Unit 2 — The American Dream — Teacher copy

Track E · Klasse 11 · Niveau E (Basisfach / Leistungsfach)

Niveau E

1. Reading

Read the text and use it for the activities below.

Reading — three extracts

1776 (Declaration of Independence): We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness.

1931 (Adams, The Epic of America): The American Dream is that dream of a land in which life should be better and richer and fuller for everyone.

2024 (economist, popular essay): Whatever else the American Dream is, it has, since the 1980s, outlived its statistical basis. Intergenerational income mobility in the United States is now lower than in most of comparable Western Europe.

Grammar — sentence emphasis (cleft + inversion)

Cleft: *It is the 1931 phrase, not the 1776 line, that we usually mean by 'the Dream'.*

Negative inversion (formal): *Not until the 1930s was the phrase coined. / Only after 1945 did the Dream become a mass image.*

Cleft (what): *What the 2024 critique argues is that the Dream has outlived its statistical basis.*

2. Practise

Niveau E — controlled

1. Build a cleft emphasising *the 1931 phrase*: ___ what we usually mean by 'the Dream'.
2. Inversion: *Not until 1931 ___ (the phrase coin / passive)*.

Niveau E — productive

3. Build 4 emphasis sentences (2 cleft + 2 inversion).

3. Your turn

Essay paragraph, 280 words. Hold two readings of the American Dream in tension. Use 1 cleft + 1 negative inversion + 3 academic discourse markers.

Sample

It is the 1931 phrase, more than the 1776 line, that we usually mean when we speak of the American Dream. James Truslow Adams's claim — *that life should be better and richer and fuller for everyone* — is structurally different from the 1776 *pursuit of Happiness* in one important way: it is a claim about *outcomes* rather than rights. Not until the 1930s was the phrase coined; only after 1945 did the Dream harden into a mass image of single-family homes, rising wages, and a stable career. By contrast, the 2024 critique argues that the Dream has, since the 1980s, outlived its statistical basis: intergenerational income mobility in the United States is now lower than in most of comparable Western Europe. Accordingly, the Dream survives as a rhetorical resource even as the pattern it once described has weakened. More specifically, what the 1931 phrase does well is mobilise hope; what it has stopped doing is describing reality. Both readings matter. Without the rhetorical Dream, American politics loses a shared vocabulary; without the statistical critique, that vocabulary becomes ornamental. In this regard, the most useful thing Klasse 11 readers can do is hold both — Adams's ambition and the 2024 economist's caution — without asking which is *really* the Dream.

4. Further reading / listening

- James Truslow Adams, *The Epic of America* (1931).
- The Atlantic — *American Dream* essay archive.

5. Teacher answer key

Controlled. 1. *It is the 1931 phrase that is what we usually mean by 'the Dream'.*

2. *was the phrase coined.*

Productive. 3. Open.