

Grades 11-12

Self Assessment

American Dream - What This Would Look Like in College

You have read Ragged Dick by Horatio Alger and A Cool Million by Nathanael West.

In an essay of 3-4 pages, typed, double-spaced, in MLA format, you will use as a starting point one (or more) of the following points. Your essay should include an introduction, a thesis, supporting evidence (including relevant quotes explained in terms of your argument), organization, and effective language (including grammar). Remember, an effective argument seeks not only to take a position but to establish the significance of that position. Why would it be important to notice or understand similarities/differences between these texts? Why would a reader be enlightened or intrigued by your perspective of these texts?

Both Dick and Lem hope to better themselves. How might their different approaches or goals affect their different rates of success?

Both Dick and Lem have older, wiser friends who come from a higher class. What good does it do them, and are these friends more similar or different?

What values do Dick and Lem live by? Are they the same? Where do they come from, and what do they do for the boys?

What is The American Dream offered in these books? Is the dream the same for Dick and Lem? Does it work out the same, and if not, why not?

Women are very important to both Dick and Lem, though perhaps in different ways. How do women fare in these worlds? If these are stories of The American Dream, where do women fit into that dream?

These books seem to have fairly different relationships to change and the status quo. How do Dick and Lem relate to the world as it is, and what changes (if any) do they seek to make?

Or -----

Imagine a conversation between Dick and Lem. What would they have to say to each other about their experiences, about New York, about their goals and means of achieving those goals? (note: this might not look much like a formal argument, but you would still be advancing a thesis and providing supporting evidence drawn from the texts) If you feel strongly about another topic, please consult me before starting to write.

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