

AP English III Memoir Reading Assignment

Your task is to choose a memoir or biography that you have not previously read that reflects life in America. You may choose a print book or an eBook from the list. You may also request to have a title of your own choosing approved by me. As you read the book, you will be drawing connections to the theme of the American Dream.

Understanding the American Dream

The term was coined by writer and historian James Truslow Adams in his best-selling 1931 book Epic of America. He described it as "that dream of a land in which life should be better and richer and fuller for everyone, with opportunity for each according to ability or achievement."

Adams went on to explain, "It is a difficult dream for the European upper classes to interpret adequately, and too many of us ourselves have grown weary and mistrustful of it. It is not a dream of motorcars and high wages merely, but a dream of social order in which each man and woman shall be able to attain to the fullest stature of which they are innately capable, and be recognized by others for what they are, regardless of the fortuitous circumstances of birth or position."

Define the American Dream here in your own words, based on Adams definition:

The "Big" Question: Does your author's experiences in America affirm, deny, or refine the existence of the American Dream?

- What challenges does your author face in achieving his or her 'American Dream' based on their class, race, gender, time period, or other factors?
- In what ways does the American Dream mean different things for different Americans?
- Is the American Dream of individuality a destructive or empowering force, or a combination of both?
- What is the perspective of a given nature, culture, or region in regard to the American Dream and what factors create those perceptions?
- Are independence and dependence separable or inseparable?

Recommended Memoir/Biography List:

[*indicates title available through the KHS library webpage during the school year](#)

- **A Long Way Gone* by Ishmael Beah
- **American Chica: Two Worlds, One Child* by Marie Arana
- **Angela's Ashes: A Memoir* by Frank McCourt
- **Breaking Night: A Memoir of Forgiveness, Survival, and My Journey from Homeless to Harvard* by Liz Murray
- **The Glass Castle: A Memoir* by Jeannette Walls
- **Educated: A Memoir* by Tara Westover
- **Heartland: A Memoir of Working Hard and Being Broke in the Richest Country on Earth* by Sarah Smarsh
- **Hillbilly Elegy: A Memoir of a Family and Culture in Crisis* by J.D. Vance
- **Just Mercy: A Story of Justice and Redemption* by Bryan Stevenson
- **The Liar's Club: A Memoir* by Mary Karr
- **Reading Lolita in Tehran: A Memoir in Books* by Azar Nafisi
- **This Boy's Life: A Memoir* by Tobias Wolff

All Over But The Shoutin', Rick Bragg
Animal, Vegetable, Miracle, Barbara Kingsolver
A River Runs Through It, Norman Maclean
A Stolen Life, Jaycee Dugard
Autobiography of a Face, Lucy Grealy
Band of Brothers, Stephen Ambrose
Black Boy, Richard Wright
Borderlands/ La Frontera, Gloria Anzaldua
Cherry, Mary Karr
Destiny of the Republic, Candice Millard
The Diving Bell and the Butterfly, Jean-Dominique Bauby
Don't Let's Go To The Dogs Tonight, Alexandra Fuller
Fist, Stick, Knife, Gun, Geoffrey Canada
Half-broke Horses, Jeanette Walls
The Happiness Project, Gretchen Rubin
Heartbreaking Work of Staggering Genius, Dave Eggers

I Know Why The Caged Bird Sings, Maya Angelou
The Immortal Life of Henrietta Lacks, Rebecca Skloot
Into The Wild, John Krakauer
Just Like Someone Without Mental Illness, Only More So, Mark Vonnegut
Killing Pablo, Mark Bowden
Kitchen Confidential, Anthony Bourdain
Lit, Mary Karr
Me Talk Pretty One Day, David Sedaris
Mennonite in a Little Black Dress, Rhonda Janzen
Running With Scissors, Augusten Burroughs
Travels, Michael Crichton
The Woman Warrior, Maxine Hong Kingston
The Year of Living Biblically, A.J. Jacobs
The Year of Magical Thinking, Joan Didion