

Jillian Walker
Literary Analysis Honors Project

Dreamers, Identity, and Literature: Questioning the American Dream Narrative via Two Novels

Project Description:

In this project, I will be reading and analyzing *The Brief Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao* by Junot Diaz, and comparing the different narratives of the American Dream told in this story vs. *The Great Gatsby*. I will use my knowledge of these two books, and work to understand different perspectives of what The American Dream looks like. When we read *The Great Gatsby* last trimester, I became obsessed with the idea of the “American Dream” and the Great American novel, so I was wondering if there was a project where I could compare different versions of the same story, and understand different stories based around the same lie. By comparing these two novels, I can question if there is an American Dream at all, using my final thesis from *The Great Gatsby*. I hope to strengthen my critical thinking skills, and give myself an introduction into the field of comparative literature. I also hope to gain an understanding of what America and “The American Dream” is like for rich white men (such as in *Gatsby*), versus in an immigrant family).

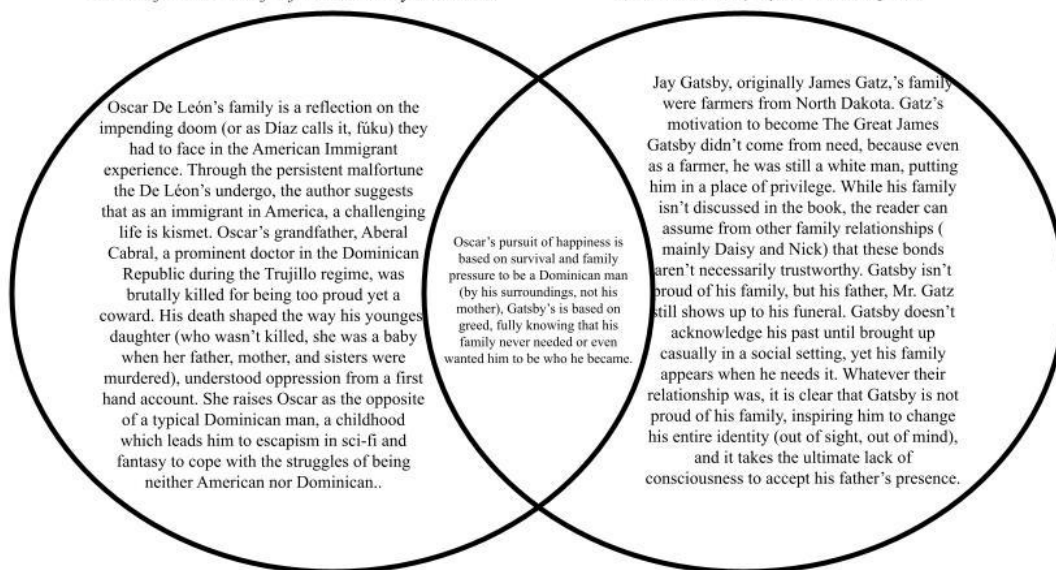
Final Product:

Instead of a traditional analytical essay, my final product is a series of Venn Diagrams, each reflecting on a branch of the American Dream and American society as a whole.

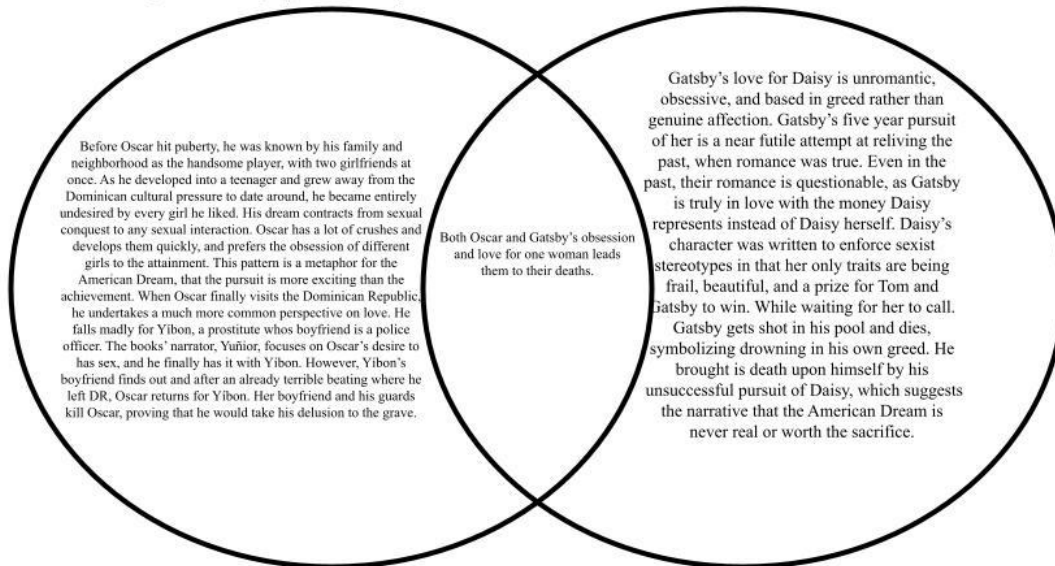
Venn Diagram #1 - Family Dynamic and Pressure

The Brief Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao by Junot Diaz

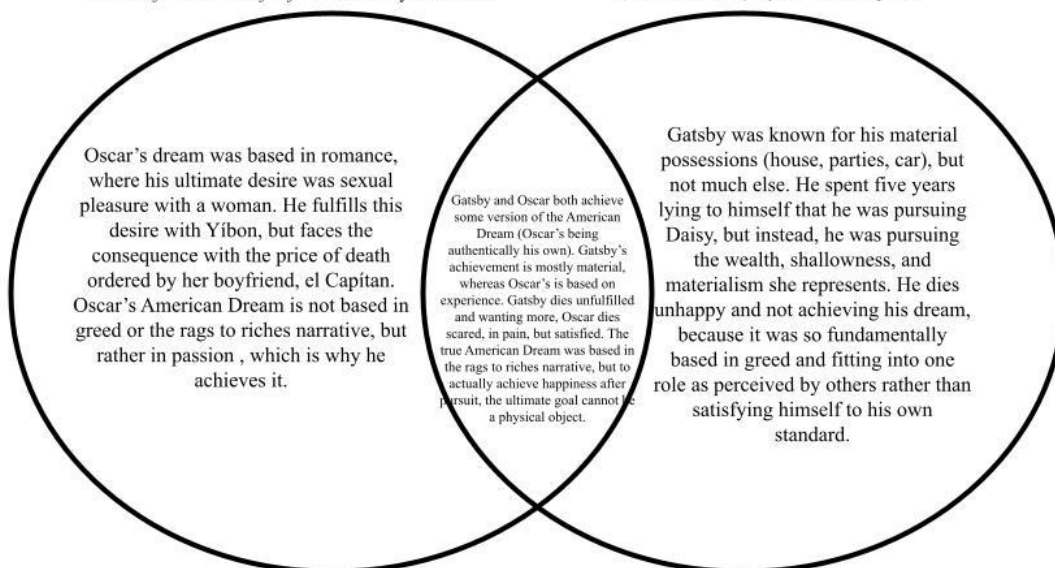
The Great Gatsby by F. Scott Fitzgerald



Venn Diagram #2 - Love

The Brief Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao by Junot Diaz*The Great Gatsby* by F. Scott Fitzgerald

Venn Diagram #3 - Success

The Brief Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao by Junot Diaz*The Great Gatsby* by F. Scott Fitzgerald

Final Reflection:

My big question was: Will Oscar achieve the American Dream? The answer is yes. However, in doing this project, I realized Oscar's experience in the pursuit of the American Dream is authentically his own. What this made me see is that the American Dream may not be as much a checklist of things to achieve or a standard to meet, as a style and an ethos underlying one's beliefs and expectations. In this sense, Oscar De León's pursuit and achievement of the American Dream is a greater reflection on the immigrant experience. Oscar's interests, desires and wants are very idiosyncratic and "geeky." He is described as a nerd. But he is also individualistic and has a very specific expectation of the American Dream that is unique to him. Seeing this made me realize that from an immigrant perspective, the American Dream can only be described "to each his (or her) own." In contrast to this immigrant perspective, *The Great Gatsby* tells us that the American Dream is entirely unattainable. That being said, this was a book written by a white man in a place of privilege one hundred years ago and excluded everybody who didn't live in the East or West Egg. This perspective is outdated and non inclusive of so many groups of people. What this tells us is that the rags to riches narrative, that if you work hard enough, anything is possible is truly unattainable. But, when that narrative is amended to fit one's own story, that version of the American Dream is the one that will be pursued, achieved, and remembered.