

American Beauty

Author/ Director	Allan Ball/ Sam Mendes
Released in	1999
Price	6 €
Language	(American) English
Length	121 minutes
Summary	The film American Beauty by Sam Mendes is about a middle-aged man called Lester. He lives in a typical american suburb with his family. His wife, Carolyn, is estate agent and he has a minor daughter called Jane. Lester starts questioning his. He starts doing drugs and falls in love with his daughter's best friend Angela. Meanwhile his daughter falls in love with the son of their new neighbors - Ricky. Ricky is the son of a former soldier who later turns out to be homosexual. Lester's wife Carolyn starts an affair with Buddy Kane- the real estate monarch. The film than tells the story how these characters try to redefine their life and go on a search for real beauty.
Structure	Four parts, structured by the seasons: autumn, winter, spring and summer, i.e. from the point of time when Juno discovers she is pregnant until she gives birth to the baby.
Characters	<div style="text-align: center;"> <p>Lester</p> <pre> graph TD Lester[Lester] --- Angela[Angela] Lester --- Carolyn[Carolyn] Carolyn --- Jane[Jane] Carolyn --- Buddy[Buddy] Jane --- Ricky[Ricky] Ricky --- Frank[Frank] Buddy --- Frank </pre> </div>
Topics	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The American Dream • Happiness • Identity within Society • American Society
Helpful Secondary Literature	<p>Sunstein, Cass. <i>The Declaration of Independence and the Constitution of the United States of America: Including Thomas Jefferson's Virginia Statute on Religious Freedom</i>. Georgetown: Georgetown University Press, 2003.</p> <p>Hentzi, Gary. „American Beauty“. Film Quaterly 2001. Vol. 54, No 2 (Winter,</p>

	<p>2000-2001): 46-50.</p> <p>Schudson, Michael. „American Dreams“. American Literary History 2004. Vol.16, no3 (Autumn, 2004): 566-573.</p> <p>Smith, David L. „Beautiful Necessities: American Beauty and the Idea of Freedom“. Journal of Religion and Film 2002. Vol. 6 No. 2 (October, 2002).</p> <p>Starks, Brian. „The New Economy and the American Dream: Examing the Effect of Work Conditions on Beliefs about Economic Opportunity“. The Sociological Quaterly 2003. Vol. 44 No. 2 (Spring, 2003): 205-225.</p> <p>Cohen-Marks, Mara and Stout, Christopher. „Can the American Dream Survive the New Multiethnic America? Evidence from Los Angeles“. Sociological Forum 2011. Vol. 26 No. 4 (December, 2011): 824-845.</p> <p>Karlyn, Kathleen Rowe. „Too Close for Comfort: American Beauty and the Incest Motif. Cinema Journal 2004. Vol. 44 No. 1 (Autumn, 2004): 69-93.</p>
Language	The language is very easy to understand. There are no strong dialects and the language is also suitable for minors. (No harsh swearing)
Suitable Age	Grades 9-12
Activities	<p>Literary aspects of the film</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Plot, Characters, Motifs • Dramatic structure of the film <p>Film analysis</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Introduction of technical terms (camera adjustments, editing, stylistic devices [metaphors, motifs, costumes, etc.] • Analysis of key scenes: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ How is American society depicted? ➤ What is Lester searching for? ➤ How do the different characters develop? ➤ Which symbols can you find in the film?
Teachability Pros	<p>+ Good opportunity to talk about society</p> <p>+ Easy understandable language</p> <p>+ Beautifully added symbols</p> <p>+ Good to analyze single scenes</p> <p>+ Good for while watching activities</p> <p>+ The film is cheap and available</p>
Teachability Cons	- with 121 minutes the film is too long to show at school
Overall Evaluation	I think this film is highly suitable for the classroom. It gives so many opportunities to talk about American society, the American Dream, what is importance in life, American freedom, happiness ... It is also is suitable for group work and the analysis of single scenes what makes it perfect for 45 minutes sessions.