

Social class

1. Read the text and explain the following terms:

social class	
social inequality	
social mobility	

Social class refers to the grouping of people in society according to their social and economic status, e.g. lower class, middle class and upper class. A person's social class is affected by their income (money earned through a job), wealth (accumulation of assets), family background, education, attitudes and hopes.

Social inequality describes the unequal opportunities and rewards available to different groups within society. It can influence different areas of people's lives, such as health, education, jobs etc.

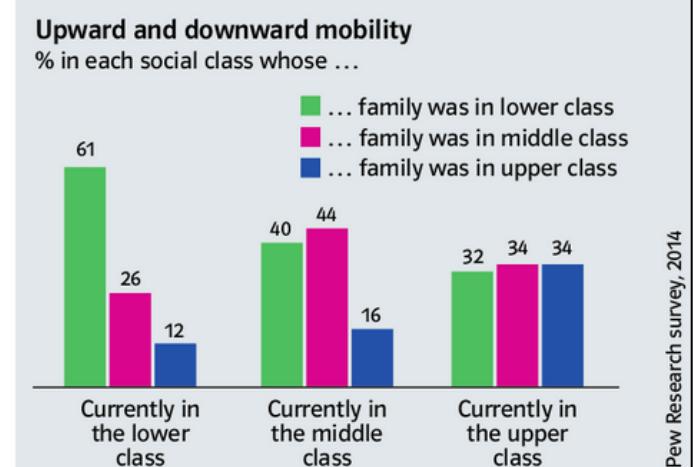
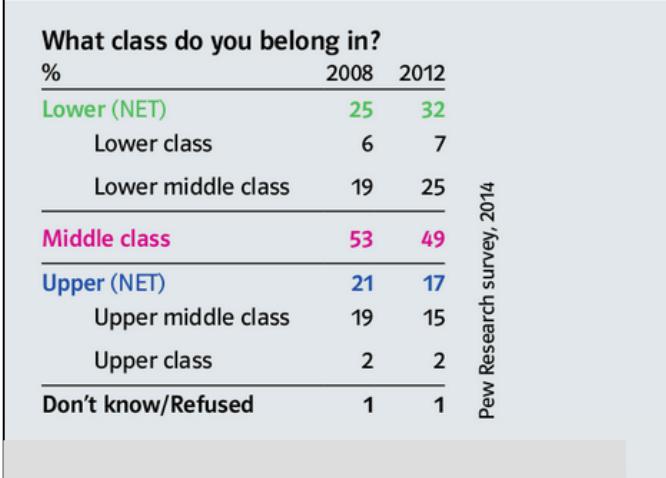
Social mobility is the term we use when an individual, family or group moves up or down the social hierarchy.

2. Read the text on social class in the US.

Although the US does not have any titled nobility or royalty unlike many European countries, US society is still divided into different social classes: the upper class or elite, the upper middle class, the middle class, the lower middle class and the poor. Yet upward social mobility – from 'rags to riches' – is an integral part of the American Dream. As President Obama said, "Here in America, our success should depend not on accident of birth, but the strength of our work ethic and the scope of our dreams. That's what drew our forebears here. It's how the daughter

of a factory worker is CEO of America's largest automaker; how the son of a barkeeper is Speaker of the House; how the son of a single mom can be President of the greatest nation on Earth."

However, since the 1970s the gap between the rich and poor has been growing, fuelled in recent years by the economic downturn. Income inequality is growing and it has become increasingly difficult for the poor to move up into the middle class and more precarious for those who remain there. This trend is reflected in a survey by the Pew Research Center:



- a) Sum up what is being said about class, social mobility as well as the gap between rich and poor.

- b) Study the two charts. Analyse and explain what they show.

- c) Describe and analyse the cartoon.



3. Read the text and the fact file on social class in the UK. For more help and information watch the video (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ohqDW390a5I> (UK - 7:40, the rest is about Australia)).

People in the UK now fit into seven social classes, a major survey conducted by the BBC suggests. It says the traditional categories of working, middle and upper class are outdated, fitting 39% of people. It found a new model of seven social classes ranging from the elite at the top to a "precariat" – the poor, precarious proletariat – at the bottom. More than 161,000 people took part in the Great British Class Survey, 5 the largest study of class in the UK.

The new classes are defined as:

- **Elite** – the most privileged group in the UK, distinct from the other six classes through its wealth. This group has the highest levels of all three capitals
- 10 • **Established middle class** – the second wealthiest, scoring highly on all three capitals. The largest and most gregarious group, scoring second highest for cultural capital
- **Technical middle class** – a small, distinctive new class group which is prosperous but scores low for social and cultural capital. Distinguished by its social isolation and cultural apathy
- 15 • **New affluent workers** – a young class group which is socially and culturally active, with middling levels of economic capital

The Great British Class Survey (2011) measured people's **economic capital** (income, savings, house value); **social capital** (number and status of people a person knows) and **cultural capital** (type and extent of cultural interests and activities).

⁴ precarious uncertain
¹¹ gregarious sociable
¹³ prosperous doing well financially
¹⁶ affluent wealthy
²¹ emergent beginning to exist or be noticed

- **Traditional working class** – scores low on all forms of capital, but is not completely deprived. Its members have reasonably high house values, explained by this group having the oldest average age at 66
- **Emergent service workers** – a new, young, urban group which is relatively poor but has high social and cultural capital
- **Precariat**, or precarious proletariat – the poorest, most deprived class, scoring low for social and cultural capital

25 Professor of sociology at Manchester University, Fiona Devine, said the survey really gave a sense of class in 21st Century Britain.

"It's what's in the middle which is really interesting and exciting, there's a much more fuzzy area between the traditional working class and traditional middle class. There's the emergent workers and the new affluent workers who are different
30 groups of people who won't necessarily see themselves as working or middle class. The survey has really allowed us to drill down and get a much more complete picture of class in modern Britain."

35 The researchers say the new affluent workers and emergent service workers appear to be the children of the "traditional working class", which they say has been fragmented by de-industrialisation, mass unemployment, immigration and the restructuring of urban space.

BBC website, 2013

²¹ service worker person who works with customers (sales, food service, social work etc.)
²³ deprived lacking basic or essential things



- a) What have the categories of class been extended from three to seven classes? Explain.

- b) Summarise the criteria according to which people are assigned to a certain class in the UK and state the seven social classes.
