Materials (can be found online):

• Van der Zee photographs of Harlem and its residents

• Dorthea Lange photographs of “Migrant Mother”

**E. Prior knowledge:**

• Students need to understand the concept of the American dream and that there are multiple perspectives on it.

**F. Connection to curriculum:**

• This task can be connected to a unit on characterization or character development

(as in *Death of a Salesman*, *The Great Gatsby*) and on the intersection of history and

literature, and how literature can best be interpreted through their historical contexts.

• This task can also be connected to a unit on how authors and artists convey messages or make arguments about an idea through fiction, poetry, and art.

• This task can also be connected to a unit on the creation of portraits and the craft choices made by authors/artists, with a focus on author's techniques

**G. Teacher instructions:**

1. Task Engagement: Introduce students to the concept of the American dream by

presenting contemporary images of the American dream through a multi-­‐media slide presentation that you create, with images, text, quotes, and photos, and accompanied by music that portrays different visions and perspectives of the American dream. For example, photos of wealthy children and poor children, photo of a fourth of July celebration parade, photo of a family gathered around a picnic table with food aplenty, photo of a soup kitchen staff serving homeless individuals, photo of a groom carrying his bride into their new home, photo of a pro athlete, photo of a famous celebrity, photo of a McMansion, photo of a house with a foreclosure sign, photo of young women or men in military uniform, and photo of a disabled veteran. (These are just examples. This is your chance to use some creativity and convey your own perspectives on the American dream.) Music can include song clips from Bruce Springsteen or other more contemporary singers that convey a perspective on the American Dream. Have students discuss their initial responses and analyze what the different media images and songs

are saying about the American Dream.

2. Engage in Close Reading: Cross Media

**A. *Text Comprehension: Langston Hughes’s “Let America Be America Again”***

• First reading: Ask students to read (or read aloud to them) Langston Hughes’s

“Let America Be America Again,” marking places in the poem:

o Where something resonates with them

o Where they disagree or recoil

o That leave them wondering or asking a question

• In partners, ask students to “re-­‐say” or paraphrase the poem in a

paragraph, taking care to capture the sequence of main ideas in the poem and what it says about the American dream

• Discussion, followed by quick-­‐write: Why does the speaker say, “O, let America be America again-­‐-­‐/The land that never has been yet-­‐-­‐/And yet must be—“?

**B. *Text Comprehension Work: Filmed version of “Death of a Salesman” (Dustin***

***Hoffman version)***

Ask students to:

• View the film (or a selected segment, with an overall summary)

• As they watch, take notes on places in the film that affect or confuse them.

• Divide the overall plot of the film into several sections or chunks and summarize each in 2-­‐3 sentences. One of those sentences should highlight what Miller is showing the audience about the American Dream in that segment.

• Craft a summary of the play/film that reflects both what happens and what the story implies about the American dream.

**C. *Cross-­‐Text Analysis:***

Drawing on their notes, students compose a 400-­‐500 word response to the following prompt:

Imagine that in “Death of a Salesman” and “Let America Be America Again,” Miller and Hughes are making arguments about the American dream. What argument(s) do you see Miller and Hughes making in their texts about the nature or legitimacy of the American dream? How are their perspectives similar or different? Be sure to cite specific lines in the story to support your claims.

3. Extend Close Reading to a Range of Texts: A Portrait of a Young American Dreamer

**A. Identifying an argument:**

Ask students to read the short essay, “At an Age for Music and Dreams,” by Dan Barry that appeared in *The New York Times* in 2009. As they read, ask students to think about the argument Barry is making about the American dream. Ask them to identify specific facts, words, phrases, and ways of organizing that Barry uses to make his point.

**B. Text analysis of craft and structure:**

As a class, discuss the following questions, citing evidence from the essay:

• What is Barry’s view of the American dream?

• How does Barry communicate his view (e.g., how does he select facts, use language, and develop his ideas through the piece?)? Save the wall charts about these strategies for students to use when writing their own portraits.

4. Conduct a Short-­‐Term Research Project

Explain to students that they will be writing a portrait of their own about an

American dreamer they know.

**A. Subject Selection**: Ask students to identify a person they know who pursued the American dream. It can be someone who has succeeded or someone who has struggled.

**B. Interview Questions**: Work with the class to add additional interview questions to the “Interview Support Worksheet.” Afterwards, ask students to identify a shorter set of interview questions from the larger list that they think will be best used with the person they plan to interview.

**C. Conducting Interviews**: Students interview their subjects, recording their

conversation if possible (many cell phones have recording capacity).

**D. Analyzing the Interview**: Students listen to their interviews, taking notes on:

• The major points the person made

• Direct quotes that express the person’s experiences

• Key events the person mentioned that they need to research. (Students should use the Internet and other available texts to research these key events, taking notes on key points.)

5. Produce a Short, Coherent Written Text

Ask students to write a short (500-­‐750 word) portrait of their American dreamer in which they:

• Employ the strategies they observed Barry use in “At an Age for Music and

Dreams”

• Use the information from their interview and background research

• Include specific evidence (direct quotes, facts, etc.)

• Communicate/reflect on what that person’s life suggests about the American dream

6. Combine Written and Visual Texts

To complete their finished portraits, each student should develop:

• A short, compelling text (either an essay or the written portion of the slide show, quotes, commentary, etc.) that describes their American dreamer. For examples of this, students can explore:

o “One in 8 Million” series in *The New York Times*

o Joseph Cotton: The Grandfather

o Tika Chapagai: The Newcomer

o Buster English: The Green Thumb

o “On Being” series in the Washington Post

<http://specials.washingtonpost.com/video/onbeing/>

• A set of images that enrich the written portion of the portrait (e.g., the slides, a collage of photos to illustrate the essay, etc.)

• A reflective commentary (e.g., a portion of the essay, a closing statement in the slide show, an artist’s statement, etc.)

**H. Student support:**

• Students should be given ample opportunities to discuss the questions for Parts 1-­‐2 in small groups and/or as a whole class prior to working on their comparative essay in Part 2C. You may want to provide students with a graphic organizer to help organize their thoughts about the poem/movie before beginning work on their comparison essays. For students who have trouble with writing extended responses, you may want to provide an outline with sentence stems at the beginning of each paragraph to help them generate their responses. You may want to provide

opportunities in class for students to receive peer feedback or to participate in writers' workshop prior to submitting the final comparative essay.

• Part 3 may also be broken down into a series of assignments in which students must A) select a subject to interview; B) submit final interview questions; C) submit a list of outside references that will be used in addition to the interview notes -­‐ focusing on major historical events that the subject refers to in his/her life; D) a storyboard, outline or quick-­‐write that summarizes what the portrait will be like before

proceeding on the final product. Again, provide opportunities in class for students to

receive peer feedback or to participate in writers' workshop prior to submitting the final portrait.

• When introducing the comparison essay and the final portrait assignment, present a student-­‐friendly version of the scoring rubric by pulling out the "Proficient" level descriptors to clearly communicate expectations for a high quality response. Have students put the rubric language into their own words.

**I. Extensions or variations:**

As a culmination to the work, you and students may want to publish or present it in any

number of formats:

• As a website with each portrait

• As a changing display on a monitor or bulletin board in the school’s entry way

• As a page linked to the school’s web site

• As a presentation to the school board of selected portraits with an invitation to visit and read the whole collection (as on *The New York Times* site)

Any of these formats would permit subjects of the portraits who are local to come and view them.

**J. Scoring instructions:**

Student work can be scored using the English/Language Arts Textual Analysis Rubric, Grade

12.