

P.15

Literature – Novel

## Imbolo Mbue: „Behold the Dreamers“ – Ideology and reality of the American Dream

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Der Roman „Behold the Dreamers“ (2016) der kamerunischen Schriftstellerin Imbolo Mbue gibt einen tiefen Einblick in die Hoffnungen und Nöte einer Familie aus Kamerun, die in den USA Asyl sucht. Die Autorin wuchs in extremer Armut in Limbe, Kamerun, auf und wanderte 1998 nach New York City aus, wo sie seither lebt. Der Roman schildert, mit welchen Problemen und Widerständen die Protagonisten Jende und Neni bei dem Versuch konfrontiert werden, ihren *American Dream* zu verwirklichen. Die Lernenden erschließen den Roman und untersuchen, ob und wie die Erwartungen von Jende und Neni erfüllbar sind.

## Auf einen Blick

### 1. Stunde

**Thema:** Imbolo Mbue: „Behold the Dreamers“ – Introduction

**M 1** **The job interview – Excerpts from “Behold the Dreamers”** / Ein Video anschauen und kommentieren (UG); zwei Romanauzüge untersuchen (PA); den Titel des Romans diskutieren (UG)

**Benötigt:**

- digitale Endgeräte und Internetzugang zum Ansehen des Videos

### 2.–6. Stunde

**Thema:** Plot, characters and themes

**M 2** **The plot of the novel and a writer’s career** / Ein Video anschauen und auswerten (EA/GA); *summaries* zu einzelnen Episoden verfassen (PA); ein *story board* erstellen (GA)

**M 3** **Who are the main characters – A group puzzle** / Die Romanfiguren untersuchen (GA)

**M 4** **Narrative devices and turns in the novel** / Den Begriff „*intertextuality*“ erarbeiten (EA); ein Video anschauen und verstehen (EA); einzelne Episoden des Romans anhand des COPE-Modells untersuchen (GA)

**M 5** **Themes and symbolism in “Behold the Dreamers”** / Das Thema „*American dream*“ im Roman erarbeiten (PA); Symbole und weitere Themen des Romans erarbeiten (GA)

**Benötigt:**

- digitale Endgeräte und Internetzugang zum Ansehen der Videos
- die Lektürentexte in ZM 1



## 7.–11. Stunde

**Thema:** Different topics around the novel

**M 6** **Native country, ethnicities and current developments** / Bezüge zu Kamerun erarbeiten (EA, UG)

**M 7** **Colonialism and its aftermath in Cameroon** / Neni und Jende Erfahrung vor ihrem kulturellen Hintergrund diskutieren (UG); die Kolonialgeschichte Kameruns darstellen (GA); die Folgen des Kolonialismus in Kamerun analysieren (GA)

**M 8** **The Dreamers and immigration issues** / Fragen zu zwei Videos beantworten (EA); Nenis Hoffnungen und Träume herausarbeiten (EA); den *DREAM Act* erarbeiten (PA); einen Rap-Song analysieren (UG); sich mit dem Thema „migration“ auseinandersetzen (PA); eine Fishbowl-Diskussion durchführen (UG)



**Benötigt:**

- digitale Endgeräte und Internetzugang zum Ansehen der Videos
- die Anleitung für die *fishbowl discussion* (M 2)

## LEK

**Thema:** **The Declaration of Independence and a book review** / Die Erfahrungen von Jende und Neni in Bezug auf die *Declaration of Independence* diskutieren; eine Rezension zum Roman „Behold the Dreamers“ verfassen



**Zusätzlich im Online-Archiv bzw. in der ZIP-Datei**

- ZM1\_M2\_Gap-facts
- ZM2\_M8\_Fishbowl-method

### M 3 Who are the main characters? – A group puzzle



#### Tasks

1. Characterise the four protagonists according to the reference pages (and/or your own findings). Work in groups, following the rules of a group puzzle. Cover these aspects for each character as far as possible:
  - physical appearance
  - character traits
  - personal history/background
  - relationships with other characters
2. After having shared your findings about the protagonists, work on two of the minor characters each and collect your respective findings in class.



#### Group puzzle

1. Form groups of four students. This is your **home group**. Agree on who will work on which main character (Jende, Neni, Clark or Cindy).
2. In the next step, you will work on your respective character. You will do so in new groups. These are called **expert groups**.
3. Each expert group consists of one person from each home group. Each expert group takes care of one character.
4. Now each expert goes back to their home group. Each expert reports to the other group members what he/she found out in his/her expert group.
5. Write down your findings.

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## Themes and symbolism in “Behold the Dreamers”

M 5

### Tasks

- Material 1:** Using the video, the excerpt as well as other text passages in the novel, outline the associations connected with the American Dream versus “the dream of becoming Americans” (p. 226). If necessary, do some further Internet research on the American Dream.
- Material 2:** In groups of four, find overlaps between themes and symbols and discuss their meaning. Focus on the excerpts given. Present your findings in a gallery wall.



### Material 1: The American Dream (and nightmare)

**American Dream:** The belief that anyone, regardless of where they were born or what class they were born into, can attain their own version of success in a society in which upward mobility is possible for everyone.

From: <https://www.investopedia.com/terms/a/american-dream.asp> [last access: 02/05/2025]



**Video:** Interview with Imbolo Mbue on PBS – The American Dream  
<https://raabe.click/Mbue-American-Dream>



### Excerpt from the novel:

Jende agreed. Their fate was in the hands of others – what use would it be to get another opinion and find themselves weighing bleak option against bleak option? They would stay with Bubakar; it was all going to work out. They encouraged each other to be hopeful, to believe that they would one day realize the dream of becoming Americans. But that night they each had nightmares that what they told the other nothing of the next morning. Jende awakened of knocks on the doors and strange men in uniform taking him away from his fainting wife and crying children.

From: Imbolo Mbue: *Behold the Dreamers*. Random House. New York 2017. Pp. 226/227.

**Further text passages:** p. 14 / p. 19 / p. 61 / p. 82 / p. 96 / p. 185 / p. 230 / p. 312 / p. 316 / p. 326 / pp. 357/358 / pp. 360/361 / p. 365 / p. 377

## M 8 The Dreamers and immigration issues



### Tasks

- Material 1:** Work with the excerpts from Jende's and Winston's conversation.
  - Summarise the issues connected with seeking asylum in the USA.
  - Summarise the way developments along the Mexican border might alter the direction of migration.
  - Explain how Jende's decision to be "respectable" makes him change his mind.
- Watch the video and answer the questions:  
<https://raabe.click/Mbue-immigrant-experience>
  - Why did Imbolo Mbue think the person she visited in America was so peculiar?
  - How does she compare Cameroon to America?
  - How does she describe compatriots coming back from America?
  - Why would people feel ashamed after having lived in America for some time?
  - Does the American Dream work for everybody?
- Watch the video and answer the questions:  
<https://raabe.click/Mbue-Washington-Post>
  - What is Imbolo Mbue's life story?
  - Why was her childhood very humble?
  - What is shown by Jende's experiences?
  - What is her message about people being illegal in America?
  - What has changed after 9/11?
  - Is she the embodiment of the American Dream?
  - She compares a very poor with a very rich family – what do they have in common?
  - Who is the real villain in the novel?
  - How does she present Candy?
  - How did she get information about very wealthy people, living on the high level of the Edwards'?
  - What can be learned from Cameroonian people – how to live a better life?
  - What can be the contribution of immigrants?
- Material 2:** Work with the excerpt. Delineate Neni's dreams and her hopes for her children Timba and Nemi. What makes her pessimistic about her own return?
- Material 3:** With a partner read the text about the Dreamers and do further research. Define the meaning of this legislation as opposed to the DACA programme.
- Watch the video: <https://raabe.click/Suli-Breaks>. Analyse Suli's rap about the American Dream. Also discuss why he called his rap "American Dream".
- Material 4:** Evaluate the texts about the Cameroon brain drain.

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