American Perspectives: Guided Notes

What does it mean to be an American?

American literature reflects our experiences, some shared and common, others not.  Read through **at least five** of the pieces from the American Perspectives documents set and complete the table below. *You do not need full sentences.*

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| Source | What message does the author convey to the reader? How? | How does this perspective affect you? Agree/Disagree? Why? | What values was the United States based upon according to this source? | Does the sentiment of this piece still hold true in this day and age? |
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| “Look around here.  Old or young, healthy as a horse, or person with a disability.  . . . Man or woman, Native American, native born, or immigrant.  Straight or gay.  . . . If you are willing to work hard and play by the rules, you are part of our family.”  **— President Bill Clinton, 1996**  “The Constitution only guarantees the American people the right to pursue happiness. You have to catch it yourself.”  **— Benjamin Franklin (founding father)**   “I’m not standing here speaking to you as an American, or a patriot, or a flag-saluter, or a flag-waver — no, not I. I’m speaking as a victim of this American system. And I see America through the eyes of the victim. I don’t see any American dream; I see an American nightmare.”  **— Malcolm X, 1964 (civil rights leader)** | Inscription on the Statue of Liberty    **The New Colossus**  Not like the brazen giant of Greek fame,  With conquering limbs astride from land to land;  Here at our sea-washed, sunset gates shall stand  A mighty woman with a torch, whose flame  Is the imprisoned lightning, and her name  Mother of Exiles. From her beacon-hand  Glows world-wide welcome; her mild eyes command  The air-bridged harbor that twin cities frame.  "Keep, ancient lands, your storied pomp!" cries she  With silent lips. "Give me your tired, your poor,  Your huddled masses yearning to breathe free,  The wretched refuse of your teeming shore.  Send these, the homeless, tempest-tost to me,  I lift my lamp beside the golden door!"  **— Emma Lazarus 1883 (poet)** |
| **The Pure Suit of Happiness**    The pure suit of happiness.  not yet invented.  How I long  to climb into its legs,    fit into its sleeves, and zip  it up, pull the hood  over my head.  It’s got    a face mask, too, and gloves  and boots attached.  It’s  made for me.  It’s blue.  It’s    not too heavy, not too  light.  It’s my right.  It has its own weather,    which is youth’s breeze  equilibrated by the ideal  thermostat of maturity,    and, built-in to begin with,  fluoroscopic goggles of  age.  I’d see through  everything, yet be happy.  I’d be suited for life.  I’d  always look good to myself.    **— May Swenson, 1972  (poet)** | **I, Too**    I, too, sing America.    I am the darker brother.  They send me to eat in the kitchen  When company comes,  But I laugh,  And eat well,  And grow strong.    Tomorrow,  I’ll be at the table  When company comes.  Nobody’ll dare  Say to me,  “Eat in the kitchen,”  Then.    Besides,  They’ll see how beautiful I am  And be ashamed—    **— Langston Hughes, 1925 (poet)** |
| I say to you today, my friends, even though we face the difficulties of today and tomorrow, I still have a dream.  It is a dream deeply rooted in the American dream.  I have a dream that one day this nation will rise up and live out the true meaning of its creed: "We hold these truths to be self-evident: that all men are created equal."  I have a dream that one day on the red hills of Georgia the sons of former slaves and the sons of former slave owners will be able to sit down together at the table of brotherhood.  ……  I have a dream that my four little children will one day live in a nation where they will not be judged by the color of their skin but by the content of their character.  I have a dream today.  ………  I have a dream that one day, every valley shall be exalted, every hill and mountain shall be made low, the rough places will be made plain, and the crooked places will be made straight, and the glory of the Lord shall be revealed, and all flesh shall see it together.  **— Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.,  1963 (civil rights leader)** | |
| “America is composed of all kinds of people - part of the difficulty in our nation today is due to the fact that we are not utilising the abilities and the talents of other brown and black peoples and females that have something to bring to the creativity and the rejuvenation and the revitalisation of this country.”    **— Shirley Chisholm (first Black woman elected to congress in 1969)**  I would also hear then the high nasal notes of middle-class American speech.  The air stirred with sound.  Sometimes, even now, when I have been travelling abroad for several weeks, I will hear what I heard as a boy.  In hotel lobbies or airports, in Turkey or Brazil, some Americans will pass, and suddenly I will hear it again—the high sound of American voices. For a few seconds, I will hear it with pleasure, for it is now the sound of my society—a reminder of home.  But, inevitably—already on the flight headed home—the sound fades with repetition.  I will be unable to hear it anymore.    **— Richard Rodriguez, 1982 (writer)** | |
| **I Hear America Singing**    I hear America singing, the varied carols I hear,  Those of mechanics, each one singing his as it should be blithe and strong,  The carpenter singing his as he measures his plank or beam,  The mason singing his as he makes ready for work, or leaves off work,  The boatman singing what belongs to him in his boat, the deckhand singing on the steamboat deck,  The shoemaker singing as he sits on his bench, the hatter singing as he stands,  The wood-cutter’s song, the ploughboy’s on his way in the morning, or at noon intermission or at sundown,  The delicious singing of the mother, or of the young wife at work, or of the girl sewing or washing,  Each singing what belongs to him or her and to none else,  The day what belongs to the day—at night the party of young fellows, robust, friendly,  Singing with open mouths their strong melodious songs.    **— Walt Whitman, 1860 (poet)** | |
| “On the Statue of Liberty it says: ‘Give me your tired, your poor, your huddled masses yearning to be free…’ In the Declaration of Independence, it is written: ‘All men are created equal and they are endowed with certain inalienable rights…’And in our National Anthem, it says: ‘Oh, say does that Star-Spangled Banner yet wave over the land of the free.’ … that’s what America is. No matter how hard you try, you cannot erase those words from the Declaration of Independence. No matter how hard you try, you cannot chip those words off the base of the Statue of Liberty and no matter how hard you try, you cannot sing the Star-Spangled Banner without those words. That’s what America is. Love it or leave it.”  **— Harvey Milk, 1978 (politician, first openly gay elected official in California)** | |
| “Here in America, we don't let our differences tear us apart. Not here. Because we know that our greatness comes from when we appreciate each other's strengths, when we learn from each other, when we lean on each other, because in this country, it's never been each person for themselves. No, we're all in this together. We always have been.”  **— Michelle Obama, 2016 (former first lady)**  “America was not built on fear. America was built on courage, on imagination and an unbeatable determination to do the job at hand.”  **— President Harry S. Truman**    “All Americans living today are the heirs of this magnificent legacy.  We are the descendants of the most daring and courageous people ever to walk on the face of the Earth.  We inherit their towering confidence, unwavering enthusiasm, their unbridled ambition, and their unrelenting optimism.  This is the untamed spirit that built this glorious nation, and this is the spirit that burns brightly within the soul of every American patriot.”  **— President Donald Trump, 2020** | “Basically, there are two kinds of stereotypes out there in the world about America. There’s America the Goliath – the big, powerful, bullying country that pushes its way around the world and gets its ways, pursues its own interests nakedly, irrespective of what others want. And the other stereotype is America, the land of opportunity, where everyone can go and do anything, be anything, make any dreams come true.”  **— Shashi Tharoor (writer/politician from India)**  “True patriotism springs from a belief in the dignity of the individual, freedom and equality not only for Americans but for all people on earth, universal brotherhood and good will, and a constant striving toward the principles and ideals on which this country was founded.”  **— Eleanor Roosevelt, 1962 (former first lady)**  “Let every nation know, whether it wishes us well or ill, that we shall pay any price, bear any burden, meet any hardship, support any friend, oppose any foe in order to assure the survival and the success of liberty.”  **— President John F. Kennedy, 1961**  “I love America more than any other country in this world, and, exactly for this reason, I insist on the right to criticize her perpetually.”  **— James Baldwin, 1955 (writer,civil rights activist)** |
| “If you take advantage of everything America has to offer, there’s nothing you can’t accomplish.”  **— Geraldine Ferraro (Congress member, first female VP candidate)**  “We’re blessed with the opportunity to stand for something—for liberty and freedom and fairness. And these are things worth fighting for, worth devoting our lives to.”  **— President Ronald Reagan**  “I fell in love with my country when I was a prisoner in someone else’s. I loved it for its decency, for its faith in the wisdom, justice, and goodness of its people. I loved it because it was not just a place but an idea, a cause worth fighting for. I was never the same again; I wasn’t my own man anymore; I was my country’s.”  **— John McCain, 2008 (Senator, presidential candidate)** | **The Recipe**    Round Eyes    Ingredients:  scissors                        Scotch magic transparent tape,                   eyeliner—water based, black,                   Optional: false eyelashes.    Cleanse face thoroughly.    For best results, powder entire face, including eyelids.  (lighter shades suited to total effect desired)    With scissors, cut magic tape 1/16” wide, 3/4”-1/2” long depending on length of eyelid.    Stick firmly onto mid-upper eyelid area  (looking down into hand mirror facilitates finding  adequate surface)    If using false eyelashes, affix first on lid, folding any  excess lid over the base of eyelash with glue.    Paint black eyeliner on tape and entire lid.    Do not cry.    **— Janice Mirikitani, 1987 (Bay Area poet)** |
| “I have always believed you can define America in one word: Possibilities. That in America, everyone, and I mean everyone, should be given the opportunity to go as far as their dreams and God-given ability will take them... United in our pursuit of a more perfect Union. United in our dreams of a better future for us and for our children. United in our determination to make the coming years bright...This is a great nation. And we are a good and decent people. This is the United States of America. And there has never been anything we've been unable to accomplish when we've done it together.”    **— Vice President Joe Biden 2020** | “We say success in America is about hard work and character. It's not really. Most of success today is about how good you are at certain tests and what kind of family background you have, with some exceptions sprinkled in to try and make it all seem fair”   **— Andrew Yang,  2019 (entrepreneur, former presidential candidate)** |