

THE AMERICAN DREAM: SOCIETY, RACE, AND OPPORTUNITY

*Unit Plan & Assessments by Ryan Baker
High School English Language Arts*

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**"The American Dream"
Society, Race, and Opportunity**

UNIT LEVEL

SpringBoard Unit Overview:
In this unit, you will explore a variety of American voices and define what it is to be an American. If asked to describe the essence and spirit of America, you would probably refer to the American Dream. First coined as a phrase in 1931, the phrase "the American Dream" characterizes the unique promise that America has offered immigrants and residents for nearly 400 years. People have come to this country for adventure, opportunity, freedom and the chance to experience the particular qualities of the American landscape.

<p>ANTI-BIAS FRAMEWORK ANCHOR STANDARDS: CONTENT</p> <p>DI.9-12.10: I understand that diversity includes the impact of unequal power relations on the development of group identities and cultures.</p>	<p>ANTI-BIAS FRAMEWORK ANCHOR STANDARDS: PROCESS</p> <p>JU.9-12.13: I can explain the short and long-term impact of biased words and behaviors and unjust practices, laws and institutions that limit the rights and freedoms of people based on their identity groups.</p>
<p>CONTENT ENDURING UNDERSTANDING</p> <p>Students will understand that American identity and the concept of the "American Dream" are rooted in power, privilege, and the exclusion of non-White Americans, including people of Color, immigrants, and other marginalized peoples.</p>	<p>PROCESS ENDURING UNDERSTANDING</p> <p>Students will be able to define what it means to be an American, and will be able to use textual evidence to support a claim about whether the "American Dream" is still attainable, to who it has been made attainable, or how it might be made more equitably attainable.</p>

INQUIRY QUESTION(S)
What does it mean to be an American?
What is the "American Dream", and who gets the ability to pursue it?

ESSENTIAL QUESTIONS
How does systemic power play a role in defining and sustaining dominant conceptions of American identity?
How do society and institutions prevent and/or resist the advancement of equitable opportunities for the pursuit of the American Dream?



RYAN BAKER ARTIST STATEMENT

As Common Core State Standards and for-profit college preparatory curricula become increasingly adopted and implemented throughout the nation, there has been a related standardization in what content is being taught in high school classrooms. The texts, the process-oriented skills that are taught towards, the paradigms that shape teaching and learning are all involved in this process of standardization. While these standardizations dictate the *what*, there is no standardized classroom. There is no standardized student. There is no standardized *how*. There is no standardized *why*.

In this alternative project, Ryan Baker attempts to implement a framework that is simultaneously rooted in culturally-responsive pedagogical strategies, and intentionally centers topics of race, power, and privilege in a unit that he will soon teach in his first year as an educator in an 11th grade English Language Arts classroom. To implement this framework, Baker first interrogates the curriculum that he is about to teach: SpringBoard English Language Arts curriculum for 11th grade. To guide this interrogation, Baker poses the question, "How can I align culturally-responsive pedagogical strategies, SpringBoard ELA Curriculum, and state-mandated learning outcomes to build meaningful thinking, reading, and writing skills amongst my students for the purposes of working towards an equitable, inclusive society?"

As Baker orients himself to the texts and proposed learning outcomes (via the SpringBoard ELA curriculum and Common Core State Standards) he applies a critical lense to the curriculum in question, and the standards to which the curriculum is being taught. The unit "The American Dream" asks students to consider and define their interpretation of what it means to be an American, and asks them to make an argument about whether America still provides access to the "American Dream".

In an attempt to teach towards justice-oriented outcomes, Baker filters the purposes for the unit through a selected coupling of Anti-bias Framework Standards; Baker asks "Who gets to define what constitutes American identity? Who decides who gets to be American? Who does the American Dream benefit, and who was it meant for? How do society, race, and opportunity play a role in the exploration of these questions?"

As Baker adapts the unit to more centrally focus race, power, and privilege within the unit, he develops a series of Learning Segments and Embedded Assessments that ask students to engage in critical, intersectional readings of texts in an attempt to push students to consider what role they have in disrupting a long history of non-White exclusion in America, both in terms of social acceptance as well as economic opportunity.

This disruption and interrogation of curriculum is driven by Sensoy and DiAngelo's framing of the role of social justice consciousness in our classrooms. They write, "When we have developed a critical social justice consciousness, it is evident in all that we do and no longer seen as outside the job description" (Sensoy and DiAngelo, 2011). With this exigence shaping his work, Baker acts on a gnawing need to more intentionally consider the how and why of the curriculum that he is asking his students to engage with.

The recreated how and the why is this: to interrogate one's personal history, culturally-influenced beliefs and perspectives, and America's long history of discriminatory practices, beliefs, and institutions in order to understand how we might collectively work towards a more just, equitable, and inclusive United States of America.

