Socratic Seminar: The American Dream

Using Academic Language Stems:
Try to use these sentence starters when you speak. Put an “X” next to one each time you or your inner circle partner uses it!

- “I agree/disagree with ___ because…”  “What you said makes me think of…”
- “I believe that ___ because…”  “Who can provide some evidence that…?”
- “Based on the reading…”  “Can you please clarify what you said about…?”

Seminar Essential Topic/Question:
Is the American Dream attainable by everyone?

Related questions:
- Do all people have the same opportunities, regardless of race or nationality?
- Is the American Dream a realistic goal for everyone?
- How does race/gender/economic inequality play a role in attaining the American Dream?

AFTER SOCRATIC SEMINAR: Give yourself a score (1-4) for the following:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>SCORE</th>
<th>SKILL</th>
<th>HOW TO SHOW THIS SKILL</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Preparation</td>
<td>Make sure you are prepared by reading the included articles and marking the text, completely and thoughtfully answering the questions on page 2, and that you share your ideas and thoughts during the SS.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Evidence</td>
<td>Refer to statements and events from the articles, tell us where in the article they are coming from, and use at least 1 quote! (Cite the text, using a quote at least once, and explaining how the quote matters to the discussion, for a 4)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Participation/Thoughtfulness</td>
<td>Listen thoughtfully to peers and respond appropriately, use sentence frames from this sheet, and ask higher-level questions (from page 2) to show that you are thinking critically about the topic.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Reflection:
One thing I did really well today was:

One thing I still need to work on is:
Preparation for Socratic Seminar: The American Dream

A. Define “The American Dream,” according to the article titled “American Dream? Or Mirage?”

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B. Who does the first article claim that the American Dream serves? Explain why:

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C. What is “upward mobility”? How does income play a role in “upward mobility”?

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D. How has Sergio Garcia shown that “The American Dream is still out there for the taking”? Do you agree or disagree? Explain why:

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E. Seminar Essential Question: Do you think that anyone can attain the American Dream? Why/why not?

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Write down two pieces of evidence that support your opinion. Explain what each quote MEANS and why it MATTERS for your perspective:

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2.________________________________________________________________________________________
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F. Brainstorm and write down 2 higher-level questions to encourage conversation:

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2.________________________________________________________________________________________
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American Dream? Or Mirage?

MAY 1, 2015, By MICHAEL W. KRAUS, SHAI DAVIDAI and A. DAVID NUSSBAUM

ECONOMIC inequality in the United States is at its highest level since the 1930s, yet most Americans remain relatively unconcerned with the issue. Why?

One theory is that Americans accept such inequality because they overestimate the reality of the “American dream” — the idea that any American, with enough resolve and determination, can climb the economic ladder, regardless of where he starts in life. The American dream implies that the greatest economic rewards rightly go to society’s most hard-working and deserving members.

Recently, studies by two independent research teams (each led by an author of this article) found that Americans across the economic spectrum did indeed severely misjudge the amount of upward mobility in society. The data also confirmed the psychological utility of this mistake: Overestimating upward mobility was self-serving for rich and poor people alike. For those who saw themselves as rich and successful, it helped justify their wealth. For the poor, it provided hope for a brighter economic future.

In studies by one author of this article, Shai Davidai, and the Cornell psychologist Thomas Gilovich, published earlier this year in Perspectives on Psychological Science, more than 3,000 respondents viewed a graph of the five income quintiles (sections divided into 5) in American society and were asked to estimate the likelihood that a randomly selected person born to the bottom quintile would move to each of the other income quintiles in his lifetime. These estimates were compared with actual mobility trends documented by the Pew Research Center. Participants in the survey overshot the likelihood of rising from the poorest quintile to one of the three top quintiles by nearly 15 percentage points. (On average, only 30 percent of individuals make that kind of leap.)

Studies by another author of this article, the University of Illinois psychologist Michael W. Kraus, and his colleague Jacinth J.X. Tan, found a similar pattern: When asked to estimate how many college students came from families in the bottom 20 percent of income, respondents substantially misjudged, estimating that those from the lowest income bracket attended college at a rate five times greater than the actual one documented by the Current Population Survey.

One experiment by Professors Kraus and Tan demonstrated the self-serving nature of these errant upward mobility estimates. As with the studies above, participants were asked to estimate the ease of moving up the economic ladder. This time, however, they were also asked to estimate upward mobility for people who were similar to them “in terms of goals, abilities, talents and motivations.” In this case, respondents were even more likely to overestimate upward mobility. We believe unduly in our own capacity to move up the economic ladder, and these beliefs increase our mobility overestimates more generally. For those lower in income or educational attainment, lower standing was associated with greater overestimation of upward mobility. Those with the most room to move up were more likely to think that such movement was possible.

However, when people were asked to explicitly state how high up the economic ladder they felt, after accounting for their actual economic standing, the reverse pattern emerged: The higher up people said they were, the more they overestimated the likelihood of upward mobility. Being aware of your position at the top of a low-mobility hierarchy can be uncomfortable, because without mobility, sitting at the top is the result of luck, rather than merit.

Taken together, these sets of studies suggest that belief in the American dream is woefully misguided when compared with objective reality. Addressing the rising economic gap between rich and poor in society, it seems, will require us to contend not only with economic and political issues, but also with biases of our psychology.

(Adapted from: http://www.nytimes.com/2015/05/03/opinion/sunday/american-dream-or-mirage.html)

Write a one-sentence summary of the main ideas/argument of the article titled “American Dream? Or Mirage”: ________________________________________________________________
In Defense of the American Dream by Sergio Garcia

Editor's Note: Sergio Garcia, the 36-year-old Chico man whose struggle to practice law was the subject of a California Supreme Court hearing earlier this month, inspired a last-minute bill that passed last week in the state legislature. An undocumented immigrant who has wanted to be a lawyer since the age of 10, Garcia writes that the legislation represents the realization of his American dream.

I must have been no older than 10 years old when I dreamt of one day becoming an attorney. That dream has brought me great satisfaction, but also considerable heartache. At that innocent age I was exposed to the horrors of injustice. I saw innocent people being locked up and kept in jail because they were unable to buy their freedom. Justice should never depend on one's ability to pay for it. It should apply equally to all.

People say it doesn’t cost anything to dream and I am glad it doesn't because otherwise I would have never been able to afford such a big dream. In 1987 I lived in Mexico with my mother and four younger siblings. Many times we didn’t even have enough money to eat, much less for clothes or shoes. I recall often going to school hungry and embarrassed by my old torn shoes. With all of this poverty you would think I was an unhappy child, but I wasn't. Money isn't everything in this world and you don’t miss what you have never had.

It's hard to believe that 26 years have gone by since the birth of my dream. I no longer struggle for food or shoes. I have grown, but so have my problems. With a great deal of hard work and sacrifice, not only from me but from all of those around me, I managed to realize my dream and finish my education as an attorney. Sadly, given my lack of status I have been prevented from taking the last step towards the achievement of my dream.

Allow me to explain. My father, who is now a U.S. citizen, applied to have my status adjusted, for me to have a green card. This was 19 years ago and I still don’t have one.

Not having a green card has opened a Pandora’s box for me. I have had to fight for my right to be able to one day fight for others. On Sept. 4, 2013, I reached the highest court in the state of California -- perhaps something that to most would seem a lofty goal in their law careers, but not to me, since I was there to fight my own case. And given the limited amount of time provided by the court, I was not even able to say a word. I allowed the grown-ups to do the arguing for me: private counsel, the California State Bar attorney and the attorney for our very own state Attorney General.

They fought with courage. However, a fight can only be won if the opposition is open to engage. Here, the court appeared impotent against a federal law that, based on their reaction, they feel ties their hands and prevents them from allowing me to fulfill my dream and issue me a law license. Even though I was discouraged by their response, I did not take it as a total defeat. I took it as an opportunity to help them help me. As soon as I left the courthouse, I reached out to some of my friends in the California legislature. I knew that passing a law that would free the court’s hands to grant me a license was my last hope to fulfill my dream -- short of taking my fight to the U.S. Supreme Court.

Luckily, my friends had been paying attention to my plight and were quick to step in, in defense of the American dream. Assembly member Luis Alejo (D-Salinas) was quick to assemble the troops and encourage them to pass a favorable law quickly. Soon all members of the Latino Legislative Caucus had heeded the call to action and had picked Assemblywoman Lorena Gonzalez (D-San Diego) to lead the effort. I was ecstatic at their quick response. It made me feel like someone shared my passion for justice. Those who lead by action and not mere words have always been my heroes and it was refreshing to find so many like-minded people all at once.

Once Gonzalez introduced AB 1024 -- the bill that could potentially open the door to my dream, and that of many others -- my excitement increased exponentially. With less than a week left in this year's legislative session, the measure was written, debated and passed by the state legislature. The bill is now headed to the
governor’s desk. Nothing that is truly worthwhile comes without effort or sacrifice, but I am out to prove that the American dream is still out there for the taking.


**Write a one-sentence summary of the main ideas/argument of the article titled “In Defense of the American Dream”:**

**Teenagers Are Losing Confidence in the American Dream**

By Eric Thayer

In 1996, when asked a series of questions about the brightness of her future, one high-school senior in an unnamed Midwestern state said, “There’s been extraordinary examples of people that have been poor and stuff that have risen to the top just from their personal hard work ... not everybody can do that, I realize, but I think a lot of people could if they just tried.”

In 2011, a survey with identically worded questions was done in the same state, with the same age group. “You can always work hard, but if you aren’t given the opportunity or you don’t have the funds to be able to continue working hard then you never get the chance to get out of where you are,” said one student.

What a difference 15 years makes. In the 1990s, those loosed upon the world after high-school graduation faced a booming economy and relatively sunny job prospects; more recently, high-school and college graduates have faced less hospitable conditions. A study published recently in the *Journal of Poverty* juxtaposes adolescents’ perceptions from those two eras, and the results, while qualitative and limited by their small sample size, suggest that young Americans’ outlook on social mobility has gotten bleaker. (The study’s findings align with a more-expansive survey of young people suggesting an erosion of confidence in the American Dream.)

The study’s authors, Carol Hostetter, Sabrina Williamson Sullenberger, and Leila Wood, observe that the palpable faith in meritocracy in the 90s faded, making way in the 2010s for a belief in what they call “The American Dream 2.0.” “In this version of the American Dream, anyone can go to college if they have the resources, are ok about going into debt, can somehow get the coveted scholarship, are willing to go to community college, or come from a family of means,” they write. The new normal appears to be meritocracy with an asterisk.

Their study takes interviews that Hostetter collected in 1996 for her dissertation and sets them alongside surveys they administered in 2011, with the same prompts and questions. Even though the study’s samples aren’t representative, capturing young people’s attitudes and feelings on paper is useful part of a sociological conversation that is often about looking at the same limited sets of numbers from different angles, under different light.

As views on self-advancement changed over that decade and a half, so did views on the advantages of having lots of money. In 1996, high-schoolers were more likely to feel that wealth wasn’t a ticket to happiness, and a lack of opportunity might even have character-building advantages. “If I was rich, I could see where it could
come easy just to take it for granted,” one participant said. By contrast, the 2011 group tended to think that wealth made people happier overall, because it affords them material goods, such as Apple laptops, that would give them the respect and attention of their peers.

Perceptions of higher education’s attainability also appeared to shift over the course of 15 years. Both the 1996 and 2011 cohorts saw college fundamentally as a choice, but in 2011, students were more sensitive to the idea that money is a barrier for some. “When you are lower class I don’t think that you get that downpour of, ‘Here’s how you pay for college,’ ‘You’re going to college,’” one student observed.

Taking all of this together, teens (or at least a few of them in that unnamed Midwestern state) have lost confidence in the power of meritocracy and gained faith in the power of money. Generally, an updated version is supposed to be better than its predecessor, but the American Dream 2.0 doesn’t seem like much of an improvement.

(Adapted from: http://www.theatlantic.com/business/archive/2015/06/teenagers-are-losing-confidence-in-the-american-dream/395780/)

Write a one-sentence summary of the main ideas/argument of the article titled “Teenagers are Losing Confidence in the American Dream”:

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Video Notes:

Title of Video:________________________________________________________

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