

Year 11 English (Advanced) student work sample – Grade A

Please note: The following work sample has been transcribed for readability. To assist with grading, spelling and grammatical errors have not been corrected and appear as written.

The American Dream is an idea that is based upon living a better future and your dreams by adapting to society and the accepted way of life. Sam Mendes's film American Beauty (1999), explores the idea of how; individuality, delusion vs. reality and conformity, present themselves as a danger or challenge to the believed and accepted way of living for so many generations, the American Dream. The listening stimulus, spoken by Sally Field, conveys the message of how by being an individual, you can save America from being trapped by the ideology that is the American Dream. The danger of the American Dream is that it can cause you to be trapped in your own little world and vision which leads to your disappointment after realising it false sense of hope that it has given you.

A clear articulation of the thesis

Individuality is explored in American Beauty, through the character of Lester, who allows him self to be free from the American Dreams set rules, benefitting him greatly. In his resignation scene, the contrasting colours of the office and his attitude of life shows how he feels greater and is in a better position than those who live by the ideology of the dream. This is used in conjunction with his body language with exemplifies his 'laid back' attitude and carefree nature about life. In the scene where he gets his new car, he is questioned about whose it is by his wife Carolyn to which he says, "It's the car I've always wanted and now I have it.", referring to the 1970 Pontiac Firebird. This is evident of his freedom which he is allowing himself by not living by the American Dream way of life. This poses a danger to the belief of others in living by the same ideology as the person with the most happiness is the one who is not bound by its measures. The listening stimulus also talks about this as Sally Field refers to the need of a new President to save America, because she is worried it is falling apart due to its attempt to fulfill every bodys dream. She conveys a message of how dangerous individuals are to the change of society when she says, "you can be whatever you want to be," which implies that the freedom of being an individual will help rather than hinder your life. The danger that faces the American Dream is th innovation and ability of individuals to free themselves from society and find happiness by other means.

Ideas supported with evidence from the text

Effective and perceptive argument provided, together with integrated links to set text and stimulus

Confident, sustained discussion of stimulus material

The theoretical portrayal of the American Dream is one that gives people a better life and a greater future, juxtaposing the practical implementation of its imposing nature on those who believe in it in reality. The danger that this brings to the American Dream is evident in the film, American Beauty, again through the character of Lester. The catalyst for Lester's frustration with life is the overwhelming nature of life itself. He is metaphorically imprisoned. He is trapped in his small culture of work, hiding being his own curtains at home and is also trapped linguistically. In the opening sequence he says, "This is my neighbourhood. This is my street. This is my life." The repetition of the word 'this' show how the ideology of the American Dream has trapped him in his world, contrasting with what it is meant to actually be doing which is allowing him

Use of relevant English terminology and complex vocabulary in support of a strong topic sentence that illustrates creative thinking and ideas

Carefully selected textual references which communicate the thesis and concept

freedom and happiness. Unfortunately, Lester can also find happiness by escaping this ideology, making his example a danger to that of the society. The various rose petal scenes throughout the movie show how the happiness and joy that is promised by living the American Dream is not the reality, instead it is a very limited experienced only experience in dreams. This is portrayed through the use of birds eye view shots, which create a sense of dysfunctional relations between the viewer and the character. The ideal life is one that is out of reach and being held back by the false hope that is given to the characters about the promises of the American Dream. The danger that the theme of delusion vs. reality imposes on the American Dream is that the reality of what is promised can only be found in one's dreams, therefore turning them away from the idea of wanting to live by it.

Detailed engagement with the text demonstrating the ability to explore abstract concepts through set text

Conformity is a theme explored in American Beauty, and is one of the biggest dangers facing the ideology of the American Dream. It does this though the characters of Colonel Fitts and Angela, who struggle to live this ideal life but attempt it by lying and hiding their real selves. Colonel Fitts is a war veteran and appears to be a man's man. This is emphasised in the scene where he fights with his son Ricky and worries about him being homosexual. His aggressive tone and use of vulgar language are just a mask for the truth. In the scene where he kisses Lester, his homosexuality, which he has feared to speak of as he knows it is what is accepted and practiced in society, is let out. He frees himself from his conformity to society, as the inspiration of Lester's new life has shown him that conformity hinders more than it helps his life. Angela projects an image that all college girls want to be, comfortable and confident in her self and her looks. This false self that she gives off is again exposed by Lester in the scene where she starts to get intimate with him. She allows herself the freedom, like he does, to express herself and stop conforming in society, revealing her true life, one of despair and vulnerability. Both of these characters exude a presence which is synonymous with that of the American Dream, false, and is foiled by Lester whose inspirational effort to not live by the norm, allows him the most happiness of the characters.

Perceptive analysis and evaluation

Textual evidence used confidently and explained within the context of the question

The American Dream faces many dangers, as seen in American Beauty and heard in the listening stimulus from Sally Field. The ideology of the American Dream is challenged by the themes of; individuality, delusion vs. reality and conformity which highlight the flaws and false hope and promises of the American Dream which are not actually being experienced in reality. Lester plays a significant role in the film to provide evidence of this as his change in lifestyle allows him freedom that the other characters who conform to the norm of society don't live, allowing others to see the appealing nature of that lifestyle and the danger of the American Dream.

An effective conclusion that logically summarises the argument

Grade Commentary

Harper has demonstrated extensive knowledge of the concept of the American Dream and the prescribed text. The response is well structured, showing a sophisticated attempt to articulate the nuances of the concepts. There is strong use of well-selected textual evidence to support the argument. Harper has also responded confidently to the stimulus material and integrated this discussion into the response.

Harper's response, on balance, demonstrates characteristics of work typically produced by a student performing at a grade A standard.