



Ball State Philosophy Outreach Project

Lesson Plan

Topic: The American Dream and Capitalism

Time: 50-60 minutes

Materials: PowerPoint Presentation

Learning Objectives:

1. Students will be able to define the American Dream.
2. Students will be able to analyze various critiques of the American Dream.
3. Students will be able to cite real-world evidence and experiences in a collaborative discussion format.
4. Students will be able to define capitalism.
5. Students will be able to examine the relationship between the American Dream and capitalism.

Activity: Follow through the PowerPoint using the recommended instructions below. This should be learner-centered and focused on student dialogue. The teacher will act as the facilitator of student discussion, while expanding on student thoughts by asking clarifying questions and offering insight and connections to other notable philosophers as appropriate. After the presentation, move onto the final discussion questions.

Slide 1 (5 min):

Introduce the topic of the American Dream. Ask students the following questions:

1. Have you heard the term “the American Dream”? What do you think it means?
2. Has the concept American Dream evolved over time?
 - A. If so, then how do you think the concept of the American Dream has evolved?
 - B. Do you think that the concept of the American Dream will continue to evolve?

Slide 2 (<1 min):

Share the following definition of the American Dream: A belief shared by many Americans and promoted by media and other avenues that holds that freedom in the United States includes the ability for social mobility with hard work.

Slides 3-5 (5 min per slide):

These slides depict political cartoons on the topic of the American Dream. Facilitate a student discussion and listen for student recognition of the romantic or Marxist critiques of capitalism as well as praises of capitalism that align with John Locke or Adam Smith's philosophies.

Ask the following questions for each slide:

1. What is this cartoon indicating?
2. Is this a critique of the American Dream?
 - A. Why or why not?
 - B. If so, what aspect of the American Dream is this critiquing?
3. Do you agree with the critique offered by this cartoon?
 - A. Why or why not?
4. Why might someone have created this cartoon?

Slide 6 (5 min):

Definite capitalism and then ask the following questions:

1. How is capitalism connected to the American Dream?
2. Is capitalism essential to the American Dream?
 - A. Why?
3. To your knowledge, do other capitalist societies reflect something like the American Dream?

Slide 7 (5 min):

Present a brief summary of Locke's and Smith's views.

1. What do you think of these positions?
2. Do you see these positions reflected in our culture today?
 - A. If so, how?

Slide 8 (5 min):

Present a brief summary of the Marxist critique of capitalism.

1. What do you think of Marx's position?
2. Do you see his position reflected in our culture today?
 - A. If so, how?

Slide 9 (5 min):

Present a brief summary of the Romantic critique of capitalism.

1. What do you think of Marx's position?
2. Do you see his position reflected in our culture today?
 - A. If so, how?

Slide 10

Bibliography

Final Discussion Questions (10-20 minutes)

1. How does capitalism change our perception on what we produce and how we view others?
2. What's a better measure of success, the amount of money you have, or how 'woke' you are?
3. Are classes (rich, poor) necessary for a society to do well?
4. How should we structure society?
5. What is the individual's role in the American society?

Key Terms:

1. The American Dream

- A belief shared by many Americans and promoted by media and other avenues that holds that freedom in the United States includes the ability for social mobility with hard work.

2. Capitalism

- An economic system in which trade and industry are controlled by private owners for profit.

3. Marxism

- The Marxist perspective perceives capitalism to be...
 1. Alienating-- this includes **alienation in work**.
 2. A feature of class divided societies.
 1. Systematic oppressions and inequities marginalize certain groups of people in a capitalist society often putting minorities at a disadvantage
- Romantic critique of capitalism articulated by 18th century artists and poets in response to the Industrial Revolution.
 - Critique of industry and technology for upending pre-capitalist relations (Löwy, 1987)

4. Romantic Critique

- This differs from the Marxist perspective in the sense that
 - it is critical of technology, and
 - it is not a systematic critique
- The romantic critique of capitalism believes that
 - capitalism leads to a materialistic perspective that is unhealthy for an individual's emotional consciousness, and
 - capitalism hurts human values and connections with one another.

Key Figures:

1. **John Locke** (1632-1704), English philosopher
 - A. Believed that capitalism was moral because it respected individuals, their rights, and the pursuit of happiness.
1. **Adam Smith** (1723-1790), Scottish economist and philosopher
 - A. Said to be the "father of capitalism".
 - B. Focus on the benefits of a commercial society on the **political economy**.
 - C. Believed that a strong economic 'stage' was necessary for a functional government.
2. **Karl Marx** (1818-1883), German philosopher and economist
 - A. believed capitalism was an economic stage that included many technological advancements but ultimately could not meet the needs of all people because of its emphasis on profit

Bibliography

Bakst, Daren. "Capitalism and Morality." *John Locke Foundation*, John Locke Foundation, 20 Oct. 2011, www.johnlocke.org/update/capitalism-and-morality/.

Libretexts. "16.1C: The Marxist Critique of Capitalism." *Social Sci LibreTexts*, Libretexts, 16 Dec. 2020, [socialsci.libretexts.org/Bookshelves/Sociology/Book:_Sociology_\(Boundless\)/16:_Economy/16.01:_Economic_Systems/16.1C:_The_Marxist_Critique_of_Capitalism](https://socialsci.libretexts.org/Bookshelves/Sociology/Book:_Sociology_(Boundless)/16:_Economy/16.01:_Economic_Systems/16.1C:_The_Marxist_Critique_of_Capitalism).

Löwy, M. (1987). The Romantic and the Marxist Critique of Modern Civilization. *Theory and Society*, 16(6), 891-904. Retrieved February 26, 2021, from <http://www.jstor.org/stable/657542>

Weinstein, Jack R. "Adam Smith (1723—1790)." *Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, iep.utm.edu/smith/.

Wolff, Jonathan, and David Leopold. "Karl Marx." *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, Stanford University, 21 Dec. 2020, plato.stanford.edu/entries/marx/#AlieCapi.