

# American dream theme

[Literature](#), [American Literature](#)



The portrayal of the American Dream in literature has evolved as the United States has developed and prospered. In the beginning, the initial settlers in the Americas were searching for simple things, such as new opportunities and freedom of religion. As the country grew more populous, competition for success was heightened. Many people have different ideas on what the American Dream means to them. Over the years, American authors have used the theme of the American Dream to share their perspectives on society.

Starting with Mark Twain's *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*, the depiction of this theme has evolved with society throughout the years. This novel was set in the years that slavery was prevalent, which made the relationship between a young boy and a runaway slave very difficult. They crave to have no restraints and constrictions and strive to escape the controlling society that they live in. In his book, Twain's idea of the American Dream is depicted as "a celebration of freedom, not only from physical structure and rules, but from the prejudices of Southern society in the age of slavery"

("The American Dream" 2).

The two boys struggle to reach freedom and happiness together throughout the entire book. The main character in *The Great Gatsby* also struggles for happiness throughout his life in Scott Fitzgerald's novel. After losing his true love and BURTON 2 discovering that she has been married to another man, he uses his riches and "high society" lifestyle to win her back over. He strives for money and fortune, but finds no true happiness in his successes.

One article had a wonderful explanation of the American dream presented in this novel: “ Through the character of Gatsby, Fitzgerald eventually shows that, while the rags-to-riches American Dream seems fantastic and wonderful, it is in reality shallow, as well as devoid of true joy and love” (“ The American Dream” 3). However, not all quests for success can end favorably for everyone. This fact is depicted well in Arthur Miller’s Death of a Salesman. After a lifetime of failures, Willy Loman learns the hard way that success in society is not everything in life; family and love for one another is what is most important.

He seems to focus more on being well liked by the buyers and other people that he visits instead of actually selling his products. Near the end, he voices his frustration frequently about how there is no relationship and personality in the selling business anymore. In his article, Bradford states that Willy “ believes that personality, not hard work and innovation, is the key to success” (Bradford 3).

Miller proves this to be false when, in the play, Willy attempts to use his charisma to get a raise from his boss, but the conversation eventually ends in him being fired altogether. He goes on to blame numerous other reasons for his being let go from the company, but never recognizes his own fault.

The American Dream started off as a simple desire for freedom to express oneself and live equally with each other. This was expressed in the 1884 novel, Adventures of Huckleberry Finn. These hopes and dreams turned more BURTON 3 materialistic by the 1920’s when Gatsby believed that he could somehow win over his one true love with his fame and riches.

He worked hard to earn his success, but without friends and loved ones to share your life with, he realized that success does not bring true happiness. This theme changed once again, though, when the Loman family was introduced in 1949. In Arthur Miller's play, Willy Loman acted as if he shouldn't have to work for success and riches. He seemed to believe that everything should be handed to him, instead of earned. The American Dream theme has never failed to keep up with progress in American society.

Many authors and playwrights incorporated this theme into their works in order to make the stories relatable to readers at their times. While peoples' aspirations started out more moral, people began to become greedy in their desires. This led to their dreams becoming more complicated.

The definition of success and means of achieving happiness have changed as American culture has transformed. BURTON 4 Works Cited " The American Dream in Literature. " Examiner. com. Clarity Digital Group LCC, 15 Sept. 2011. Web. 09 Sept. 2013. Bradford, Wade. " The American Dream in " Death of a Salesman"" About. com Plays / Drama. N. p. , 2013. Web. 09 Sept. 2013.