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**Grade level:** 9-12

**Primary Source Citation:** “The Ladder of Fortune,” 1875. Currier & Ives. Museum of the City of New York. Image Accession # 56.300.1154.  
[http://www.mcny.org/nyc\\_images/prints/246.html](http://www.mcny.org/nyc_images/prints/246.html). (Link no longer active and just posted for attribution.)

Allow students, in groups or individually, to examine the print below while answering the questions below in order. These questions will prepare students to think critically when observing primary source documents.

### **Level I: Description**

1. What appears to be the focus of those by the tree?
2. What appears to be the interests of those distant from the tree?
3. What are the words on the sides of the ladder?
4. Each rung has a name. Can you define each name – industry, temperance, prudence, integrity, economy, punctuality, courage, and perseverance?
5. What is different about the appearance of those closest to the tree and those in the background?

### **Level II: Interpretation**

Read the caption below the ladder and connect the moral message with the actions in the picture.

1. Which group is taking risks and believing in luck and chance?
2. What is the common bond between racing, stock market investment, and union membership?
3. How can one acquire the fruits on the tree?

### **Level III: Analysis**

1. When Currier & Ives printed this, the picture was meant to tell a story. Explain the allegory.

2. Most Currier and Ives prints reflect the homes and farms of successful farmers and artisans. To whom are the artists appealing in this print?
3. Does this remind you of the ideas of Andrew Carnegie and his writing *Way to Wealth*? Does it reflect on Benjamin Franklin's work ethic that he charted in his diary and wrote about in *Poor Richard's Almanac*?
4. Can you trace this idea to the colonial leaders and their religious values?
5. What is the "American Dream" and does this print relate to that dream?
6. Does the "American Dream" still have meaning? Are these values the values of today?



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## THE LADDER OF FORTUNE.

Industry and Morality bring solid rewards. Idle schemes and speculations yield poverty and ruin.