

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:

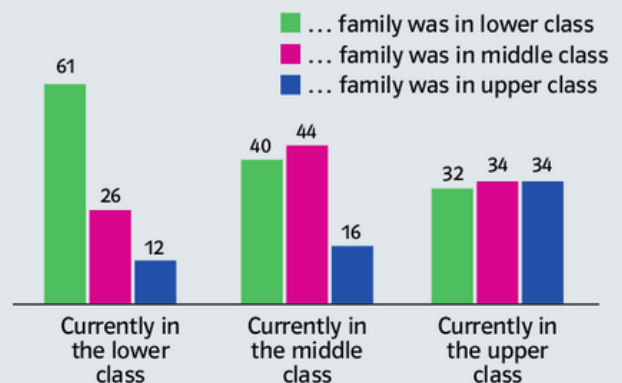
What class do you belong in?

%	2008	2012
Lower (NET)	25	32
Lower class	6	7
Lower middle class	19	25
Middle class	53	49
Upper (NET)	21	17
Upper middle class	19	15
Upper class	2	2
Don't know/Refused	1	1

Pew Research survey, 2014

Upward and downward mobility

% in each social class whose ...



Pew Research survey, 2014

- 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, 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 **precious** uncertain
- ¹¹ **gregarious** sociable
- ¹³ **prosperous** doing well financially
- ¹⁶ **affluent** wealthy
- ²¹ **emergent** beginning to exist or be noticed

