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Title: The American Dream and *Out of This Furnace*

Subject: English/Social Studies (9-12)

State: Pennsylvania

## **Abstract**

*Out of This Furnace* is a realistic history of an important part of the United States labor moment and ethnic histories. After reading the novel or excerpts, students will compose their own writings in response to an evaluation of a chosen character's interpretation of the American Dream.

## **Introduction, Overview, and Unit Rationale**

*Out of This Furnace* by Braddock, Pennsylvania, native Thomas Bell (1903-1961) is a multi-generational story about immigrant steel workers, their families, and a fight within the mill for unionization. It is an autobiographical novel, a kind of written documentary, that highlights industrialization, the immigrant experience across generations - especially the fractious relations between immigrant groups and "Americans," and the Americanization of residents in industrial cities.

The immigrant story is one that touches all of us. Industrial workers built our nation, won our wars, and strengthened the fabric of America. *Out of This Furnace* humanizes this story and Bell used his gifts as a writer to draw attention to an entire people and the history of the steel industry. Fiction has the power to convey another time and place and that is exactly what Bell's work accomplishes for those studying the labor and ethnic history of the United States.

Students will read *Out of This Furnace* and select a character of their choice. The students will then write a diary entry as that character with the focus in that entry being their character's perspective on the American Dream while including evidence from the text to support this interpretation.

## **Unit Goals**

- Describe and analyze the American Dream.
- Interpret the use of characterization in historical fiction.
- Compose a creative writing piece supported by textual evidence.

## **State Standards**

- CC.1.4: Draw evidence from literary or informational texts to support analysis, reflection, and research, applying grade-level reading standards for literature and literary nonfiction.
- 8.2.9: Contrast the role groups and individuals from Pennsylvania played in the social, political, cultural, and economic development of the U.S.

## **Description of Plan Implementation**

Day 1: After reading *Out of This Furnace* (or chosen excerpts), discuss the idea of the American Dream. Ask students to define this term and brainstorm ideas of how they may see it in our society. Students will then journal about what the American Dream looks like in their own lives.

Day 2: Discuss the American Dream in the context of *Out of This Furnace*. View film of *Out of This Furnace: A Walking Tour of Thomas Bell's Novel* [available on YouTube](#). Evaluate the characters of the novel in the context of the American Dream.

Day 3: Students select a character from the novel and then write a diary entry as that character containing textual evidence in reference to the chosen character's interpretation of the American Dream.

### **Assessment**

There will be an evaluative rubric for this writing piece to ensure it incorporates evidence from the text of *Out of This Furnace* and appropriate historical perspective.

### **Materials**

Students will need either the entire novel or excerpts selected by the teacher.

### **Sources**

Bell, Thomas. *Out of This Furnace*. University of Pittsburgh Press, 1941.