

Year 11 English (Advanced) student work sample – Ungraded

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 danger that the American Dream faces is that we become trapped in the idea and the concept that we lose focus of what is important. As shown in Sam Mendes' American Beauty the idea of the American Dream has many flaws and we lose all sense of relationships and meaningful connections between people. This is explored through Generational conflict, Marital conflict and is contrasted through the interactions between Ricky and Jane. In the stimulus Sally field discusses how she believes the American Dream is something that is real and that we can achieve whatever we want, however she does accept that there are flaws and discusses them. Both texts show how we become trapped by the American Dream and that there are Dangers that come from this.

Marital conflict is explored in Beauty through Lester and Carolyn's relationship and highlights the dangers of the American Dream. As shown in the opening scene there is conflict in their relationship, shown in the line, "see the way she handle on her pruning shears matches her gardening clogs, that isn't an accident." Lester is openly talking about how he doesn't like things that Carolyn does and describes her as "miserable". Mendes uses wide angle shots with Lester seen in the background looking through the window. There is a clear separation between the two as Lester is watching Carolyn's actions but not taking part. This lack of communication and separateness is also explained in the scene where Carolyn goes on a rant about their problems and conflicts saying that she will "divorce you so fast it will make your head spin." In the scene in the bedroom Carolyn is shown standing up while Lester remains lying down showing that Carolyn believes she is dominant. However after Lester makes the argument that, "this hasn't been a marriage but you were happy as long as I kept my mouth shut," she sits down again suggesting that they are equal again. Mendes further highlights separateness through his use of camera angles where he cuts between Lester and Carolyn but the two are never together. The Marital tension evident in both of these scenes emphasises the dangers of the American Dream. We be too caught up and trapped by the idea of, as Sally field says, "Anything is possible," that we lose sight of maintaining our relationships.

Generational conflict is explored In Beauty and further explores the idea that we are trapped by the ideology and the concept of the American Dream. In Beauty following the basketball game generational conflict is evident through the interactions between the adults and teenagers. Lester awkwardly tries to make conversation between Angela and Jane. However they are laconic and say very little back. This emphasises the Generational conflict and lack of good relationships evident in the film. Jane says, "Dad, Mum is waiting for you," in an annoyed and frustrated tone further highlighting the absence of family relationships and generational conflict. Mendes' use of close up here is also effective in engaging the audience and conveying the issue. Generational

conflict is also evident in Lester's Mr Smileys application scene. Lester tries to move away from the concept Associated with responsibility as a part of the American Dream and get a job with the least responsibility. The employer states that, "I don't think you'd fit in here," clearly showing generational conflict. Mendes positions the camera behind Lester and the Manager who are positioned across the table. They are both in the shot however the back of one is showing, highlighting separateness and disconnect. Both scenes highlight generational conflict and that through this and a lack of meaningful connections we will never achieve the American Dream as we cannot even interact in meaningful ways.

These Ideas of how we are very separated and cannot communicate in a meaningful way are juxtaposed through the interactions between Jane and Ricky in Beauty. The most Important scene in understanding their relationship is the scene where Ricky shows Jane the video of the floating bag, "dancing in the wind." Leading up to this being played, Mendes uses a wide angle shot of of them walking down the middle of the road. These proxemics are very close (which is different to most other interactions in the film) and they are the central focus of this shot, emphasising their good relationship. The framing of this shot with the trees on the outside of the road creates a sense of isolation and entrapment, which is symbolic of the American Dream. However through their strong and meaningful relationship they are able to break through this barrier. When Ricky plays the floating bag video they are both shown in the shot right next to each other highlighting their strong relationship. Here the piano motif is played which is creates a sense of intimacy and engages the audience telling them that this is an important scene. Along with Mendes uses close up shots of Jane and Ricky to effectively convey their emotions. Ricky and Janes relationship within Beauty is in stark contrast to those of others in the film. They show how through meaningful connections and interacting happiness can be achieved, and the danger of the American Dream avoided.

Both texts explore the danger of the American Dream, that we can become trapped and isolated by the ideas. Sally field discusses that "we expect that every thing is possible," however mendes shows that through a lack of meaningful connections between people, not everything is possible. Mendes also shows that if we do have meaningful connections and break the barrier of isolation and entrapment that is the American dream only then "you can be whatever you want to be" (Sally field). As Sally states "the American Dream has changed, and In order for it to be achieved we need to stop the potential dangers from becoming realities.

Grade Commentary