

Poverty in America: Film Questions
Waging A Living: Working Overtime in Pursuit of the Elusive American Dream

Introduction

“Over three years, the film follows for hard-working individuals as they strive for their piece of the American Dream but find only low wages, dead end jobs, and a tattered safety net in their way. As they raise children, try to get a college degree, and take care of sick relatives, these working class heroes make you root for them to overcome seemingly insurmountable obstacles.”

Jean Reynolds

- “God’s not paying us enough.” Explain
- What did she do? When did she work?
- How much did she make an hour? Every two weeks?
- What are her expenses?

- Who does she speak with regarding her wages?
- How many people now live in the house? Why?
- How did the conversation go with her boss?
- How many Americans die each year because they do not have access to health care?

- What is Bridget’s status? What is the result?
- What happened with her housing situation?
- What phone call came? How did that help?
- What was the situation eight month later?

Jerry Longoria

- What does he do?
- Where does he live?
- How much does he pay to rent?
- How much does he make per hour?

- Where do his children live? When is the last time he saw them?
- What does the gym do for him and at what cost?
- Why doesn’t he have health insurance?
- Why does he start a savings account?

- What are the two sides to having a strike?
- What changes are made in their contracts? What is the response and how do they vote?
- Where does he go and how is the experience?
- What happened to Jerry’s job? What happened after that?

Mary Venetelli

- What is she going through? What happened to her income?
- How many children does she have? What does she mean when she notes that “it would be a lot easier if they didn’t believe in Santa.” Explain.
- What does she do for work? How much does she make?
- What happens to a man’s and woman’s standard of living after a divorce

- How much money does she have in the bank?
- “Because so many people quit, he has to hire inexperienced people.” What effect does that have on Mary?
- What was she approved for? Why is that ironic?
- Why is her debt growing? How much debt does she have?

- How much did the divorce “cost”?
- What are her monthly expenses? What is her income, with child support and income?
- “I’m independent. Not free.” Explain.
- What is her situation *one year later* regarding her education, relationships, and family?

Barbara Brooks

- How many children live with her?
- What three “jobs” does she have? How much does she make and what does she do?
- How much does she make, what other services does she receive?
- What happened to her when she was younger?

- What did she get for a raise? What happened as a result?
- What is wrong with her son? What does she do about it?
- What happens at her meeting regarding her rental subsidy?
- How much does her wage go up per month? As a result, how much does she lose in government benefits?

- What “lottery” did she hit?
- What did she do after she earned her degree? What affect did it have?
- What happened after her 90 day review? What are the consequences?
- What was her situation 8 months later?

“The harder I work, the harder it gets.”

“There use to be a time where you could get by on just labor. That’s not the world anymore.”

“I feel cheated out of the American Dream...there’s no American Dream anymore.”