

Literacy Skills Teacher's Guide for

The Great Gatsby

by

F. Scott Fitzgerald

Book Information

F. Scott Fitzgerald, The Great Gatsby

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182 Pages

Book Level: 7.3

Interest Level: UG

This story deals with the fabulously wealthy Jay Gatsby and his love for the beautiful Daisy Buchanan, set during 1920s.

Topics: Classics, Classics (All); History, Roaring 20s; Popular Groupings, College Bound; Popular Groupings, Upper Grades Popular Authors/Starred Reviews; Recommended Reading, California Recommended Lit., English, 9-12

Main Characters

Daisy Buchanan the wife of Tom, who knew Gatsby before she married

Jay Gatsby a rich man who dreams of recapturing his past by marrying Daisy

Jordan Baker a female golfer who has a romance with Nick

Myrtle Wilson the woman with whom Tom is having an affair

Nick Carraway the narrator and a character in the story who begins a type of friendship with Gatsby

Tom Buchanan a strong, rich man who is married to Daisy

Vocabulary

banns notice given three separate times in church that a certain man and woman are to be married

bootlegger a person who makes, sells, or transports unlawful liquor

bungalow a small one-story house

coupe a closed, two-door automobile, usually seating two to six people

innuendo a veiled or equivocal reflection on someone's character or reputation

Synopsis

This story opens in summer at West Egg, where Nick has rented a house. Mr. Gatsby owns a mansion next to him. Daisy and her husband, Tom, own a mansion across the bay at East Egg, a more fashionable community. Nick is invited to dinner at Daisy's. Here he meets Jordan, a female professional golfer, who informs Nick that Tom has a mistress.

One day, Tom takes Nick to meet his mistress, a married woman named Myrtle. They go to an apartment Tom keeps for his meetings with Myrtle. Myrtle holds a party, which breaks up when Tom breaks her nose for using Daisy's name.

Gatsby, who gives large, elaborate parties, formally invites Nick to one of his parties. Here, Nick finally meets Gatsby, and they begin a type of friendship.

Nick realizes why Gatsby has taken an interest in him when he has tea with Jordan. Gatsby wants Nick to arrange a meeting between himself and Daisy, the woman he has loved for years. He has tried to gain Daisy back from Tom by buying a house across the bay from her and holding lavish parties.

Gatsby and Daisy meet, and she is moved to tears after she tours his house and sees his shirts. They begin to see each other.

While at a luncheon, Tom realizes Gatsby has been pursuing Daisy. After this luncheon, Tom, Daisy, Gatsby, Nick, and Jordan drive to New York. Daisy and Gatsby drive together. Tom, Jordan, and Nick drive in Gatsby's yellow Rolls-Royce. When Tom stops for gas, Myrtle sees Tom in the yellow car and thinks it is his.

These five people now rent a suite in the Plaza Hotel. Tom and Gatsby have a verbal confrontation there. Tom makes accusations about Gatsby's past, and Gatsby tries to retaliate by claiming Daisy never loved Tom. Tom wins the confrontation and is so sure the affair is over that he sends Daisy and Gatsby home in the yellow Rolls-Royce. He, Nick,

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and Jordan follow awhile later. When Tom's car reaches the valley of ashes, the occupants learn that Myrtle has been killed by a yellow Rolls-Royce. When Nick finally finds Gatsby, he learns Daisy was driving the car when it hit Myrtle.

Gatsby is shot and killed by Myrtle's husband, who mistakenly thinks Gatsby purposely killed his wife. Nick now tries to recruit friends for Gatsby's funeral. Most refuse to come.

Because of his experiences, Nick becomes disgusted and decides to return to the Midwest. Before he leaves, he breaks off his romance with Jordan and meets with Tom. In this meeting, he learns Tom told Myrtle's husband that Gatsby owned the yellow Rolls-Royce.

Open-Ended Questions

Use these open-ended questions as the basis for class discussions, student presentations, or extended writing assignments.

Initial Understanding

Why might Daisy have believed, as she told Nick, "...that's the best thing a girl can be in this world, a beautiful little fool"?

This statement, directed at her infant daughter, explains Daisy's own childish way of coping with the world. She pretends to be frivolous, so that others will bear the consequences of her care and comfort. But there is also a bitterness to the statement, as is in her secret heart, Daisy knows she has made a conscious choice to remain childishy irresponsible for herself.

Literary Analysis

What do the gigantic eyes of Doctor T.J. Eckleburg, which stare from a billboard across the valley of ashes, symbolize?

To a simple, conventional character like George Wilson, the unblinking eyes recall God's eternal awareness of human sins and actions. But their location, in a kind of grey wasteland, and their ironic origin, as an advertisement, prevent the eyes from attaining a fully religious presence. In this secular sense, they cast a sublime indifference across the events of the novel.

Inferential Comprehension

Although he was killed by a man he had not directly wronged, Gatsby's fate seems somehow fitting. In what sense did Gatsby deserve the death that claimed him?

Gatsby's idealization of Daisy was so absolute, he would no doubt have gone to any lengths to protect her from the consequences of her recklessness. His death accomplishes that protection. Even more fitting, he has, by the time that last moment in the pool arrives, lost the dream for which he created "Gatsby" -- the dream of returning to his past to rewrite his life more perfectly a second time. That invented Gatsby had already died when Daisy withdrew from him.

Constructing Meaning

In what ways is the character of Jay Gatsby an apt symbol for the American dream in general?

Gatsby represents "the self-made man" in the most literal way. His youthful daily itinerary, kept in a boy's book called Hopalong Cassidy, reads like a page from Ben Franklin's autobiography. Despite the unspoken crimes behind Gatsby's fortune, he retains a sense of idealism and optimism, both qualities that are often associated with the American national character. To this day, athletes and movie stars who gain celebrity status will preach at their moments of triumph: never give up on your dreams. Gatsby reminds us many a shipwreck first set its sails toward that sun.

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Teachable Skills

Understanding Hist./Cultural Factors In this book, we meet a colorful character named Meyer Wolfsheim. Gatsby introduces him to Nick as his "friend." After meeting him, the reader feels that Mr. Wolfsheim has links to the underworld. Gatsby says Mr. Wolfsheim fixed the 1919 World Series. Mr. Wolfsheim shows Nick his cuff buttons made of human molars. The students might find it interesting to know that F. Scott Fitzgerald based Mr. Wolfsheim on the real-life person of Arnold Rothstein. Have them do some research on Mr. Rothstein. Did Mr. Rothstein fix the World Series? Did he have cuff links made of teeth? Was he rumored to be part of the underworld? After their research, have them compare the real-life person to the fictionalized character by listing three similarities and three differences between the two.

Understanding the Author's Craft After Gatsby's death, Nick tries to recruit people to come to the funeral. Most of Gatsby's friends refuse. Nick talks about the funeral. The students might find it interesting to explore what the author is trying to tell them through the guests at the funeral. Have them make a list of the people at the funeral. Then have them write a list of who did not show up but most likely should have. Behind each person, write a brief reason as to why they came or why they didn't come. Does this list tell them who Gatsby's real friends were? What does it tell them about Gatsby's life? What does it tell them about Gatsby's "dream"?

Deriving Word or Phrase Meaning Nick compares Gatsby's obsession with Daisy to "the following of a grail." The grail was the cup used by Christ at the Last Supper. It was what the knights of the round table were searching for. If they found the grail, they would be saved. The students might find it interesting to explore the reasons why Fitzgerald used this analogy. What was Fitzgerald suggesting? Have them list several reasons why they feel Gatsby's dream of marrying Daisy was like following a grail.

Responding to Literature In this book, we meet the characters of both Nick and Gatsby. It has been said that Nick and Gatsby represent the two sides of human nature. Gatsby is shown as a romantic type of person who yearns for intense experiences. Nick is more of a disciplined person. It might be fun for the students to compare themselves to these two characters. Have them write a brief paragraph in which they tell which of these two characters they most resemble, and why they feel that way.