Name: \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ Hour: \_\_\_\_\_ English 10 A

Reading Texts Closely and Critically

Online Blog: “Who Wants to Be a Millionaire: Changing Conceptions of the American Dream” by Matthew Warshauer

*Traditionally, Americans have sought to realise the American dream of success, fame and wealth through thrift and hard work. However, the industrialisation of the 19th and 20th centuries began to erode the dream, replacing it with a philosophy of "get rich quick". A variety of seductive but elusive strategies have evolved, and today the three leading ways to instant wealth are large-prize television game shows, big-jackpot state lotteries and compensation lawsuits. In this article, Matthew Warshauer, Professor of History at Central Connecticut State University, examines why so many Americans are persuaded to seek these easy ways to their dream. This excerpt is from the conclusion of his article.*

The "rags to riches" legend has and continues to be a cornerstone of the American Dream.  The traditional message taught that through hard work, frugality, and self-sacrifice one could achieve financial success and social mobility.  Ben Franklin counseled industry, Abraham Lincoln sang the praises of the northern labor system, and Horatio Alger instilled hope in generations of Americans.  All three helped to establish basic guidelines for success in a land of infinite possibility.

There are unquestionably many Americans who continue to abide by such tenets and in doing so are rewarded for their efforts.  Yet there are also those who have come to believe that the American Dream's promise of riches is just that, a promise, and as such they feel entitled to instant financial success.  Nor has the socio-corporate climate in America disappointed such a belief.  Savvy television producers and marketing executives have latched on to the core of the American Dream.  They understand that Americans are enthralled with striking it rich.  Thus millionaire game shows are designed to make winning seem easy.  Lotteries are marketed in such a way that one thinks they have a real shot at cashing in.  The reality in both instances is that achieving the American Dream through such means is a long shot at best.  Too much chance exists.  Too much luck is necessary.

What is the end effect on society?  Do millionaire game shows and promises of lottery millions help to further erode the ethic of work and self-reliance that once embodied the American Dream, replacing it with an ethic of luck?  Or are these sources of instant gratification merely products of an ethic already lost to some Americans?  Perhaps the truth lies somewhere in the middle.

The even darker side to this cultural phenomenon is how the sense of entitlement has spilled over into a lack of responsibility.  The fact that so many Americans are willing to utilize litigation to cash in on the American Dream is disheartening.  Failing to take responsibility for their own mistakes, plaintiffs look to the legal system to make misfortune into fortune.  Again, marketing and an avalanche of advertising by personal injury lawyers helps encourage would-be injury victims.  Still, the readiness of people to sue is a key social factor.

Ultimately, most Americans would like to achieve the American Dream of financial independence.  Yet it is the means to achieving it that are essential to the nation's ethical foundations.  It seems that many Americans covet the easy road to the Dream and in the process undercut the core values that established the Dream in the first place.  Equally culpable are the big businesses that capitalize on the quest for the Dream.  In an ironic sense, such businesses are fulfilling the Dream for themselves while dangling the possibility of the Dream over the heads of the public.  There can be little doubt that the producers of the millionaire games shows, the state lotteries, and lawyers are getting rich on other people's yearning for the American Dream.

**Close and Critical Reading Questions**

Use your reading of the selection to answer the four levels of close and critical reading questions about the article.

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| **Questions** | **“Who Want to Be a Millionaire?”** |
| What does the text say? (Briefly summarize the selection at a literal level.) |  |
| How does the text say it? In other words, how does the author develop the text to convey his/her purpose? (What is the genre format, organization, features, etc.) |  |
| What does the text mean? (What theme/concept is the author trying to get across?) |  |
| So what? (What does the message/theme/ concept mean in your life and or the lives of others? Why is it worth sharing/telling? What significance does it have to your life and/or the lives of others?) |  |