Directions:

1. Mark your confusion.

2. Show evidence of a close reading. Mark up the text with questions and/or comments.

3. Write a one-page reflection on your own sheet of paper.

**American Dream Deferred: We Now Embrace More Modest, Personal Goals**

**Source** Martha White, TIME December 1, 2011

As conceptual ideals go, the American Dream is pretty iconic. And for a long time, it was pretty easy to define: People worked to earn a college degree, get a good job, buy a house and have a spouse and kids. But then the Great Recession came along and upended everything. Now, our goals are more modest — like having a financial safety net — but are still out of reach for many Americans, especially those approaching retirement age. Nearly half — 44% — of Americans say they’re working harder than their parents did at their age. In MetLife’s fifth annual survey about the American Dream, more than 80% of respondents say attaining the American Dream is very or somewhat important, but the yardstick we’ve used to measure whether or not we’re living that dream has changed drastically. Some of the shift is generational: 41% of all respondents say the American Dream is about personal fulfillment. But within that total, there’s a big gap. While only a third of Boomers agree with that statement, more than half of Gen Y respondents do.

Our outlook about wealth and material possessions has changed, too. Roughly three-quarters of us say we have what we need, but last year, only 58% of respondents agreed with that assessment. Nearly two-thirds say it’s possible to achieve the American Dream without a college degree; 59% say it can be done without owning a home. An even larger percentage — 70% — say it’s within reach even if you’re not wealthy or don’t have kids, a stark contrast from traditional thinking, says Beth Hirshhorn, MetLife chief marketing officer.

“They’re shifting from the traditional definition of a nuclear family to broader relationships,” she says, while the drive for financial success has been replaced by a desire for financial security.

These more modest desires don’t mean that the American Dream is any more attainable, though. Three quarters of Baby Boomers say a financial safety net is crucial to achieving the American Dream, but nearly as many say they don’t have a safety net in place. While 57% say they’re living paycheck to paycheck, 28% say they still plan to rely on the government and their employers’ retirement plans and simply hope that’s enough to support them through their senior years. However, less than 20% of Gen Y respondents say the same thing.

 “This shift from institutions to individuals is actually putting the dream at risk,” says Hirshhorn. Younger Americans are more cynical, or perhaps more realistic. “Gen Ys and Xs never expected these programs to be around for them,” she says. “Trust in every institution out there has dramatically declined.”

The self-sufficiency Americans increasingly have to display when it comes to their financial and retirement security are likely to be behind the more personal incarnation of the American Dream, Hirshhorn says. Since they have to rely more on themselves, they tend to view their successes through the same lens. “Poeple are defining the Dream much more personally,” she says. “To that extent, a sense of personal fulfillment is what drives the Dream.”

**Reflection Ideas:**

**In studying American literature this year, you have learned a great deal about the concept of the American Dream.**

* **It began with the Puritans and their desire to build a “city on a hill”. Our country’s roots are founded in the doctrine of election.**
* **The Declaration of Independence defined the American Dream as the right to life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness.**
* **The Revolutionary War added the promise of land ownership to the mix.**
* **The Industrial Revolution created the possibility of wealth for everyone.**
* **Emerson and Thoreau championed individualism and self-reliance as central to achieving the American Dream.**
* **Westward expansion and the Gold Rush gave people hope for a new start in the West.**
* **Immigrants came to America in huge numbers in hopes of achieving this dream themselves.**
* **We are about to begin reading *The Great Gatsby*, a novel about the loss of the American Dream in the 1920s. Fitzgerald felt that we lost the youthful optimism Huck possessed.**

**With this in mind, how do you think the American Dream is doing today? This article claims that many Americans are creating new definitions of the dream for themselves. Do you agree? Does the “pursuit of happiness” have to be the same for everyone? As a country, can we hold on to this iconic dream and give it different meanings?**