

Teacher Guide

Grades 7–8

The Graveyard Book

Neil Gaiman

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THE GRAVEYARD BOOK

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Teacher Guide

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Please note: Parts of this novel deal with sensitive, mature issues. Please assess the appropriateness of this book for the age level and maturity of your students prior to reading and discussing it with them.

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Skills and Strategies

Critical Thinking

Analyzing, inference, research,
compare/contrast

Literary Elements

Theme, irony, symbolism,
conflict, characterization, literary
devices, setting, genre study,
author's craft, foil, dialect,
point of view

Vocabulary

Definitions, denotation/
connotation, parts of speech,
context clues, root words,
figures of speech

Listening/Speaking

Reenactment, discussion

Comprehension

Cause/effect, predictions

Writing

Essay, song, poetry, epitaph,
short story, research paper,
script, journal

Across the Curriculum

Literature—other works of
mythic fiction, *The Jungle Book*,
monsters, archetypes; Art—
illustrator study, collage,
diorama, drawing, photography,
painting, comic strip; History—
historic references, epitaphs,
military history, Roman
mythology; Music—Danse
Macabre, performing a score;
Film—movie trailer

Chapter Two

Vocabulary:

grotesque 23
ectoplasm 30

transcendent 23
proprietary 30

conscious 24
haute 31

pastoral 28
strident 36

Discussion Questions:

1. Describe the Valley of Ashes. What does it symbolize?
*It is a desolate area where empty people labor, watched over by the giant billboard eyes of Dr. T. J. Eckleburg. It symbolizes the "waste and mentality" of the materialistic middle class and the spiritual emptiness of society as a whole. It is reminiscent of scenes from Dante's *Inferno*, and is appropriately "watched over" by the huge, godlike eyes on the billboard.*
2. Does Tom try to keep his affair with Myrtle a secret?
No. Everyone knows about it, and he often takes her to restaurants where he is likely to see her. It is understood that his affair is nothing but an amusement.
3. How does Nick go with Tom to visit Myrtle. Describe her and her husband, and what happens during the course of the evening.
Myrtle, in her mid-thirties, is fairly stout but carries her surplus flesh "sensibly." She is full of vitality and yearns to escape her circumstances and acquire all the trappings of the wealthy. George, who runs an unprofitable garage in the Valley of Ashes, is "Myrtle's man and mine." Myrtle treats him badly. Nick and Tom stop at the garage, and Tom arranges for Myrtle to meet him in the city. At Tom's city apartment, they have an impromptu party with Myrtle's sister and some neighbors. Nick is repulsed by the lower-class people's attempt to emulate the wealthy. The evening ends with everyone getting drunk and Tom breaking Myrtle's nose for insisting on repeating Daisy's name over and over.
4. Explain the significance of the puppy episode.
Myrtle's wish for the little dog is immediately fulfilled by Tom, but Myrtle considers how she will be able to care for the puppy properly. He is just for the possession. Ironically, the only person who seems to show any concern for the dog is the elevator boy, who brings milk and dog biscuits. Myrtle adores the boy as "shiftless."
5. What gossip about Gatsby does Nick hear at the party?
Gatsby is supposedly the "new war cousin" of Kaiser Wilhelm.
6. What shows Myrtle's lack of sophistication?
She uses poor grammar and speaks coarsely to her husband. She has lived with George over the garage for 11 years and Tom is her "first sweetie."

Question for Writing: Why did Tom get so angry at Myrtle for mentioning Daisy's name? From his reaction, how do you think he feels about Daisy? About Myrtle?

Activity: Overindulgence in alcohol is a problem for many of the characters in *The Great Gatsby*. Have the students work in small groups to discuss characteristic behavior of people who have had too much to drink. They might make a list of appropriate adjectives, or use an attribute web like the one on page 3 as a framework for their discussion.

Chapter Three

Vocabulary

caricature 39	omnibus 39	roanight 39	ravages 39
conspicuous 40	prodigality 40	contemptuous 42	homogeneity 44
spectroscopic 45	impetuous 45	provocation 47	corpulent 49
provincial 49	circulate 51	vinous 51	

Discussion Questions

1. Gatsby's parties are juxtaposed to Tom's in *Fitzgerald*. How do they compare?
Gatsby's parties are on a much grander scale, however the end results are not much different: everyone gets drunk and acts foolishly.
2. What does Nick mean when he says he is one of the few who were invited?
Many people merely crash the parties given by Gatsby. He doesn't even know most of his guests.
3. What are some rumors about Gatsby heard at his party?
He doesn't want any trouble with anybody. Someone says he once killed a man. Someone else says he was a German spy during the war.
4. What is Nick's comment about the gossip? What did he mean?
"It was testimony to the rampant speculation he inspired that there were whispers about him from those who had found little that it was necessary to whisper about in this world" (page 44). Nick meant that the people at the party were rather wild and daring in their casual acceptance of all kinds of behavior, and their being in awe of Gatsby was remarkable.

9. Discuss the carelessness of the Buchanans. *They leave messes behind for others to straighten out. Tom is really responsible for the deaths of Myrtle, Gatsby, and Wilson, yet he leaves town and avoids any involvement. Daisy leaves the scene of the accident and is willing to have Gatsby take the blame. They leave town after Gatsby dies and let Nick take care of the funeral arrangements.*

Question for Writing: Reread the last three paragraphs of the novel. Write in your own words what you believe Fitzgerald, through Nick, is saying.

Activities:

Have the students complete the review sheets on pages 29-30, and then discuss the sheets with the whole class.

- Have the students complete story maps similar to the one on the following page.

Have the students complete a sociogram for Daisy or another character, using the framework below.

