



SOCIAL CLASS

“The middle class were invented to give the poor hope; the poor, to make the rich feel special; the rich, to humble the middle class.”

Mokokoma Mokhonoana, South African author and social critic

1. Social Class Discussion

1. What is social class? What different social classes are there? What class do you think you are?
2. What are the differences between classes in terms of jobs, education level, income, health, way of dressing, and way of speaking (e.g., accents and vocabulary)?
3. Are the categories of working, middle and upper class outdated in the modern world? Can you think of better categories?
4. Are all university graduates middle-class? Can someone still be considered working-class if they have a degree?
5. How does social class affect a person's values and culture?
6. Are poor people poor because they don't take advantages of the opportunities available to them?
7. Is it really necessary to categorise people by social class? What are the benefits of this? What problems might this cause?
8. Are social classes and inequality natural in a society? Are they necessary for society to function?

2. Social Class Vocabulary

- **class conflict / war / warfare / struggle** (noun) – *a political theory that says tensions exists in society between different social classes or between rich and poor people.*
- **classless society** (noun) – *a society in which every person has the same prospects and opportunities from birth, and in which a person's position in society is determined by their individual experiences and achievements or successes and failures.*
- **social mobility** (noun) – *the ability to move from a lower social class to a higher social class.*
- **to gentrify** (verb), **gentrification** (noun) – *to change the nature of an area by moving wealthier people in, often by displacing the existing poorer population; the process of an area's character changing because wealthy people move there.*
- **to be born with a silver spoon in one's mouth** (saying) – *to be born into wealth and privilege.*
- **posh** (adjective) – *elegant or luxurious; describes someone from, appearing to be from, or acting like, the upper class (often derogatory).*

Using the vocabulary words above, complete the following sentences (remember to use the correct form of the word, e.g. verb conjugation or plural noun):

1. Free university education for all helps **social mobility** as even those born into poorer families will have the opportunity to become professionals and earn a high wage.
2. My neighbours are so **posh** they have a cleaner and a nanny to look after their children.
3. The exploitation of the working class by the ruling class, for example by paying them low wages or sending them off to fight in wars, is the main source of **class conflict**.
4. Despite all Conservatives promising a **classless society** when they come to power, they don't make sufficient investments in education so that people from lower socio-economic backgrounds have the opportunities necessary to move up in society.
5. The Prime Minister was **born with a silver spoon in his mouth**; he has no idea how the lives of normal people are.
6. When artisanal coffee shops and vegan restaurants pop up on the high street, you know the area is being **gentrified**.

Social Class vocabulary comprehension questions

1. What kind of tensions between classes lead to class conflict? How do the upper classes treat those below them that could lead to class conflict? Does class conflict happen in your country?
2. Do we already live in a classless society? Is a classless society realistic or even desirable?
3. Is social mobility really possible, or is a person's future prospects pretty much determined from the moment of their birth? How does social mobility work? Does this work for everyone?
4. What signs tell you an area is being gentrified? Which areas of your city have been gentrified? Is gentrification a good thing or a bad thing? Where do the original inhabitants move to?
5. Which people were born with a silver spoon in their mouth?
6. Who is the poshest person you know? What makes them so posh?

3. Video: Dream Hoarders

You are going to watch a video by PBS NewsHour called "How the upper middle class keeps everyone else out."

Watch the video here: <https://youenglishpal.com/blog/esl-conversation-lesson-plan-social-class/>

While you watch the video, answer the following questions:

Multiple choice

1. How does American society feel talking about class?
a) *relaxed* **b) uneasy** c) *eager*
2. Dream hoarders rig markets to benefit whom?
a) their families b) *their communities* c) *all of society*
3. How many Americans think they're middle class?
a) *70%* b) *80%* **c) 90%**
4. Who helps the upper-middle class buy expensive houses?
a) *their families* b) *their employers* **c) the government**

Sentence completion

5. School admissions policies can be organised in a way that mean even **public schools** can be predominantly attended by wealthier students.
6. 40% of the upper-middle class live near public schools with the best **test scores**.
7. It is deeply troubling that a child should get preferential **treatment** when applying to a college just because their parents attended the same college.
8. Many employers place a lot of value on someone who has done an **internship**.

Short answer

9. Why are many internships automatically biased towards people from wealthier backgrounds?
They are unpaid
10. Many internships are handed out on the basis of what? **Who you know**
11. For someone to move up in society, where does another person have to move? **Down**
12. Downward mobility is unpopular on what level? **Personal and political**

4. Social Class Conversation Questions

1. What kind of discrimination occurs based on socio-economic background? Why does this happen?
2. Is your country classist in any way? Do people in your country respect those considered below them socially? Do people act differently around those considered above them?
3. Is it just a coincidence that a disproportionate number of politicians are privately educated and attend the most expensive universities? Could a working-class person ever win a presidential election or equivalent in your country? Would you ever vote for a working-class person with no private education and no degree to be president?
4. How does the ruling class convince the classes below to vote for them at election time when they don't represent their interests?
5. Can a society ever be considered democratic if different social classes have different levels of political influence? Why or why not?
6. In order for someone to succeed in moving to a higher class, is it necessary for someone at the top to fail and move down? How does this affect the prospects of social mobility? Can everyone be upper class?
7. Should the class system be overthrown and abolished? Why or why not? If the class system were abolished, who would do all the jobs currently done by the working class?
8. Do you agree with Margaret Thatcher when she said, "Class is a Communist concept . . . It groups people as bundles and sets them against one another." Does social class actually exist?

5. Social Class Writing Task

Write about your opinion of social class. Try to use some of the vocabulary you learned earlier in this lesson. In your answer, you could include some of the following topics:

- Why social classes exist.
- Some differences between social classes.
- How social class determines a person's future prospects.

Alternative exam practice question:

Some people say that social class is the biggest factor in determining what prospects and opportunities a person will have in life. Other people say that in the modern day, everyone has the same opportunities to succeed or fail, regardless of the socio-economic background they were born into. Which side do you agree with?