

Before you start

1. Look at the illustrations of the main characters in the story. Think of three adjectives to describe the characters based on how they look. As you read the story, check to see if you were right, and make changes as you find out more about them.



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2. What does the American dream mean to you? Finish these sentences.



3. Clara's professor claims that the American dream is now over. Do you agree?
4. Look at the cover and the illustrations below. What do you think the story is about?



5. Read the story. Were you right?

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Oscar looked around his Mexican restaurant. Then he pressed his hands together and smiled. Every table was **occupied**. There was a long line of people at the door. He heard Mari, his wife, talking to a customer on the phone. "Right now, the wait for a table is about an hour," she said politely. "It's very busy tonight."

Mariachis played and sang in the large, colorful dining room. Servers carefully carried hot plates of *tacos*, *enchiladas*, and *tamales*. Hungry **patrons** were **delighted**. "Oh, this looks delicious!" said Lidia, a weekly regular, picking up her fork. "Oscar's has the best Mexican food in the world!" Everyone at her table agreed. Oscar felt **proud**. "I've arrived," he thought with satisfaction. "This is the American dream... and I am really living it!"

Thirty years ago, Oscar was an eighteen-year-old **immigrant** from Mexico. At adult school in Southern California, his English

19 **to occupy** to be taken – 25 **patron** a restaurant customer – 25 **delighted** very happy – 28 **proud** feeling of satisfaction when you have done something good – 30 **immigrant** sb who has come from another country to live in a new country

teacher talked about the American dream. She believed that *anyone* – **regardless of** birthplace or class – could be successful in the U.S. “You can live the American dream,” she declared, “if you work hard.” At the time, Oscar was doubtful.

“But I am working hard,” he thought, looking at his hands, red and **rough** from washing dishes at a Korean restaurant. Naturally, Oscar wanted to believe his teacher. And his main goal, like many other immigrants, was success. Still, it was difficult to imagine being truly successful. Reality was standing in front of a mountain of dishes and earning only minimum wage. At that time, his daily goal was survival.

At school, Oscar remembered writing something in his notebook. Using the present and past tenses, he wrote two positive sentences: “Today, I **washed** dishes. Yesterday, I **washed** dishes.” Then, in the future tense, he wrote a negative one: “Tomorrow, I **won't wash** dishes.” Oscar didn't mean *tomorrow* as the very next day. In fact, he washed dishes at the Korean restaurant for eight more months. He meant it as a promise to himself. He wouldn't stay at **the bottom of the ladder** forever. Tomorrow – whenever tomorrow was – there were more opportunities.

In time, Oscar's English **improved** a lot. He found better jobs in other restaurants, and he never washed dishes again. In some places, Oscar cooked in the kitchens. In others, he worked as a busboy, server, or cashier. Later, he became a manager. After working at restaurants for twenty years, he **knew the business inside out**. So, ten years ago, he got a **business loan** and opened his own Mexican restaurant – Oscar's – on Fourth Avenue.

Since Oscar's first opened, the business tripled in size. It now employed twenty-five people, plus four **mariachi** players. “I pinch

2 **regardless of** not depending on – 5 **rough** not soft, usually from working hard – 19 **the bottom of the ladder** the lowest position in a company – 22 **to improve** to get better – 26 **to know sth inside out** to be very familiar with sth – 27 **business loan** money from the bank to use to start a business – 30 **Mariachi** a traditional Mexican type of music

myself sometimes,” Oscar said, walking toward Mari. “I'm afraid that I'll wake up... and be washing dishes again at the Korean restaurant.”

“It is incredible,” Mari replied, **patting** her husband's shoulder **affectionately**. “And I hope business stays this way,” she added. “Next year, we'll have *two* daughters in college. It will **cost a fortune**.”

“Don't worry about the money,” answered Oscar, counting at least twenty people on Mari's waiting list. “It's a **drop in the bucket**. We worked hard and became successful. We're living the American dream.”

How would you describe Oscar's restaurant?

How did Oscar achieve his dream of owning a restaurant?

Think about it...

Have you ever eaten at a Mexican restaurant? What did you eat? Would you go again?

In this chapter Oscar talks about the American dream. What is the American dream?

4 **to pat** to touch sb gently with the palm of your hand – 5 **affectionately** in a way that shows love – 6 **to cost a fortune** to be very expensive – 9 **a drop in the bucket** sth is small or insignificant

Oscar and Mari had two daughters: Clara and Emma. Clara, twenty years old, was in her third year at a well-known university. Emma, three years younger, was in her last semester of high school. She had already been accepted to an excellent college and planned to start in the **fall**. Mari was right. Their schools would cost a fortune next year. But, thanks to the restaurant, Oscar and Mari could afford it. They were happy to support Clara's dream to become a dentist and Emma's to become a software engineer. Of course, this meant many years of expensive higher education. But **money was no object**. They had more than enough – and could handle the **expense**.

Clara and Emma grew up at Oscar's restaurant. When they weren't studying, they often worked there. As children in elementary school, they cleaned tables, swept floors, and **wiped off** plastic menus. Later, Clara and Emma helped out in the kitchen, sometimes washing dishes. Like their father, it wasn't a job they particularly enjoyed. "Yet, it's good for you," said Oscar, **handing** them two pairs of rubber gloves and pointing toward the sink. "Believe me, *big dreams* begin by scrubbing pots and pans."

Oscar regularly reminded his daughters that he was a living example of the American dream. "I started with nothing here – absolutely nothing. And look at me now!" he said proudly, putting a hand on his chest. "I've gone from rags to riches!" Clara and Emma were impressed by the efforts of both their parents, neither born into wealth. In comparison, their lives were quite privileged: a nice home, good schools, and no real worries about money. Washing dishes wasn't necessarily about survival. It also "built character," according to their father. So, when asked, the girls put on their **rubber** gloves and did the job.

5 **fall** (American English) autumn – 10 **money is no object** the price of sth is no reason to worry – 11 **expense** cost – 14 **to wipe off** to remove sth, such as pieces of food, from sth – 18 **to hand sb sth** to give sb sth – 29 **rubber** elastic, stretchy material