

"An American Story" Study Guide

Teacher Note: Use the following index code to select questions for discussion:

I - Interpretive; D – Discussion; T – Tracking; P – Philanthropic

1.	(I)	The movie opens with a group of soldiers crossing a live battlefield in the blue night while a voice narrates what each soldier sees in his dream. Explain how this scene represents a foreshadowing of events.
2.	(I)	Background music playing "Till the End of Time" introduces a welcoming parade marching triumphantly down main street in slow motion past a theater marquee announcing <i>It's a Wonderful Life</i> . What symbolism if any can be found in this scene?
3.	(I, P)	George Meade states, "For some of us all things but for the war have become a dim memory. Home was some distant star, no closer than the moon." He tells us, "Each man dreamed of that distant star, of all things familiar and good, fighting no more battles. But for some of us, maybe all of us, going home would mean the end of one war and the beginning of another. We fought together, but we'd go home alone, home to fight another war." What does his dream and going home alone to fight another war say about the way we live and carry out our life as a responsible citizen?
4.	(I)	Why was George's wife "...so proud of [him] when he stepped off the train?"
5.	(I)	Why is George upset when he notices a framed photo of himself and tells his wife, Barbara, that she shouldn't have done that?
6.	(I, P)	Why did Juan say the war brought everyone together as a family?
7.	(T)	Why was Jesse confined to a wheel chair?
8.	(T)	What did the doctor tell Jesse about his injury?
9.	(T)	Why did George visit Hope Tyler?



10.	(I)	Why did Hope say, "It's understandable to watch a parade and that people don't really want to watch wives and children that don't feel like celebrating?"
11.	(T)	What message did Tim have for his sister?
12.	(T)	Why was Hope surprised by the friendship of Tim and George?
13.	(T)	What message did Tim have for George and what did he mean by that message?
14.	(I, P)	Why does Jesse say that he doesn't know why he expected things to be the same when he returned home?
15.	(T)	Who tells Jesse that the mayor is skimming off the war contracts?
16.	(I, P)	Why is Jesse upset that the mayor skims off a war contract?
17.	(I)	What does the mayor mean when he says, "As long as people want things, they can expect there will be war?"
18.	(I)	Why does the mayor, Tom Cantrell, want George to run on his ticket?
19.	(I)	What is ironic about the mayor's advice when he tells George "Your time has come?"
20.	(T)	Who collects the money for the mayor?
21.	(T)	How does George excuse the mayor's corrupt behavior when he learns what is happening in the town?
22.	(I, D)	Why won't George head up the Veterans' Party ticket and run for mayor as Jesse would like?



23.	(I, P)	Why does George tell Jesse that Jesse is lucky to know what he wants?
24.	(I)	Why does Jesse want his wife to quit work?
25.	(T)	What kind of job offer does Juan Medina receive when he applies for work in Henry Meade's insurance business?
26.	(I)	Why can't Juan get a job in the insurance business?
27.	(I)	What is meant when George's father tells his son that Juan doesn't have the right qualifications?
28.	(I, D, P)	Explain why George lies to his friend, Juan, when he tells him that there are no job openings?
29.	(I)	Why does Juan say, "Do you ever miss the war, George?"
30.	(I, D, P)	What does Barbara Meade mean when she tells her husband, George, that he is going to run because it's the right thing to do?
31.	(T)	What job does Juan finally get?
32.	(T)	Who visits the gas station but won't pay the bill?
33.	(T)	Why does the visitor at the gas station assault Juan?
34.	(I)	Why do the Veterans say that George is sticking with his own kind?
35.	(I, P)	What does Tom mean when he says that Jesse "has the courage of his convictions?"



36.	(I, P)	Why does George still go along with the mayor's campaign, even after he hears his father, Henry, say, "Everybody is a little tainted one way or another"?
37.	(I)	Why does Tom Cantrell want the people to see his opponent debate in public?
38.	(I)	Why does the sheriff ask Juan if Andy left him in charge?
39.	(T)	What happens to Juan at the gas station?
40.	(I, D, P)	Why does the mayor say, "You got to give that poor fellow (Jesse) credit. He has got the courage of his convictions"?
41.	(I, D, P)	Why does the mayor laugh when George tells him that Jesse is "doing the right thing" running for office?
42.	(I)	What does the mayor mean when he tells his advisors, "We're all in this together because we're all tainted one way or another"?
43.	(I)	Why does Jesse feel that he doesn't fit in society since he has come back?
44.	(I, D)	Why doesn't Becky want to stop working?
45.	(I, P)	Why won't Juan move to California even though this is what his wife would like?
46.	(I, P)	Why doesn't Jesse have any firm plans to run the city when the mayor asks how to solve various problems?
47.	(I)	How does Tom Cantrell take advantage of his opponent when he says that being the mayor is more than pointing the finger and making accusations?
48.	(I)	Why does Jesse want to kill himself?



49.	(I)	Why did George turn his back on the Veterans' Party?
50.	(I, D, P)	When Hope Tyler talks to George about his lack of leadership and failure to take a stand, George responds by telling Hope, "I have never asked anybody to look up to me." Explain why this isn't a fair excuse to justify a lack of action on the part of George.
51.	(I)	Why does Hope tell George that he is dead?
52.	(I, P)	Why does George decide to run for major?
53.	(I)	Why does Henry Meade advise his son not to run against Tom Cantrell?
54.	(T)	Why does Barbara Meade tell her husband that he owes her?
55.	(I, P)	How does George respond to Barbara's demands?
56.	(I)	What is ironic about Barbara's warning to her husband that if he continues his course, she won't stay married to a loser?
57.	(I)	Barbara tells her husband that "there is a price for everything." What price does Barbara pay for her behavior in the movie?
58.	(I, D, P)	What does George mean when he says, "We must have the courage to believe in ourselves, that we can make a difference?"
59.	(T)	Why does the mayor think that the Veterans' Party will lose the election?
60.	(T)	What deal does George's father offer George if he were to not run against the mayor?
61.	(I)	Why does Henry ask George if he is willing to be ruthless to win?



62.	(I, D, P)	Why does Hope say, "You have to take a chance if you want to change people's attitudes?"
63.	(D)	Is it better to lose on principal or the chance to make a change? Explain.
64.	(I)	Why does Juan come to George to tell him that he is going to drop out of the race?
65.	(T)	What advice does Juan's father give his son when Juan says, "How can you live in a place where you can't get ahead?"
66.	(T)	Why does the Veterans' Party gain in the polls?
67.	(I, D, P)	Why does Jesse's wife call her husband a hero?
68.	(D)	What is a hero?
69.	(T)	Why does the mayor close the polls?
70.	(I)	Why does Sheriff McMillan tell George, "It's all your fault we are leaving with the ballot boxes"?
71.	(T)	What does George do after the ballot boxes are taken?
72.	(T)	What does the mayor do to get help?
73.	(T)	How long does George give the mayor to bring out the ballot boxes?
74.	(T)	How does George get the ballot boxes back?



75.	(T)	What happened to the mayor?
76.	(D)	Why is it necessary to act responsibly to take a risk or a chance to change something?
77.	(D)	The conclusion of the film brings more questions about behavior than answers. Why, at the end of the movie, doesn't everyone feel that they have won? Is it because "We are all tainted," according to George? Explain.
78.	(D)	Why was it necessary for the citizens to take such extreme action?
79.	(D)	Was the action of the townspeople justified?
80.	(D)	Should the people in the community have used other channels?

