

**Year 11 English (Advanced) student work sample – Grade B**

*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 faces dangers of being corrupted and turned into an ugly version of itself. The modern American Dream has become about materialism and conformity, only through true individuality can the pure American Dream be realized. "American Beauty" (directed by Sam Mendes, 1999) is a film which explores the dangers of the American Dream through unraveling stereotypes of middle – class suburbia. The voice recording also describes the fear felt by many Americans that their once pure ideals have become tainted and corrupted.

The American dream has become a battle between delusion and reality with the latter being in the original intentions of the dream. "Beauty" presents many deluded characters, one of which being Carolyn Burnham who is obsessed with materialistic ideals. Her value on materialism is so great that when given a chance to rekindle romance with her husband, she interrupts it because he is "about to spill beer on the couch ....cost \$4000 and is Italian silk." This displays how her drive for items and prestige transcends her inter-human happiness, a trait which modern America has become notorious for. Every now and again the delusion put forward by the American dream is shattered by concepts of reality, often with disastrous effects. Mendes portrays this rejection through Carolyn, when she fails to sell her house despite pumping her self full with mantras. In the scene blinds are drawn behind Carolyn separating her from the outside, this use of props represents Carolyn's facade of success and prosperity being penetrated to reveal her inner uncertainty and denial. A foil for Carolyn's character is Ricky. Ricky embraces reality and is the embodiment of what the American dream was originally intended, beauty in the small things and pure happiness. Ricky's grasp of reality is explored when he shows Jane the a paper bag dancing in the wind, Mendes uses camera angles to enthrall the audience in the footage, by moving the camera from behind Ricky and focusing on the footage. Ricky's belief in a power that transcends humans is also relevant to the divine aspect of the American dream, hope and faith that was distilled amongst all Americans, but according to the stimulus, this is in under threat.

Conformity is imposed by the American Dream, and has huge impacts on the individuals it suppresses. Colonel Fitts who is presented as a man's man (ex-marine, clean living) who harbours a horrendous homophobia, in an attempt to secure his heterosexuality, which is false. The split personality of the Colonel is represented in the scene where he attacks his son, lighting puts his face in contrasting shade of black and white representative of his false macho facade and his suppressed tender, fatherly side. Colonel Fitts, like many Americans recognise this constant attempt at conformity, but many confuse it with a faux-individuality.

Clear establishment of the thesis conveying an understanding of the current perception of the American Dream

Perceptive ideas and analysis linking to key thesis statement

Well-developed textual reference providing evidence of creative thinking through selection of film techniques and analysis

Explains effectively how ideas are represented

False individuality is the vehicle which carries Americans through the American dream. The cliché of being able to carve your own path to success and prosperity has been twisted by individuals who define this as materialistic pursuit. Buddy Kane (the Real Estate King) matches this stereotype. His mantra “project an image of success at all times” is a paradox as it implies success and prosperity was not present or concrete. The main character, Lester, vexes Buddy and Carolyn’s materialistic views. His pure individuality is shown in the scene where he quits his job. The use of proxemics in this scene separates himself from his superior exaggerating Lester’s individuality and distance from the norm. Lester describes the new American Dream as a “coma”, and he awakes from it and embraces like Ricky, reality and the metaphor of the American Dream.

“America once gave had possibilities, for to be safe.... to be whatever you want to be” now the American Dream faces the danger of being corrupted by a too literal understanding of itself, manifesting itself in materialistic ideals, at the expense of a sense of reality. The only way for an American to realise the true American dream is to be individual.

Confident use of language to express concepts; however, discussion could be strengthened by a more explicit analysis and links to the stimulus

Sound linkage back to original statement

## Grade Commentary

Dom has demonstrated thorough knowledge of the concept of the American Dream and the medium of film. He has established a clear thesis and argues this thesis using well-selected evidence. Lack of sustained development of ideas and evidence keep this in the B range, as does the limited attempt to engage with the listening stimulus material.

Dom’s response, on balance, demonstrates characteristics of work typically produced by a student performing at a grade B standard.