

AMERICAN DREAM PROJECT

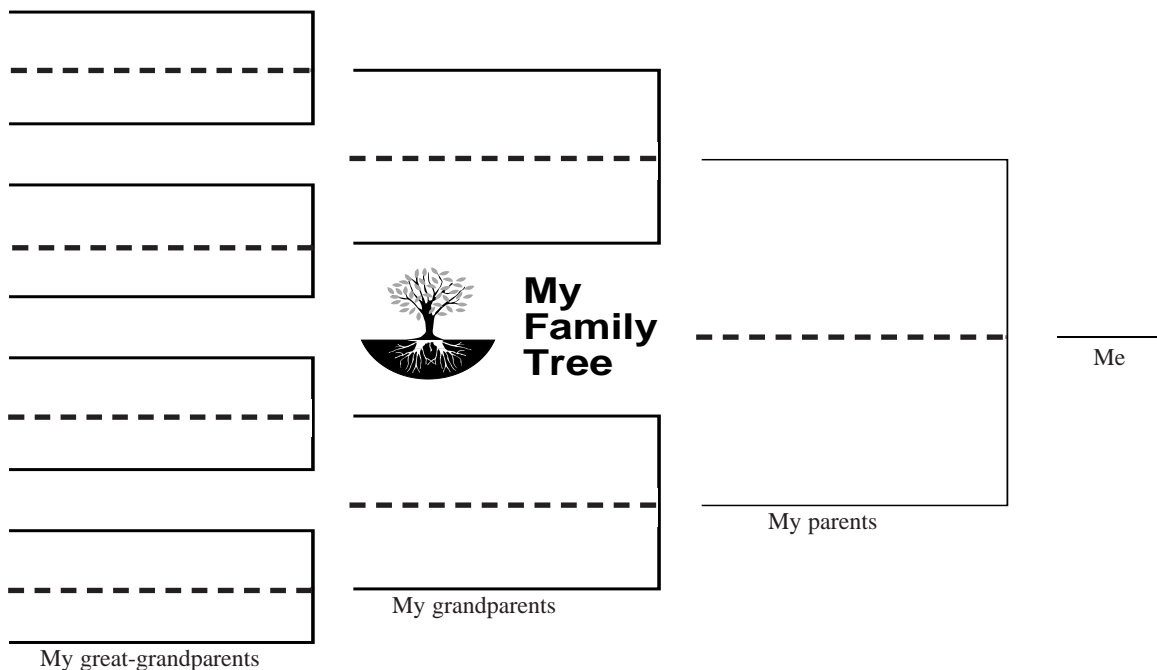
For several decades Studs Terkel traveled endlessly across America. Terkel talked with celebrities as well as typical next-door persons asking them whether they believe in any kind of “American Dream” for themselves and those whom they love. He found the American Dream of 1900 still alive but altered. Gathering together his most perceptive interviews, he wrote, The American Dream: Lost and Found.

In this project you, will be contacting persons in your life about what their dreams have been, are and may become in the years ahead. You will be particularly trying to find out how their dreams have been shaped because they live in our country. You will work both as an individual and as a member of a group.

Procedure

1. On your own, create a blank “Family Tree” on a poster board like the sample below.
2. Ask family members (parent, step-parent, grandparent, aunt, or others) to help you fill in the FAMILY TREE’s spaces as follows: Great-grandparents, grandparents, parents, and you yourself go on the dark lines. Squeeze in birth and death dates, racial/ethnic backgrounds wherever you can—except on the dotted lines. On these lines place the number of children and their gender. (For example, 2 s . . . 1 d means 2 sons and 1 daughter.)

Below is a sample of the type of “Family Tree” you will fill out during this AMERICAN DREAM PROJECT. Use this “tree” or one you create.



3. As you interview relatives, take brief notes on the answers you receive to questions such as these:
 - a. What does the phrase “American Dream” mean to you?
 - b. What do you think this same phrase meant to our ancestors?
 - c. Should we close immigration to America?
 - d. If we were to close immigration, will the American Dream be lost? That is, to keep persons “finding” the American Dream, must we always have immigrants entering our country?
4. Write a 3-5 page dialogue between you and the most interesting person you interviewed. Use your notes to reconstruct only the most interesting parts of the dialogue you had with this person.
5. **Creative Option** If you feel writing #4 above would be either difficult or dull, consider writing an imaginary dialogue between you and the most interesting relative in your family tree. Try to capture the spirit of this relative and his/her American Dream.



Now . . . Divide into groups of four to six students

6. In your groups, share your dialogues. Either individually read them out loud to one another or hold a read around (you pass them around the circle and silently read one another's work).
7. Choose a leader for your activity group who will plan a 20-minute presentation for the whole class. All other groups in your class will also be planning presentations. The question unifying all group presentations is this:
The American Dream: Are we losing it? Can it still be found?
8. The 20-minute presentation should include the following:
 - a. An introduction by one member.
 - b. The most interesting portions of each member's dialogue. These portions must be presented by two group members, with the author reading his or her questions and the other group member presenting the responses.
 - c. A summary by one member in which the following are briefly covered: consensus or conclusions reached . . . questions still unanswered.
 - d. **Creative Option** Group members may wish to role-play a brief scene from the life of one group member's ancestor as this person pursued his or her American Dream.