



"I hear America singing, the varied carols I hear...."

- Walt Whitman

Dear English 11 Students:

Welcome. When Walt Whitman wrote those lines, he was celebrating something we have all come to understand -- that America is one very unique place. It is a country with a history of hope. Hope for a new and better life, free from oppression and rich in opportunity. It may be the only country with a dream named after it -- "The American Dream." It's a promising place where "all...are created equal." That, in and of itself, should make us want to sing. Yet, as Whitman points out, our songs are diverse. This country has lured (and enslaved) people of myriad cultures, beliefs and backgrounds, and with these differences come different dreams.

That's right, the American Dream may mean different things to different people. It certainly seemed out of reach for Langston Hughes who spoke of the "deferred" dream. It was called into question by Allen Ginsberg when he wrote, "America, I have given you all and now I am nothing." And Martin Luther King, Jr. felt that many had not yet realized the American Dream when he gave his famous speech in Washington. As the country evolved and had new collective experiences, its authors' interpretations of the American Dream evolved too. The young America that was primarily rural with confident, idealistic people who believed in God had a much different outlook than the World War I America that had become industrialized and urbanized, had been forced to deal with the implications of Darwin's evolution theory, and had seen the greed of a small minority of business bosses put the squeeze on a majority of average hard-working people. And what of our Americans 'of color' who Maya Angelou said were offered only "crumbs from [the] country's table?" How might they see this dream? So, differing outlooks abound in our country's rich history -- from the puritans to Poe, from Ben Franklin to the Beat poets, from Negro Spirituals to JD Salinger, from Mark Twain to Arthur Miller to Gwendolyn Brooks. Despite the differences, however, it's still all American Literature trying to get a handle on this American Dream thing.

Tackling all this literature might seem a bit intimidating. Well, I hope you come to embrace it the way I have. These are our stories after all, and by exploring them we can come to know ourselves better. Speaking of us, I ask you to begin now to develop your sensitivity and your strength. For our learning community to work optimally, you must become sensitive toward others by respecting and embracing their differences. Become sensitive to yourself as well, for you will surely evolve and grow as you read and discuss new literature. Solidify your inner strength. You'll need it when it comes time to share your new discoveries and ideas in writing and class discussions. You should try to think critically, but always with compassion for your fellow thinkers. Simply stated, for the duration of this term, you will be expected to care and to share. Let's have fun!

Warmest regards,

Michael Metzler

p.s. It wouldn't be English class without a taste of Shakespeare, though, so we'll toss *Macbeth* into the mix in addition to all our American Lit. (Hmmm... Maybe we can find some American writers who created a Simpsons version of *Macbeth*. That's a connection ...sort of. Sure, that'll work!)