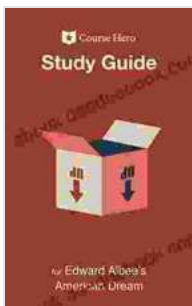


# Study Guide for Edward Albee's American Dream: A Deep Dive into the Play's Themes, Characters, and Symbolism

Edward Albee's "American Dream" is a thought-provoking and challenging play that delves into the darker aspects of the American dream. Written in 1961, the play premiered during a time of significant social and political upheaval in the United States. Albee's work incisively critiques the materialism, conformity, and emptiness that he saw as pervasive in American society.

This study guide will provide a comprehensive analysis of "American Dream," exploring its themes, characters, symbolism, and its ongoing relevance in contemporary society. By engaging with the play's complex ideas and controversial perspectives, readers can gain a deeper understanding of Albee's critique of the American dream and its implications for the present day.



## Study Guide for Edward Albee's American Dream (Course Hero Study Guides) by Dori Pulitano

★★★★☆ 4.6 out of 5

Language : English

File size : 593 KB

Screen Reader : Supported

Print length : 362 pages

Lending : Enabled

Paperback : 234 pages

Item Weight : 12.3 ounces

Dimensions : 6 x 0.59 x 9 inches



## Themes

"American Dream" explores a range of profound themes that challenge conventional notions of success and happiness.

### **Materialism and the Pursuit of the American Dream**

The play's central theme is the corrosive effect of materialism on the American psyche. The characters are consumed by their relentless pursuit of material possessions and status, believing that these will bring them fulfillment and happiness. However, Albee reveals that this pursuit is ultimately empty and destructive, leaving the characters unfulfilled and isolated.

### **Conformity and the Stifling of Individuality**

Another major theme is the stifling nature of conformity in American society. The characters are desperate to fit in and meet societal expectations, even if it means suppressing their true selves. This suppression of individuality leads to alienation, loneliness, and a loss of meaning.

### **The Illusion of Happiness**

Albee also explores the illusion of happiness. The characters in "American Dream" desperately crave happiness, but they fail to recognize that true happiness cannot be found in material possessions or external validation. Instead, they remain trapped in a cycle of emptiness and despair.

## Characters

The characters in "American Dream" are complex and flawed individuals who embody the play's themes.

## **Mommy**

Mommy is the matriarch of the family and the embodiment of the materialism and conformity that Albee critiques. She is obsessed with appearances and status, constantly striving to maintain a façade of perfection. Behind this facade, however, she is a deeply unhappy and unfulfilled woman.

## **Daddy**

Daddy is Mommy's husband and a successful businessman. He is equally materialistic and ambitious, but he is also more self-aware than his wife. He recognizes the emptiness of their lives, but he is unable to escape the cycle of materialism and conformity.

## **Grandma**

Grandma is Mommy's mother and a bitter and cynical woman. She has witnessed firsthand the destructive effects of materialism and conformity on her family, and she offers a harsh critique of the American dream.

## **The Young Man**

The Young Man is a mysterious and enigmatic figure who represents both the promise and the pitfalls of the American dream. He is charismatic and charming, but he is also ruthless and manipulative. He embodies the allure of success and the dangers of unbridled ambition.

## **Symbolism**

Albee employs a range of symbols throughout the play to enhance its themes and characters.

### **The House**

The house is a central symbol of the American dream. It represents the ideal of success and domestic bliss that the characters strive for. However, the house is also a prison, trapping the characters in a cycle of materialism and conformity.

### **The Garden**

The garden is a symbol of hope and possibility. It is a place where the characters can escape the confines of the house and explore their true selves. However, the garden is also threatened by the encroaching materialism and conformity, symbolizing the fragility of the American dream.

### **The Baby**

The baby is a symbol of the future. It represents the potential for change and renewal, but it is also a reminder of the responsibilities and sacrifices that come with the American dream.

### **Relevance to Contemporary Society**

"American Dream" remains a relevant and provocative play in contemporary society. Despite being written over 60 years ago, its themes continue to resonate with audiences today.

### **The Persistence of Materialism**

Materialism continues to be a driving force in American society. The pursuit of wealth, status, and possessions remains a primary goal for many people,

often at the expense of their relationships, well-being, and the environment.

### **The Stifling of Individuality**

Conformity pressures are still prevalent in contemporary society. Social media, consumer culture, and the fear of missing out can contribute to a sense of pressure to conform to societal norms, suppressing individuality and authentic self-expression.

### **The Illusion of Happiness**

The search for external validation and instant gratification often leads to feelings of emptiness and despair. True happiness, as Albee suggests in the play, must come from within and be rooted in meaningful relationships, purpose, and self-acceptance.

"American Dream" is a powerful and insightful play that offers a scathing critique of the American dream. Through its complex characters, provocative themes, and evocative symbolism, Albee challenges audiences to question their own values and aspirations. By engaging with the play's ideas, readers can gain a deeper understanding of the complexities of the American dream and its implications for personal fulfillment and social well-being.

### **Additional Resources**

\* [Edward Albee's American Dream: An Overview]

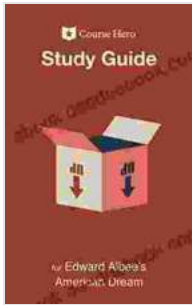
(<https://www.litcharts.com/lit/american-dream/summary>) \* [Edward Albee's American Dream: Themes and Analysis]

(<https://www.coursehero.com/lit/American-Dream/theme-summary/>) \*

[Symbolism in Edward Albee's American Dream]

(<https://www.enotes.com/homework-help/discuss-ways-which-albee-uses->

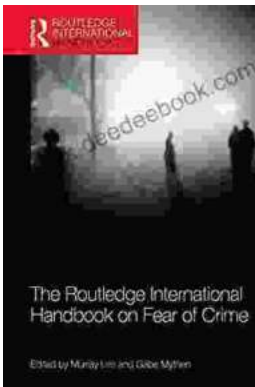
symbols-american-dream-695900) \* [The American Dream in Edward Albee's American Dream](https://www.jstor.org/stable/41650530) \* [American Dream: The Play's Enduring Relevance] (https://www.theatlantic.com/culture/archive/2016/11/american-dream-edward-albee-donald-trump/507428/)



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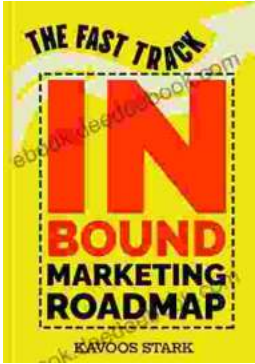
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