

## Habits of Mind:

The social studies and English departments have outlined skills students should work on by the end of their junior year. American Studies, like any junior year social studies or English class, addresses these skills. What we've tried to do with the list below is distinguish what makes this class *different*. This course is an elective, so students should expect to have a different experience in taking American Studies.

We also want this list to be short and usable for teachers. Rather than composing a long and parsed "to do" list, the four broad habits of mind below are a quick guide for helping teachers in their unit planning. These four points capture what students do in American Studies, and because these four topics are not specific to a particular discipline, they naturally fit the course:

- **Synthesis:** each discipline accommodates the interests of the other discipline, and in doing so, creates ample opportunities for students to articulate connections between social studies and English, or even additional disciplines. The interplay across artifacts from each discipline is primarily what students do in this course. How that interplay shows up in student work can take a number of forms.
- **Asking questions:** questions help merge our disciplines and drive the course, and students composing questions is a key part of American studies. Many of the questions are intentionally broad, thereby allowing students to answer the question using a variety of literacy forms listed in the next point below. In some cases it's even appropriate for students to see a well-crafted question as an *end*, rather than as a means. In this sense, students can see that their exploration of United States' culture is sometimes best expressed by arriving at a question, rather than by starting with one.
- **A Broader Literacy:** in addition to the reading, writing, research, speaking and listening work a student would be expected to complete in a junior-year social studies or English class, American Studies students should also expect to read various forms of art work (e.g. photography, painting, sculpture, music, dance), other forms of primary source documents (e.g. maps, statistical studies, speeches, journals or diaries), new forms of media (e.g. Internet sites, advertising, film), in addition to reading artifacts dealing with modern-day issues (e.g. political cartoons, current newspaper articles and editorials).
- **Reading the current world:** the work in American Studies is applicable to what students observe in their everyday lives. Making parallels between artifacts studied in the course and modern-day events is a natural move. American Studies seeks to help students become active thinkers and critical consumers of their world.

We've included an example of how an American Studies unit can address each of these items:

## Unit: Exploring Cultures of Affluence and Poverty

### Driving Questions:

- What characterizes a life of affluence? A life of poverty?
- Are individuals primarily responsible for their financial standing or are factors outside of their control primarily responsible?
- How much responsibility should individuals have for addressing poverty? How much responsibility should the government shoulder?
- What are the tradeoffs of capitalism as an economic system?
- What are the tradeoffs of a consumer culture?

### Artifacts:

- *The Great Gatsby*, Fitzgerald
- "Bernice Bobs Her Hair," Fitzgerald
- Music of the Roaring 20's
- Renderings of flapper fashion in the 1920's
- Historical interpretation of the stock market crash of 1929
- Simulation of economic behavior that led to the stock market crash
- Photographs of the Dust Bowl era
- Photographs of life during the Great Depression
- Woody Guthrie songs
- Letters written by Americans to FDR pleading for help during the Great Depression
- Historical interpretation of The New Deal
- Speeches from Hoover and FDR on economic conditions in the United States
- "Breadline" video
- Excerpts from *The Grapes of Wrath*, Steinbeck
- Excerpts from *The Price of Privilege*, by Madeline Levine
- Political cartoon portraying the failures of the U.S. banking system in the early 1930's
- Modern-day examples of advertising
- Modern-day examples of economic problems in the United States (e.g. mortgage crisis in the U.S. in 2007-2008). *New York Times* articles and editorials on the issue and a simulation of a mortgage crisis for a contemporary American.
- NPR survey (2008) on perceptions of poverty in the United States
- "Unnatural Causes: is inequality making us sick?" – PBS documentary