

Essay Prompt
Mr. Pogreba
Honors English III

What is an American? Essay Prompt

One of the issues that American writers have struggled with from the beginning is what it means to be an American, whether that means demographics, values, experiences, or geography. Consider the works of others we have studied, ideas you have read in the media and fiction, and provide your own definition of what it means to be an American.

You could write about a number of ideas, from the idea that an American is someone with new ideas, someone controlled by prejudice, someone uncertain about her future. Your definition could contain multiple elements, but try to make a developed claim about one or more elements.

One of the first of these essays was written by Hector St. James de Crevecoeur, an immigrant who defined Americans as people who, despite their disparate backgrounds, have new values and new beliefs, for instance seeing past differences of wealth and background. One of his most famous quotes from his piece offers this explanation:

What then is the American, this new man?...He is an American, who, leaving behind him all his ancient prejudices and manners, receives new ones from the new mode of life he has embraced, the new government he obeys, and the new rank he holds. He has become an American by being received in the broad lap of our great Alma Mater. Here individuals of all races are melted into a new race of man, whose labors and posterity will one day cause great changes in the world. Americans are the western pilgrims.



This piece offers the chance and challenge of breaking away from the standard five paragraph essay. This is a challenging piece—spend some time with it. Break away from the traditional essay model if necessary.

Be creative. Use a structure that might lead to the definition at the end rather than in the intro, for example.