

The Great Gatsby Essay Assignment

Directions: In a well-organized essay, discuss ONE of the following topics, create a thesis, and write a paper to prove your thesis using quotes from the novel to support your claim. The introduction must capture the reader's attention and funnel to a one sentence, declarative thesis that contains an element of analysis (an "angle"). The succeeding body paragraphs must have topic sentences, supporting concrete details (in the form of direct quotations), and strong analysis/commentary. Your essay must include a conclusion that makes a judgment and restatement of the thesis. Be sure to put the author and title in the introductory paragraph, but not in your thesis.

Requirements:

- 3-4 pages typed, double-spaced (including heading)
- use at least one literary criticism (maximum of two) in your argument
- size 12 pt. font (Times New Roman)
- 1" margins all the way around (you will have to adjust yours)
- header (last name and page number) in upper-right-hand corner of every page
- heading on first page of essay only (left side of paper)
- centered title that is appropriate to your topic and angle (not underlined, quoted or emboldened)
- Work Cited page with the novel and secondary source listed on it
- submission of essay to turnitin.com (and a printed receipt) – directions are on the website

DUE DATE: May 9, 2013. No exceptions! This paper is worth 300 points.

1. Examine the role of female characters – namely Daisy, Jordan, and Myrtle – in the novel. How does each of them find herself in conflict with society's expectations of them? How does each negotiate that conflict? (hint: you'll have to consider each separately before comparing/contrasting them)
2. What, besides money, makes Gatsby such an attractive and alluring character? Conversely, why, besides his inordinate wealth, do we view Gatsby with skepticism? Discuss both sides of this character. What makes him such a consummate yet divided character? Write an essay that discusses Gatsby's allure as a character and our doubts in him as a reader. In using secondary source information, consider how there were two sides to post WWI society and how they battled against each other. Which side won? Which suffered defeat?
3. F. Scott Fitzgerald crafted Nick Carraway as a "perfect narrator." But Nick does have imperfections. Examine his imperfections and discuss how they effect the outcome of the novel. Is one more important than the other? Do they compliment each other? How do they play off his "cardinal virtue" of honesty? In finding secondary source information, consider how there were contradictions and imperfections in the society and culture of the 1920's as a point of comparison. Write an essay that examines imperfections in society and in Nick Carraway.
4. How are the lives portrayed in *The Great Gatsby* a direct opposite of lives lived by a majority of the people in the 1920's? Why do you think Fitzgerald wrote a novel like this when it only reflected a small percentage of the population? Include analysis of Fitzgerald's symbolism relevant to this contrast. What did he hope to accomplish with this work in society? Discuss this aspect of opposite portrayals of this book and 1920's society.
5. How does Fitzgerald explain Gatsby's version of the American dream? Is it the quintessential American dream? How is it similar to or different from it?
6. Fitzgerald describes Tom and Daisy as "careless people" who "smashed up things and creatures and then retreated back into their money or their vast carelessness...and let other people clean up

the mess they had made" (188). Are Tom and Daisy villains? Bad people? Immoral? Or are they just as Nick says, careless?

7. Nick is the only one there for Gatsby at the bitter end. Why is no one else there? Why does Nick stay?
8. Discuss the author's use of symbolism in the novel. What elements have more than a literal meaning? How does Fitzgerald's use of symbolism add to the complexity of the novel.
9. Many critics have argued that *The Great Gatsby* is a book about the disintegration and/or loss of the American dream. Think about the the ideas of pessimism vs. optimism and dreams vs. fulfillment expressed in the book Do you agree or disagree with these critics? Why?

The Great Gatsby wasn't Fitzgerald's first stab at a title. He came up with a whole list, including:

- *Among Ash-Heaps and Millionaires*
- *Gatsby*
- *Gold-Hatted Gatsby*
- *The High-Bouncing Lover*
- *On the Road to West Egg*
- *Trimalchio*
- *Trimalchio in West Egg*
- *Under the Red, White, and Blue*

So, did Fitzgerald make the right choice? How would our reading of the book change if he'd gone with one of these other titles? And is Gatsby truly great?

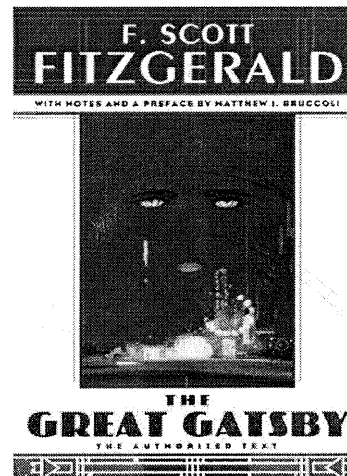
The Great Gatsby

By: F. Scott Fitzgerald
Concept/Vocabulary Analysis

Literary Text: *The Great Gatsby* by F. Scott Fitzgerald (2004, Scribner paperback edition)

Summary

A vision into the roaring 1920's, Fitzgerald captures the decades indulgences. The novel is written through the eyes of a man named Nick Carraway. This fellow is an outsider who, for a summer, experiences the grandeur and glamour of New York. The protagonist, Gatsby, is his neighbor and seems to be a member of the quintessential 1920's. His parties are the talk of the town, though he is not throwing them for enjoyment. The reason for the parties is an integral part of the romantic theme throughout the book. Juxtaposed to these parties is his wealth, which make them possible, but seems to be ill gotten. Ultimately the contention that comes from money, love, and power result in terrible deaths.



Organizational Patterns

The Great Gatsby is organized into 9 untitled chapters. The first chapter sets the book up by describing the narrator, Nick Carraway, and his migration to New York. Two peoples of interest are introduced; Nick's old friend Daisy and her husband Tom. At the close of the chapter Nick experiences Gatsby for the first time. The second chapter is dedicated to the adulteress behavior of Tom, who takes his mistress Myrtle to New York. Following this, chapter three is focused on Gatsby and his famous parties. Chapter four is gives Gatsby more definition by showing his power in a society as experienced by his ability to get out of a parking ticket. It is there that Jordan, a friend of Daisy, tells Nick that Gatsby is in love with Daisy. Chapter five describes Gatsby's obsession with Daisy and their meeting after their long estrangement. Chapter six tells of Gatsby's former life and illustrates that he is not the man many believe him to be. The following chapter deals Tom realizing the developing relationship between Gatsby and Daisy, as well as including the murder of Myrtle, his mistress. Chapter 8 revels more about Gatsby's

obsession with Daisy, and ends with his death. The final chapter is about the lack of true friendship that Gatsby had, and finishes with Nick leaving.

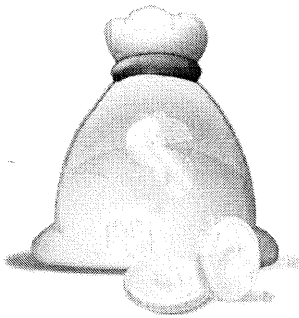
An important organizational factor is that the book is told from Nick's perspective. He tells the majority of the story as if was there, but ends with a retrospective perspective of what happened when Gatsby died.

The Central Question/ Enduring Issue

How Do People Achieve True Happiness?

The novel deals with themes that are very adult in nature. These themes in the book are all examples that Fitzgerald uses to show outlets of how individuals during the 1920's would attempt to find happiness (i.e. adultery, revenge, money). Because of the extremity in these acts, and the lack of happiness in the actors, it is clear that happiness is difficult to achieve. By allowing for the discussion of what contributes to true happiness, which addresses revenge, adultery, and money, students can develop their own ideas of what truly makes them happy.

What Value Do We Place On Money?



Fitzgerald was able to capture the 1920's with his unique talent of imagery and description. The excess of money and time during this period was complicated because previously, much of the money was 'old' money from families that had been influential for a long time. During this time there was an uprising of 'new' money, which resulted in unknown families, having influence. Within the book there is a debate as to what is really important, old money vs new money or if money is important at all.

Can We Live to Achieve A Dream From Our Past?

The book closes with the quote that says "So we beat on, boats against the current, borne back ceaselessly into the past." This idea of trying to achieve an old dream, which is what Gatsby attempts to do when he tries to rekindle a relationship with Daisy, attempts to answer the question if dreams from our past are worth our emotional investment.

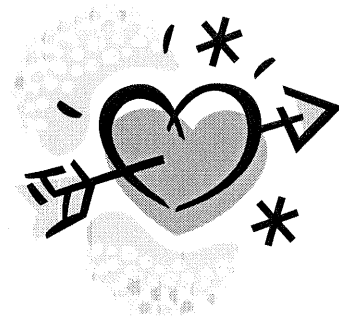
Themes

Class Distinctions: A major theme in the book is that the aristocratic society is being broken into two separate groups. The groups are those with established names, and those

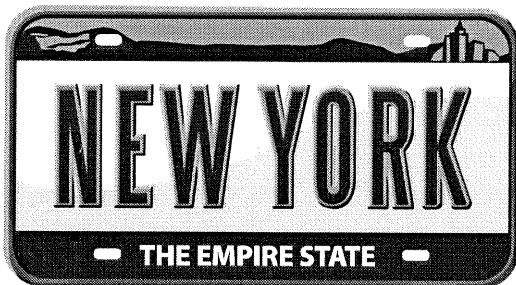
who have come into money very quickly. Within this conflict each groups shallowness and inhumanity is demonstrated. Instead of living lives of worthy pursuits, they are concentrated on petty, insignificant parties and commodities.

The American Dream: The book centers on Gatsby who gave everything in his power to become financially established in order to win back his professed love Daisy. With this goal in mind he attempts to fulfill the American dream which is hard work and financial success. The complexity of this theme deepens throughout the novel when it becomes clear that Gatsby earned his 'American dream' through unlawful acts. It address the important of at what cost is the American dream worth it?

Love: The book describes many relationships that are complex and difficult. This is illustrated in the relationship between Daisy and Tom. Tom has a long established affair with Myrtle, while Daisy and Gatsby are rekindling their old friendship. Due to the adultery in this book, many question the formality of marriage. Eventually Daisy's jealousy results in the murder (or accidental) death of Tom's mistress. This act sets off a string of events that lead to the death of Gatsby. In the end the married couple, Tom and Daisy, go off together. The deaths and affairs, coupled with Daisy profession of being able to love more than one person, spark the debate of what love really means and if marriage is a constraining or enduring.



Setting



The setting takes place in New York. Nick, the voice in the novel, is originally from Minnesota but travels to New York. There he experiences the differences between the East Egg and West Egg districts of New York. In the novel, West Egg is a representation of the newly rich, a common occurrence in the 1920's, and the East Egg represents the old, established rich families. Nick and Gatsby both live in the West Egg because their fortunes are new, whereas the representation of aristocratic poise and wealth is embodied in Daisy and Tom who live in the East Egg. Lining the West Egg is a desolate piece of land called the Valley of Ashes. This valley illustrates the moral corruption of the time.

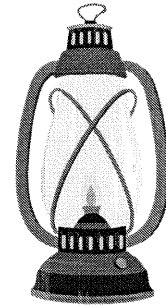
Point Of View

The point of view of this book mainly narrated by Nick Carraway but often incorporates dialogue in which Nick is not present. Nick is a friend of Daisy and Tom's and he moves to New York after the war in order to pursue his employment in the bond business. In the beginning Nick tries to establish credibility by stating that he is "inclined to reserve all judgments" (1) and claims to have many confidences with the characters in the book. Assuming this is meant to give credibility to Nick and his outlook on the situations it also causes concern for why he would feel the need to say anything about his ability to reserve judgment, giving the possible inclination that he doesn't always reserve judgment. The final portion of the book is Nick reflecting Gatsby's funeral years after he leaves New York.



Symbols

Lantern: Fitzgerald is an incredible writer, as proven by his use of symbols. A major symbol in the book is a lantern that Gatsby can see across the bay. This lantern is a part of Daisy and Tom's house, and with every longing look that Gatsby gives to the lantern it becomes a symbol of his devotion and desire to have Daisy back.



Eyes of Doctor T.J. Eckleburg: The eyes of Doctor T.J. Eckleburg is an advertisement that is described as old and faded, but his eyes take on a more symbolic meaning. They can be interpreted as representing a type of deity that is seeing the moral decline of the people of New York during the 1920's. The eyes can be judged in a different way, which is illustrated by Wilson, Myrtle's husband. He views the eyes as a representation of a loss of humanity and the worthlessness of the lives of those around him.

Affective Issues Related to the Work

Students will be able to relate to the novel *The Great Gatsby* because of its universal themes. Even though students are young, many have felt that they were in love and were rejected. This type of rejection is constantly discussed throughout the book.

Also, students are gaining their autonomy and a part of this is exposure to money and finances. Money is a consistent part of the book, and it illustrates that often people with money fail to realize what is really important. In the book this is shown by those with money participating in activities that are of little worth just as parties and expensive goods. They fail to help those around them or find anything of permanent happiness.

Students will be able to analyze which activities they believe are truly important and those which are not.

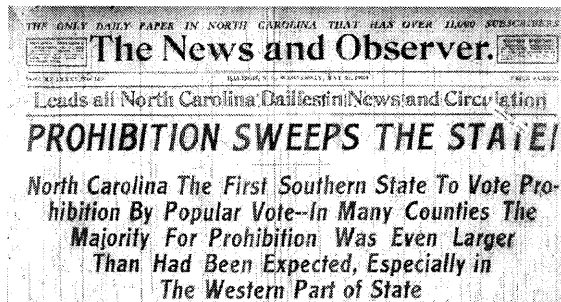
Gatsby deceives many people by not telling them how he made his money or his real reasons for being in New York. Many students will be able to relate to the desire to create an alternative personality to achieve a goal, but as illustrated in Gatsby's destruction, lies do not always result in gain.

Vocabulary Issues

The Great Gatsby is a narrative that is written with simple wording and incredible talent. Though many of the words are easily read by students as young as seventh grade, there are difficult concepts that need a certain level of analytical skills. For example, the quote that says "so we beat on, boats against the current, borne back ceaselessly into the past" is difficult to understand because of what the boats represents. It can also be conceptually difficult to understand how the boats are going into the past. This is characteristic of Fitzgerald, and so because of the difficult and seemingly unclear statements it is more suitable for high school students.

Background Knowledge

Students will enjoy *The Great Gatsby* if they have a solid background knowledge of the 1920's. Because the roaring twenties were so characteristically American, it is important to teach students that the 1920's were a time of excessive wealth and leisure. It is also important to discuss what the effects of prohibition were and why underground bootlegging was the cause for many people to become rich who had never been rich before. This plays a heavy role in the text. Also, Fitzgerald's own life parallels that of *The Great Gatsby*. By giving a brief authorial lecture, students will be able to see how sometimes writers place themselves in the text they write. Examples of this are that Fitzgerald was born in Minnesota, served in the war, lived in New York, and idealized the excessive lifestyles of the aristocrats. These facts are clearly connected with the Tom Carraway.



IMPLICATIONS FOR STUDENT DIVERSITY

The characters in *The Great Gatsby* are very similar in socio and economic situations. They all have significant amounts of money and are participants in excessive

and extreme lifestyles. Diversity comes in how they gained their money, whether it is from inheritance or old family businesses or from new ways such as bootlegging. Economic diversity within the classroom can be honored with this text because it isn't about the money, but more importantly it is a commentary on how a society shouldn't become morally corrupt and stop caring for others due to excessive money.

Gender Issues

There are extreme gender issues within the text. For example, Daisy has a child when her husband is off with his mistress and she says "I hope she'll be a fool—that's the best thing a girl can be in this world, a beautiful little fool." The reason she says that girls should be fools is so that they are not hurt. There is a common tone throughout the book that the women are participants in a men's world. There is sense that women are expected to do what the men say, which includes being ok with affairs as well as leaving parties and social events early. This problem can be approached in the classroom by illustrating that the women might have been expected to conform to the men, but they didn't as illustrated by their own affairs. This demonstrates that telling women what they should and shouldn't do ultimately hurts everyone, with each relationship being compromised.

Research Issues/ Project Ideas

Personal Narrative: By writing a personal narrative about what truly makes them happy, students will be able to develop reflective and analytical skills that they can use over the course of their lives to re-evaluate what really contributes to their true sense of happiness. This is particularly important for high school students so they resist temporary and unfulfilling types of activity in search for happiness. They will be able to analyze what did and did not make characters in *The Great Gatsby* happy.

Essay: An essay about how individuals can achieve true happiness, illustrated through examples of success and failure found in *The Great Gatsby*.

Compare and Contrast: Learn about the similarities and the differences between the 1920's and 1990's in order to have an understanding of how great wealth and affluence can affect a society's morals and priorities. Students could do brief monologues or movies to show they know the difference.

Map: Students can create a map of the different places in New York that are described in the book. Have them include East and West Egg, Gatsby, Nick and Tom's house, the

Valley of Ashes, New York City, and where Wilson and Myrtle live. They can do this in groups on poster boards that can then decorate the room.

Enrichment Resources

Other novels by F. Scott Fitzgerald

- *This Side of Paradise*
- *The Beautiful and the Damned*
- *Tender is the Night*

Video: Extreme lifestyle of those in the 1920's

http://video.google.com/videosearch?q=roaring+twenties&oe=utf8&rls=org.mozilla:en-US:official&client=firefox-a&um=1&ie=UTF-8&ei=I-O7SsLXDo78tgf6hJCcDQ&sa=X&oi=video_result_group&ct=title&resnum=4#

Movies: Thoroughly Modern Millie

<http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0062362/>

The Great Gatsby

<http://www.imdb.com/find?s=all&q=the+great+gatsby&x=0&y=0>

The Great Gatsby Teacher Edition The Roaring 20's

List: Calvin Coolidge, Warren Harding, Herbert Hoover, Stock Market, Flappers, Charleston, Swing, Harlem Renaissance, Economic Prosperity, New York City, Rise of Advertising, WWI over, the bee's knees, the bob, the Model T, Prohibition, Speakeasies, 1920-1929 ended by the Stock Market Crash, short skirts, makeup, oxford bags, social mobility?, lax morals, The Rise of Radio, talking pictures, women's rights, Modernism, F. Scott Fitzgerald, Charlie Chaplin, Babe Ruth, Jack Dempsey, Gangsters with Machine guns, Al Capone, Amelia Earhart, Duke Ellington, Louis Armstrong, Langston Hughes, Charles Lindberg, Scopes Monkey Trial, Ku Klux Klan, Jazz, Expatriated Writers, Hemingway, Stein, T.S. Eliot, Skepticism, isolationism, flat-chested women, Red Scare

If the class is somewhat diverse or without a lot of knowledge of the 1920's, consider giving them many of these words and having them group the words themselves, or give them the groups and have them come up with titles for them.

Groups:

Politics

Calvin Coolidge, Warren Harding, Herbert Hoover, WWI over, Isolationism, Scopes Monkey Trial, Prohibition, 18th, 19th Amendments, Red Scare

Economics

Stock Market, Rise of Advertising, ended by Stock Market Crash, Rise of Radio, Model T, Henry Ford, talking pictures, New York City

Social Trends

Flappers, Charleston, Swing, Jazz, The bee's knees, the bob, Speakeasies, short skirts, makeup, Oxford bags, lax morals, Gangsters with machine guns, skepticism, women's rights, flat-chested women, KKK

Famous Figures

Babe Ruth, Jack Dempsey, Charles Lindberg, Amelia Earhart, Al Capone

Harlem Renaissance

Langston Hughes, Zora Neal Hurston, Louis Armstrong, Duke Ellington, Jazz, Harlem

Expatriated Writers

Ernest Hemingway, F. Scott Fitzgerald, T.S. Eliot, Gertrude Stein, Modernism

The Great Gatsby

Directions: Read the following statements. Mark to the side of each whether you agree or disagree with the statement. Some statements may seem to be debatable, but decide whether you most agree or most disagree with the statement.

- | | Agree | Disagree |
|---|--------------------------|--------------------------|
| 1. Daydreams can be more real than reality. | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 2. You should never condemn anyone for dishonesty. | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 3. The behavior of adults is usually acceptable. | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 4. Anything you can do to "get ahead" in life or better your situation is acceptable. | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 5. You can and should only be in love with one person your whole life. | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 6. Reality is what we make of it. | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 7. If you have unintentionally done something wrong, you should not have to be responsible for your actions. | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 8. The American Dream is possible for anyone. | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 9. Money can get you anything. | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 10. A person's open behavior, occupation, and apparel are good indicators of what kind of a person someone is. | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 11. If it seems possible to achieve a goal you have always wanted, you should be able to do anything necessary to make it happen. | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |

KWL The Great Gatsby

Directions:

In the following table, working in pairs or individually, write down everything we know for a fact about Jay Gatsby. If possible, include the source from which we learn this information. Then, in the next columns, write down everything you think you might know about Gatsby and the person from whom you learn the information, and everything you would like to know about Gatsby. As you read Chapter VI, write in the last column all the things we learn about Gatsby's history from the novel.

What I know about Gatsby	What I think I know about Gatsby	What I want to know about Gatsby	What I learned about Gatsby
Fabulously Wealthy (Nick, Gatsby, Jordan) Watches a green light (Nick) Parties beyond belief (Everyone) "Person of undefined consequence" (Nick) In love with Daisy (Jordan) Interesting friends (Gatsby) Soldier in the war (Gatsby)	German Spy? (Party people) Ogsford Man (Wolfshiem, Gatsby) Bootlegger (Party People) Son of Wealthy people (Gatsby) Traveled the world (Gatsby)	Is he telling the truth? Is he an honest person in general or a dishonest one? How did he really get his money? Why did he wait so long for Daisy?	

