

1 **Letter III: “What is an American?”**

2 *Letters From an American Farmer*

3 J. Hector St. John de Crèvecoeur

4 1782

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6 He is arrived on a new continent; a modern society offers itself to his  
7 contemplation, different from what he had hitherto seen. It is not composed, as in  
8 Europe, of great lords who possess every thing and of a herd of people who have  
9 nothing. Here are no aristocratical families, no courts, no kings, no bishops, no  
10 ecclesiastical dominion, no invisible power giving to a few a very visible one; no  
11 great manufacturers employing thousands, no great refinements of luxury. The rich  
12 and the poor are not so far removed from each other as they are in Europe...

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14 What then is the American, this new man? He is either an European, or the  
15 descendant of an European, hence that strange mixture of blood, which you will  
16 find in no other country. I could point out to you a family whose grandfather was  
17 an Englishman, whose wife was Dutch, whose son married a French woman, and  
18 whose present four sons have now four wives of different nations. He is an  
19 American, who, leaving behind him all his ancient prejudices and manners,  
20 receives new ones from the new mode of life he has embraced, the new rank he  
21 holds. He becomes an American by being received in the broad lap of our great  
22 Alma Mater.

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24 Here individuals of all nations are melted into a new race of men, whose labours  
25 and posterity will one day cause great changes in the world... The Americans were  
26 once scattered all over Europe; here they are incorporated into one of the finest  
27 systems of population which has ever appeared, and which will hereafter become  
28 distinct by the power of the different climates they inhabit. The American ought  
29 therefore to love this country much better than the wherein either he or his  
30 forefathers were born. Here the rewards of his industry follow with equal steps the  
31 progress of his labour; ... Wives and children, who before in vain demanded of  
32 him a morsel of bread, now, fat and frolicsome, gladly help their father to clear  
33 those fields whence exuberant crops are to arise to feed and to clothe them all;  
34 without any part being claimed, either by a despotic prince, a rich abbot, or a  
35 mighty lord... The American is a new man, who acts upon new principles; he must  
36 therefore entertain new ideas, and form new opinions. From involuntary idleness,  
37 servile dependence, penury, and useless labour, he has passed to toils of a very  
38 different nature, rewarded by ample subsistence. -This is an American.

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privileged  
religious control

future generations

tyrannical/ religious  
leader

inferior/ poverty/  
labors

## Teacher's Guide

Name of Text: **Letter III: "What is an American?"** *Letters From an American Farmer*, J. Hector St. John de Crèvecoeur, 1782

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*Nevada State Standards: G6.[6-8].6, G7.[6-8].2, G7.[6-8].3*

CCSS: RH.6-8.1, RH.6-8.2, RH.6-8.4, RH.6-8.6, RH.6-8.10, WHST.6-8.1, SL.7.1a

Background for Teachers: Crèvecoeur's letter is one of a series of twelve letters first published in 1782. Crèvecoeur was a French American writer who wrote from the perspective of fictional narrator to an English gentleman. Each letter highlights a different aspect of life in the British Colonies and the complete set covers a range of genres and sociological observations.

Text Dependent Questions	Teacher Notes and Possible Textual Evidence for Student Answers
What do you learn from lines 1-4 of the document?	Line 1: It's a letter. The third letter- part of a series of letters called <i>Letters from an American Farmer</i> (Line 2). Line 3: The Author is J. Hector St. John de Crevecoeur Line 4: It was written in 1782.
In line 6, who is the "he" the author is referring to?	Line 1: American; Line 14: American, this new man; Lines 18-19: He is an American  R: Students need to know who the subject of the text is. They also need to define an American according to the text (the "he" is used throughout the text)
Where is the "new American" coming from?	Line 12: Europe; Lines 14-15: He is either an European? Or the descendant of an European; Line 17: England, the Netherlands, France; Lines 25-26: The Americans were once scattered all over Europe  R: Students need to understand where the Americans cam from. Who their ancestors were, and how their past helped to define who they are today.

Text Dependent Questions

Teacher Notes and Possible Textual Evidence  
for Student Answers

<p>What makes the “new American” different from individuals, families and groups from European society?</p>	<p>Lines 7-12: All are reasons; Lines 19-21: leaving behind him... the new rank he holds; Lines 35-38: The American is a new man... This is an American.; Lines 15-18: many nationalities combined in a family, evidence: hence that strange mixture of blood... four sons now have four wives of different nations.</p> <p>R: Students need to recognize and identify that the new American is different from their European ancestors. Their families are a mix of different nationalities that would never happen in Europe. The move to America created new ideas, beliefs, and families that could never occur in a European nation.</p>
<p>What new ideas and beliefs does the new American have?</p>	<p>Hard work equals advancement, a person can improve his station in life from poor to wealthy, a person can improve his status (there is not the same class system in America as in Europe), Americans have their own field to work, they own their own farms instead of farming for others, it is the first idea of the “American Dream” that anything is possible in America. The evidence of this from the text is Lines 18-22, Lines 24-28, and Lines 30-34. But, it also addresses a new philosophy on nationalism when it talks about “leaving behind him all his ancient prejudices and manners” (line19).</p> <p>R: Students need to understand the focus on how people could change their destiny or future in America. They didn’t have to remain in the same circumstances that they were born into. They could make them better and improve their lives in America. In the countries of Europe, that would never have been a possibility. You were born into a certain life and the circumstances couldn’t be changed or improved.</p>
<p>In America, Crèvecoeur states in lines 11-12, “The rich and the poor are not so far removed from each other as they are in Europe...” What does Crèvecoeur mean by this statement?</p>	<p>It doesn’t matter who you are or where you come from; there aren’t any class distinctions- lines 9-11; “all nations are melted into a new race of men, whose labours and posterity will one day cause great changes in the world”- lines 24-25; not working for others (“involuntary...servile...penury...”) to working for himself (“toils of a very different nature, rewarded by ample subsistence”)- lines 36-38</p> <p>R: From the beginnings of our country America has been the land of opportunity. The trappings of the past are gone. America is a new country and with that comes new ideas and beliefs.</p>

**Text Dependent Questions****Teacher Notes and Possible Textual Evidence  
for Student Answers**

According to the text, explain “What is an American?”	An American is someone of mixed European ancestry (lines 14-18). He has new ideas and beliefs (lines 18-21). A poor immigrant can overcome the previous caste system of Europe and make a new life for himself and his family. There is not a class distinction in America (lines 9-12). Getting ahead and improving your station in life depends on your work ethic (lines 37-38). Anything is possible. There is a new political system in America, democracy, not monarchies like in European countries.
What is the tone of this text? Cite evidence from the text to explain your answer.	Positive, upbeat, it is good to be an American, anything is possible Lines 6-7, Lines 18-22, Lines 24-25, Lines 28-30, Lines 35-38  R: Understanding the tone of the letter will help students to understand the document. This is a very positive description of what life is like in America. He does not mention any negatives in this letter.

**Writing Prompt:**

In the letter, Crèvecoeur described a new life or way of living for Americans, alluding to the “the American, this new man.” Explain what “the American, this new man” is by writing a paragraph that describes this idea. Use 3 pieces of evidence and reasoning from the text to support your claim. Cite the evidence correctly by using line numbers (Lines24-25) at the end of the sentence. Connect the evidence to the claim with reasoning that explains the evidence.

**Checklist identifying key points that will assist in measuring student success and/or difficulty with the close reading and/or writing prompt****Some possible answers to this question are:**

The idea of “the American, this new man” suggests that men/poor immigrants can break status barriers and become a new man. They can re-create themselves in America. (Lines 19-21)

The idea of “the American, this new man” embraces all European nationalities. Men can work, live, and even be members of the same family. Their old traditions are left behind and they create new ones with traditions from different cultures mixing. (Lines 14-18)

The idea of “the American, this new man” allows the new man to create his own success through hard work. He can improve his life and his fate. The harder he works the more successful he can become. A poor immigrant can become an important, wealthy man. (Lines24-25, 30-31)

The opportunity to get ahead and have a better life is here and available if a person wants it. (Lines 30-38)

The traditional caste systems of Europe do not exist in America. The old, traditional ways are gone. Men are on more equal ground in America. (Lines 9-12)

**In their writing students should:**

- Introduce a topic clearly, previewing what is to follow; organize ideas, concepts, and information into broader categories
- Develop the topic with relevant, well-chosen facts, definitions, concrete details, and quotations
- Use appropriate and varied transitions to create cohesion and clarify the relationships among ideas and concepts
- Establish and maintain a formal style and objective tone
- Provide a concluding statement that follows from and supports the information or explanation presented
- Quotations are cited correctly using line numbers from the text (Lines 8-9) at the end of the quote.