

HANDOUT A

BEING AN AMERICAN

Directions: Read the selections below and think about how they reflect what it means to be an American. Then answer the questions below.

❖ What We Say ❖

The steady character of our countrymen is a rock to which we may safely moor...
Unequivocal [clear] in principle, reasonable in manner, we shall be able I hope to do a great deal of good to the cause of freedom & harmony.
-Thomas Jefferson (1743-1826), third President of the United States

In the long run, we shape our lives, and we shape ourselves. The process never ends until we die. And the choices we make are ultimately our own responsibility.
-Eleanor Roosevelt (1884-1962), First Lady of the United States

Now, I say to you today my friends, even though we face the difficulties of today and tomorrow, I still have a dream. It is a dream deeply rooted in the American dream. I have a dream that one day this nation will rise up and live out the true meaning of its creed:—‘We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal.’
-Martin Luther King, Jr. (1929-1968), Baptist minister and civil rights leader

❖ What Others Have Said About Us ❖

Americans of all ages, all stations of life, and all types of disposition are forever forming associations....
-Alexis de Tocqueville (1805-1856), French historian and author of Democracy in America

Europe will never be like America. Europe is a product of history.
America is a product of philosophy.
-Margaret Thatcher (b. 1925), Prime Minister of the United Kingdom

There's the country of America, which you have to defend, but there's also the idea of America. America is more than just a country, it's an idea. An idea that's supposed to be contagious.
-Bono (b. 1960), musician and activist

1. Choose one quotation from each section and write each in your own words:

2. What are these quotations saying about what it means to be an American?