Preview Unit Goals

**TEXT ANALYSIS**
- Understand and analyze historical and cultural context of contemporary literature
- Identify and interpret allusions
- Identify and interpret rhetorical devices, including paradox and repetition
- Identify and analyze tone, imagery, voice, personification, and sound devices
- Analyze primary and secondary source documents
- Analyze and trace elements of an argument, including claim, reasons, evidence, and counterargument
- Identify faulty reasoning, including circular logic and non-sequiturs
- Make inferences about theme, genre, structure, and elements of drama in different cultural and historical contexts

**READING**
- Identify and evaluate main ideas and supporting details
- Analyze inductive and deductive reasoning

**WRITING AND LANGUAGE**
- Write a resumé
- Use word choice, sentence structure, and tone to establish voice
- Use word choice, imagery, and tone to create mood

**SPEAKING AND LISTENING**
- Analyze an argument in a newspaper article
- Compare and contrast perspectives in news reports

**VOCABULARY**
- Understand and use Greek prefixes to determine word meaning
- Use context clues to determine the meaning of idioms

**ACADEMIC VOCABULARY**
- complex
- economic
- establish
- ethnic
- evolve

**MEDIA AND VIEWING**
- Create a Web site

*Find It Online!*
Go to [thinkcentral.com](http://thinkcentral.com) for the interactive version of this unit.
Contemporary Literature
1940–PRESENT

NEW PERSPECTIVES
• Modern American Drama
• Responses to War
• Civil Rights and Protest Literature
• A Mosaic of American Voices

MediaSmart DVD-ROM
Perspectives in the News
Deconstruct news reports to see how they can shape audience perceptions of historical events and figures. Page 1234
Questions of the Times

**Are we responsible for the WHOLE WORLD?**

World War II brought the United States into a new role of increased power and involvement in the world, a role that expanded even further with the Cold War, Vietnam, and the “War on Terror.” Do you believe America has a responsibility to intervene in other nations’ conflicts? Does it have the right?

**Can America achieve EQUAL RIGHTS?**

In 1963, one hundred years after emancipation, African Americans still found themselves treated as second-class citizens, denied equal education, jobs, even the right to vote. The civil rights movement secured the legal right to equality, but in reality racism and injustice linger on. Do you believe America will ever achieve true equality?

DISCUSS  After reading these questions and talking about them with a partner, share with the class as a whole. Then read on to explore the ways in which writers of the contemporary era have dealt with the same issues.
What makes an American?

American writers of the 21st century reflect the diversity of the country itself. The United States has become a multicultural society whose citizens’ experiences are endlessly varied. With no single “American experience” to bond citizens together, it seems logical to ask: What makes an American? Patriotism? Independence? Mere citizenship? Or something else?

What is the American Dream?

The Pilgrims and the Puritans dreamed of a new world where they would be free to practice their religion. Later immigrants dreamed of a country where any child could grow up to be the president. In the postwar era of the 1950s, the dream focused on consumer goods—“a car in every garage.” How do you define the American dream?
In the 1950s, America entered the Space Age—a beginning foray into our modern technological times. Looking down from space, the country’s first astronauts marveled at the blue marble that was Earth floating in the blackness. From space, Earth looked peaceful and whole, with no divisions between nations, no conflict between races. It was a new way of looking at the world—just one of many new perspectives on modern life.
Contemporary Literature: Historical Context

Literature of the modern age reflects the uncertainty and anxiety brought on by the realities of war.

Modern Warfare

**WORLD WAR II** “Not a place on earth might be so happy as America,” wrote Thomas Paine in the winter of 1776. “Her situation is remote from all the wrangling world.” More than a century and a half later, as the Nazi army surged across Europe and Japan’s expansionist government seized territories in Asia, many Americans still clung to the dream of isolationism—until **Pearl Harbor** woke them from their illusions.

On December 7, 1941, Japanese bombers struck the American naval base at Pearl Harbor, Hawaii, sinking ships, destroying planes, and killing over two thousand people. Though it lasted less than two hours, this surprise attack changed the course of history, bringing a reluctant United States into World War II.

The U.S. entry into the war turned the tide in favor of the Allies—England, France, and the Soviet Union—but it was a long, hard fight. By the time Germany and Japan surrendered to the Allied forces in 1945, more than 78 million people had been killed or wounded, including around six million Jews systematically murdered by the Nazis in what became known as the **Holocaust**. World War II was a catastrophe of epic dimensions, the first war in history in which more civilians than soldiers died. Never before had so many soldiers fought. Never before had such wholesale slaughter occurred. Writers such as **Randall Jarrell**, who had personal experience with the war, struggled to both document and examine the meaning of war on such a grand scale. Others, such as **Kurt Vonnegut** and **Bernard Malamud**, examined the rampant anti-Semitism that fueled the Holocaust. Malamud once remarked, “People say I write so much about misery, but you write about what you write best. As you are grooved, so you are grieved.”

**THE COLD WAR** America came out of World War II a world power, wielding a new weapon of unparalleled destructive force: the atomic bomb. But along with strength and influence came deep uneasiness. The Soviet Union, once an ally, emerged as a rival superpower with equally large ambitions and a political system—communism—which many saw as a threat to the American way of life. Knowing any direct confrontation could end in nuclear annihilation, the two nations fought a “Cold War,” each side racing to develop more and more devastating weapons while they jostled for strategic influence around the globe. As the arms race spiraled upward, ordinary citizens felt less and less secure. In literature, this pervasive fear of known and unknown dangers prompted a boom in **science fiction** writing, as writers pondered what might arise if the current trends continued.
MODERN CONFLICTS  Meanwhile, in an effort to contain the spread of communism, the U.S. military became deeply involved in civil wars first in Korea, then in Vietnam. The major American involvement in the Vietnam War lasted about nine years and bred a degree of domestic conflict unseen since the Civil War. As the death toll among U.S. soldiers rose—reaching about 58,000 in all—many Americans questioned the wisdom of our intervention and took to the streets in protest. The literature of the time reflects the conflicts within the country. Writer Tim O’Brien once remarked that “It’s not really Vietnam that I was concerned about . . . ; rather, it was to have readers care about what’s right and wrong and about the difficulty of doing right, the difficulty of saying no to a war.”

The Cold War finally came to an end with the breakup of the Soviet Union in 1991, but America was not finished with warfare. That same year, U.S. troops were sent to counter the Iraqi invasion of Kuwait in the first Persian Gulf War. A longer struggle began on September 11, 2001, when hijackers flew commercial airplanes into the Pentagon and the World Trade Center, killing thousands and leading to U.S. invasions of Afghanistan and Iraq. At the same time, violence raged around the globe, and with nuclear weapons no longer limited to two superpowers, possibilities for worldwide disaster loomed. Writers of the last several generations have been profoundly affected by the sense of instability that has been brought on by near-constant war. “At all times,” wrote novelist John Updike, “an old world is collapsing and a new world arising.”

A Voice from the Times
Mankind must put an end to war, or war will put an end to mankind.
—John F. Kennedy

U.S. Marines training for Operation Desert Shield, 1990
Cultural Influences

Writers have both recorded and reflected upon the civil rights movement of the 1950s and 1960s—perhaps the most important social change in modern time.

The Civil Rights Movement

The civil rights movement had its roots in protests and legal actions of the 1950s. In 1954, the Supreme Court’s *Brown v. Board of Education* ruling struck down school segregation as unconstitutional. Other civil rights advances followed, pushed along by black and white activists who organized protest marches, boycotts, voter registration drives, and sit-ins. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. emerged as a leader during these times. King advocated nonviolent civil disobedience based on the philosophies of Henry David Thoreau and Indian social reformer Mohandas Gandhi.

Sadly, many of the peaceful demonstrations of the civil rights movement were met with mob violence and police brutality. While the nation watched on television, protestors were beaten, attacked by police dogs, and sprayed with fire hoses. King himself endured repeated imprisonment for his efforts. But the violence did not stop the movement.

During the famous March on Washington in 1963, which drew 200,000 participants, demonstrators demanded civil rights legislation at the national level, backed strongly by federal enforcement. Largely as a result of King’s efforts, Congress passed the 1964 *Civil Rights Act* outlawing segregation in public places and guaranteeing legal equality to black citizens. In the years since, America has still not achieved true equality and opportunity for all, yet the civil rights movement has brought it much closer to King’s dream of a land where people would “not be judged by the color of their skin, but by the content of their character.”

A Voice from the Times

*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.”*

—Martin Luther King Jr.
Ideas of the Age

Modern writers have responded in a variety of ways to a peculiarly American philosophy: that of the American dream.

The American Dream

For earlier generations, the American dream had meant many things—political and religious freedom, economic opportunity, the chance to achieve a better life through talent, education, and hard work. After living through the Great Depression and two World Wars, however, many Americans in the 1950s whittled that dream down to something much simpler: the chance to own a home in a stable neighborhood.

For millions of mainly white Americans, life in the suburbs became the American dream. Families sought out communities with affordable single-family homes, good schools, shopping malls, and parking that was free and easy to find. People didn’t care if their houses looked alike; they just wanted a safe place to raise their children.

As the years passed and the economy boomed, however, Americans began to add to their once-simple dream. Things became more important: a new television, car, or washing machine came to be seen as symbols of success. Soon the dream seemed to narrow to a vision of a consumer society in which conformity and “keeping up with the Joneses” was valued above all.

Writers from the mid-century to today have wrangled with the idea of the American dream. In the mid-’50s, “beatniks” such as Jack Kerouac and Allen Ginsberg protested the shallowness and conformity of American society. Dramatists such as Arthur Miller examined the strivings of ordinary Americans reaching for that American dream. Poets, novelists, short story writers—all have explored the many facets of the American dream.
Literature of the Times

The years between World War II and the present brought dramatic changes in the subjects and forms of literature, as well as a wider variety of authors represented.

Modern American Drama

In the years following World War II, some of the best and most influential writing was occurring within the community of American theater. Dramatists in the post-war years began to experiment stylistically and create works of social relevance that would prompt a revival in theater not only in America, but in Europe as well. Dramatists such as Arthur Miller and Tennessee Williams served as models of the liberated playwright—experimenting with stagecraft as well as modern themes often deemed provocative.

One of the most common themes explored by these playwrights was that of the American dream. “The American dream is the largely unacknowledged screen in front of which all American writing plays itself out,” Arthur Miller once said. Indeed, Miller’s Willy Loman, the main character in his *Death of a Salesman*, became the trademark figure of postwar American theater. A lowly salesman who has been discarded by the system to which he has mistakenly devoted his life, Willy Loman proved how the American dream could become twisted and broken.

A general disillusionment paired with an experimental style characterized many of the works of this period. While a play such as Thornton Wilder’s *Our Town*, first produced in 1938, experimented with stagecraft by showing life literally “behind the scenes” on a stage bare of scenery, it still took a gentle view of small-town America. Works written in the 1940s and 1950s, however, were far less sympathetic. In *The Glass Menagerie* and *A Streetcar Named Desire*, for example, Southerner Tennessee Williams portrayed characters who, unsuited to modern life, retreat into the fantasy world of an earlier era. And Miller’s critique of modern values in *Death of a Salesman* was found to be so threatening that Hollywood executives wanted to release the movie version along with a short film depicting the life of a salesman as blissful and carefree. Miller, however, protested.

*Lorraine Hansberry’s* *A Raisin in the Sun*, written in 1957, looked at the American dream from the perspective of those who had been excluded. The first major Broadway play by an African-American writer, *A Raisin in the Sun* was hailed by critics as “universal,” while also capturing unique aspects of the African-American experience.
American experience. Writer James Baldwin said of the play, “[I]n order for a person to bear his life, he needs a valid re-creation of that life, which is why, as Ray Charles might put it, blacks chose to sing the blues. This is why *Raisin in the Sun* meant so much to black people . . . . In the theater, a current flowed back and forth between the audience and the actors, flesh and blood corroborating flesh and blood—as we say, testifying. . . .” In addition, the play opened the door to writers from outside the mainstream, who would revitalize American theater in the decades to follow.

Responses to War

War, with all its moral complexities and attendant brutality, has had a strong influence on writers throughout the 20th and 21st centuries. World War II brought with it previously unimaginable horrors: millions of casualties, the genocide of the Holocaust, the use of nuclear weapons. Struggling to come to terms with such destruction, some writers worked in the modernist style—giving detailed, realistic, and somewhat detached accounts of the war, as if told by an outside observer such as a journalist.

In fact, much of the most powerful literature of World War II was straight nonfiction, such as war correspondent John Hersey’s *Hiroshima*, an unforgettable account of the first hours and days after the United States dropped atomic bombs on two Japanese cities, bringing massive destruction and an end to the war. John Steinbeck, better known for his Depression-era literature, worked as a war correspondent as well, spending time with troops in North Africa and England. His essay “Why Soldiers Won’t Talk” explores how soldiers cope with the things they have witnessed.

Many writers of this period wrote of their own experiences—including the horrors of the Holocaust. Elie Wiesel, who was born in Europe and became an American citizen much later in life, was taken as a 15-year-old boy to a Nazi concentration camp in Poland. His memoir, *Night*, describes his nightmarish experiences in the camp, where he was beaten, starved, and nearly worked to death. Most members of his family did not survive.

In the 1960s, Joseph Heller’s *Catch-22* and Kurt Vonnegut’s *Slaughterhouse-Five* introduced a new style of war literature. Both writers had seen combat in World War II, and their novels shared a dark, ironic humor that focused on the absurdity of war. One such absurdity is the “catch” in *Catch-22*. It refers to a mysterious Air Force regulation which asserts that any person willing to go into battle should be considered insane, yet the very act of asking to be excused would prove one’s sanity—and send a pilot back into battle. With their cynicism toward authority and sense of helplessness in the face of huge, inhuman forces, Heller and Vonnegut spoke to a younger generation caught up in a very different war: Vietnam.

Where World War II had united Americans in moral certainty against a common enemy, Vietnam drove them apart. Protesters—among them

A Voice from the Times

One of the most sound ideas in dramatic writing is that, in order to create the universal, you must pay very great attention to the specific.

—Lorraine Hansberry
students, pacifists, and some returning veterans—marched in the streets, calling for an end to the war.

Writers of this time questioned authority, conventional values, and even the nature of reality. Some experimented with a “postmodern” style of fiction that drew attention to its own artificiality, pointing out the presence of the author by displaying its inner workings like a clock without a face. Others, like Vietnam veteran Tim O’Brien, wrote stories that blurred the lines between fiction and nonfiction. In *The Things They Carried*, O’Brien writes about telling his daughter how he killed a man in Vietnam—but this Tim O’Brien is a character, and the real O’Brien neither killed a man nor has a daughter. Can something that “didn’t really happen” still be true? Postmodernism asks, What is fiction? What is truth?

**Analyze Visuals**

The World War II propaganda poster shown here was meant to inspire support for the war. In your opinion, is it persuasive? How might the Vietnam War protesters shown in the other image have answered the question posed? How might they have responded to the intent of the poster?
Civil Rights and Protest Literature

The questioning of authority and conventional values applied not only to the writers of the Vietnam era but to those of the civil rights movement as well. To change laws, first it was necessary to change minds. The success of the civil rights movement depended on getting the message of justice out to the rest of America—telling people what was happening and making them care. One hundred years before, abolitionist writers had made a deep impact with novels and slave narratives that showed readers how it felt to live in bondage. In the 20th century, the written word still had a crucial role to play.

Even before the civil rights movement began in earnest, writers were examining issues of race and equality. Building upon the work of earlier Harlem Renaissance writers, black writers of the 1940s explored the dynamics of race relations and the injustice of discrimination in novels such as Ann Petry’s *The Street*, which sold over a million copies, and Richard Wright’s *Native Son*. As the civil rights movement gathered momentum in the early 1950s, African-American writers began to gain wider recognition, winning prestigious awards such as the Pulitzer Prize for poet Gwendolyn Brooks and the National Book Award for Ralph Ellison’s *Invisible Man*.

The 1960s brought James Baldwin’s influential essay collections as well as many important autobiographies, including *The Autobiography of Malcolm X* and Anne Moody’s *Coming of Age in Mississippi*. By telling their own stories, these writers made a powerful statement about the harmful effects of racism and the need for change. Poets chimed in as well, reflecting upon the powerful events of the day. Dudley Randall’s “Ballad of Birmingham,” for example, was in response to the 1963 church bombing that killed four young girls.

For Your Outline

**CIVIL RIGHTS AND PROTEST LITERATURE**
- questioned authority and tradition
- delivered message of justice
- examined race and equality
- reflected African-American experience
- showed varying viewpoints

**A MOSAIC OF AMERICAN VOICES**
- current outpouring from writers of various ethnicities
- new appreciation for diversity
- universal themes, yet rooted in culture

A Voice from the Times

*We are not fighting for integration, nor are we fighting for separation. We are fighting for recognition as human beings.*

—Malcolm X

Martin Luther King Jr. and Malcolm X
Malcolm X and Martin Luther King Jr., two leaders of the civil rights movement, held opposing viewpoints on the use of violence as a means for change. Inspired by Thoreau and Gandhi, as well as the Bible, King’s speeches and writings combined a steadfast belief in nonviolent resistance with a bold determination to bring an end to injustice. In his 1963 “I Have a Dream” speech, King argued, “Let us not seek to satisfy our thirst for freedom by drinking from the cup of bitterness and hatred. We must forever conduct our struggle on the high plane of dignity and discipline. We must not allow our creative protest to degenerate into physical violence.” Malcolm X, on the other hand, advocated the use of militant armed resistance as a response to discrimination. “I am for violence,” he said, “if nonviolence means we continue postponing a solution to the black man’s problem—just to avoid violence.” Their writings give readers insight into the various, and sometimes opposing, factions that made up the civil rights movement.

A Mosaic of American Voices

The last 30 years have seen an outpouring of talent from American writers of many different ethnic backgrounds, along with an increasingly widespread appreciation of diversity. Just a few decades ago, the literary scene was still dominated almost exclusively by men of European descent. Now, they have been joined by Native American writers such as N. Scott Momaday and Louise Erdrich, Asian-American writers such as Maxine Hong Kingston and Amy Tan, Hispanic writers such as Rudolfo Anaya and Sandra Cisneros, and African-American writers such as Alice Walker, Rita Dove, Toni Morrison, and Maya Angelou, to name just a few. Many of the most exciting contemporary writers are women; many, too, such as Bharati Mukherjee and Edwidge Danticat, were born outside the United States and bring a global perspective to American literature.

While earlier writers of color often focused on the experience of discrimination, writers today draw on different aspects of life in America, positive and negative, from family memories and relationships to contemporary politics. With such a broad array of published voices, no longer is any one author assumed to speak for all people of a given group. Instead, the most compelling work of today’s literary marketplace is both expressive of the individual and rooted in culture and place, while still managing to speak to universal human concerns. American literature has changed, again, and will continue to evolve as long as writers continue to write.

Modern American Art

The power shift from Europe to the United States in the years after World War II had a parallel in the world of art. For the first time, international attention focused not on Paris’s salon or London’s Royal Academy but on the studios and galleries of New York City.

Abstract Expressionism During the 1940s and 1950s, a group of artists including Mark Rothko and Jackson Pollock dominated the New York art scene. Their style was abstract, intensely emotional, and focused as much on the process of painting as on the work itself. Jackson Pollock, who was famous for laying a giant canvas on the floor and throwing paint on it, described his art as “energy and motion made visible.” Mark Rothko’s signature style—floating rectangles of color aligned vertically against a colored background—is illustrated beautifully in his work White Cloud Over Purple (1957), shown here.

Pop Art In the early 1960s, a very different kind of art burst into public view. Pop art used familiar images from consumer culture to ask the question What is art? From Andy Warhol, with his silkscreened movie stars and soup cans, to Roy Lichtenstein’s enormous blow-ups of comic strip panels, pop art celebrated modern methods of production while it subtly undermined the barrage of messages shaping Americans’ attitudes and everyday lives.
Connecting Literature, History, and Culture

Use this timeline and the questions on the next page to gain insight about how American developments during this period reflected those in the world as a whole.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>AMERICAN LITERARY MILESTONES</th>
<th>1940</th>
<th>1950</th>
<th>1960</th>
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<tr>
<th>HISTORICAL CONTEXT</th>
<th>1940</th>
<th>1950</th>
<th>1960</th>
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<tr>
<td>1941 Japanese bomb Pearl Harbor, bringing United States into World War II.</td>
<td>1954 In <em>Brown v. Board of Education</em>, the Supreme Court declares segregated schools unconstitutional.</td>
<td>1963 Martin Luther King gives “I Have a Dream” speech in Washington, D.C.; President John F. Kennedy is assassinated in Dallas.</td>
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<td>United States drops two atomic bombs on Japan, ending the war in the Pacific.</td>
<td>1959 Alaska and Hawaii join the Union as the 49th and 50th states.</td>
<td>1965 Malcolm X is assassinated.</td>
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<tr>
<th>WORLD CULTURE AND EVENTS</th>
<th>1940</th>
<th>1950</th>
<th>1960</th>
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**MAKING CONNECTIONS**

- What important roles have new technologies played in this era?
- What evidence do you see that “American” and “world” events have become harder to separate?
- Which political and cultural trends have influenced American literature?

### Timeline

**1970**
- **1970** Maya Angelou publishes autobiographical *I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings*.
- **1983** Sandra Cisneros publishes *The House on Mango Street*.

**2000**
- **2000** Lucille Clifton’s poetry collection, *Blessing the Boats*, wins National Book Award.
- **2007** Cormac McCarthy’s *The Road* wins Pulitzer Prize.

### Important Events

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Event</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1974</td>
<td>President Richard M. Nixon resigns to avoid impeachment over Watergate scandal.</td>
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<td>1977</td>
<td>First practical home computer, Apple II, hits market.</td>
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<td>1981</td>
<td>The space shuttle <em>Columbia</em> launches; Sandra Day O’Connor becomes the first woman to be appointed to the U.S. Supreme Court.</td>
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<td>1989</td>
<td>The oil tanker <em>Exxon Valdez</em> runs aground, creating a huge oil spill along Alaskan coast.</td>
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<td>1991</td>
<td>The Persian Gulf War begins; the United States leads allied coalition against Iraq.</td>
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<tr>
<td>1975</td>
<td>South Vietnam surrenders as North Vietnamese troops occupy Saigon.</td>
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<td>1979</td>
<td>Egypt’s Anwar Sadat and Israel’s Menachem Begin sign treaty ending war between Egypt and Israel.</td>
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<td>1989</td>
<td>The Berlin Wall comes down; student protesters in China are killed in Tiananmen Square.</td>
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<tr>
<td>1991</td>
<td>Soviet Union breaks up into 15 republics.</td>
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<tr>
<td>2001</td>
<td>Hijackers fly commercial planes into World Trade Center and Pentagon, killing thousands.</td>
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<tr>
<td>2005</td>
<td>Hurricane Katrina hits New Orleans and surrounding area, causing massive destruction.</td>
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<tr>
<td>2009</td>
<td>Barack Obama becomes first African American president in U.S. history.</td>
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**COMMON CORE**

RI 7 Integrate and evaluate multiple sources of information presented in different formats, as well as in words, to address a question or solve a problem.
A New American Dream?

As rapid changes in society have given rise to fresh concerns about education, social mobility, family and community, the environment, and the hectic pace of modern life, it may be time to redefine the American dream for a new generation.

CREATE What might be the American dream for students and young adults today? For new immigrants? Working-class people? Others? As a class, share your thoughts. Then break into groups of four and create posters or collages that depict different aspects of today’s American dream. Consult a book of quotations to find varying interpretations of the American dream. Be sure to cite the speaker of each quotation.
What the Future Holds

Technology has affected both the form and content of literary and nonfiction texts, offering new possibilities from hypertext to hand-held e-books to online publishing—though the predicted death of the printed book (and of narrative as we know it) has not come to pass. What do you think literature and nonfiction will be like in 20 years?

QUICKWRITE  Taking the role of a future critic, write a “book review” discussing one new form of literature or nonfiction. Include your opinions about the limitations and possibilities this form presents.

Living in the Global Village

America’s isolationism ended abruptly with the attack on Pearl Harbor in World War II. In the postwar years, international trade and travel greatly expanded. Today, huge improvements in communications and transportation have made globalism possible on many levels: political, economic, and cultural. Day by day, Americans are becoming more aware of their ties with the rest of the world.

DISCUSS  How does globalization affect your everyday life? Brainstorm ideas with a small group, then report back to the class. If you’re stuck, try thinking about what you wear, what you eat, and how you earn and spend money.