

Advanced Placement in
English Literature and Composition

Individual Learning Packet

Teaching Unit

The Great Gatsby

by F. Scott Fitzgerald

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The Great Gatsby

Objectives

By the end of this Unit, the student will be able to:

1. identify the nuances that contribute to a character's development;
2. trace the development of the character of Nick, noting that he is the only dynamic character;
3. examine Jay Gatsby as a Byronic/Romantic hero;
4. examine Jay Gatsby as a twentieth-century tragic hero;
5. examine the irony of the title, *The Great Gatsby*;
6. examine the techniques used to establish Nick as a credible narrator;
7. discuss the structural development of the novel;
8. construct interpretations of motifs and symbols (e.g. Doctor T. J. Eckleburg's eyes, the green light, the defunct clock);
9. discuss Fitzgerald's use of weather to reflect human emotions and conditions;
10. identify, discuss, and support from the text the major themes:
 - the decline of the American dream;
 - the hollowness of the upper class;
 - the stratification of the social classes;
11. explain the concept of a foil and show how Tom is a foil for Jay Gatsby;
12. identify either Gatsby and/or Nick as the protagonist and defend the choice;
13. analyze the extent to which *The Great Gatsby* reflects Fitzgerald's life;
14. identify the social issues and discuss the techniques that Fitzgerald uses to address and expose them:
 - domestic violence
 - changing moral standards
 - racism

The Great Gatsby

Background Lecture

FRANCIS SCOTT KEY FITZGERALD (1896 – 1940)

- Born in St. Paul, Minnesota on September 24, 1896.
- His father, Edward Fitzgerald, had charm and elegance but little money. His mother, Mollie McQuillen Fitzgerald, was an Irish immigrant. Her family was financially secure, but she did not prefer society life. The Fitzgeralds lived on the outskirts of a wealthy neighborhood, and although Scott played with the rich children, he was never totally accepted by them.
- The family moved to New York in search of work. When Scott was about 12 years old, they moved back to St. Paul.
- In 1908, Scott entered St. Paul Academy where he excelled in debate and athletics. During this time, he published some articles and three stories. Over the next ten years, Fitzgerald experienced several literary achievements, but also experienced academic decline.
- He joined the Navy and was stationed at Camp Sheridan.
- In 1918, Fitzgerald met and fell in love with eighteen-year-old Zelda Sayre. Zelda refused to marry Scott because he did not have the means to finance the kind of lifestyle she was used to. She waited for a short time, but eventually broke off their engagement.
- In 1919, Fitzgerald returned home to Minnesota. He wrote and published *This Side of Paradise*, in 1920.
- One week after the novel's release, Fitzgerald and Zelda were married in New York. One year later, Zelda gave birth to their only daughter. The family lived an extravagant lifestyle that included much drinking and many parties. Their domestic life was turbulent, largely due to the couple's heavy alcohol consumption, bordering on alcoholism. They spent their time in America and Europe.
- The monies from the sale of *This Side of Paradise* began to run out so Scott wrote and sold short stories. In 1925, Fitzgerald published *The Great Gatsby*, his most famous work.
- *The Great Gatsby*, a story that takes on the intensity of a poem, is the American equivalent of *The Waste Land*, a postwar vision of England by T. S. Eliot.

The Great Gatsby

Questions Essay and Discussion

1. One of the techniques Fitzgerald uses to develop characters is choosing names that reflect specific character traits. How do the names of George Wilson, Daisy Fay, Wolfsheim, and Dan Cody contribute to the development of these characters?
2. In what ways is *The Great Gatsby* an autobiographical novel? Does the character of Nick or the character of Gatsby seem most like Fitzgerald? What other people or events mirror Fitzgerald's life?
3. Into what genre should *The Great Gatsby* be classified? Is it a tragedy? If so, what is the fatal flaw? Is it an autobiography? If so, which character is Fitzgerald? Use the text to explain and to support the genre you choose.
4. One of Fitzgerald's strengths comes from his imagistic style. Explore how he uses images to create contrasting moods at both Buchanan's palace and Gatsby's mansion. How does he bring the Buchanan palace to life? How does he create an amusement park atmosphere at Gatsby's mansion? How do the moods contribute to the theme of new money vs. old money?
5. Choose a character from the novel and discuss the nuances that contribute to the character's development.
6. Discuss the five plot elements and assign events from the story to each part of Freytag's Pyramid.
7. Nick assigns the name of "The Great Gatsby" to Jay Gatsby. Fitzgerald assigns the name to the novel. Discuss the irony of the title. What might be a better title?
8. Fitzgerald uses ages and dates to reflect the themes and ideas. Compare the ages and dated events within the text to the years representing the era, 1918 – 1930. Consider that Daisy turns 18 when she and Nick consummate their love. Consider that Nick turns thirty after Gatsby dies. How do their ages coincide with important dates in history? What do their ages represent? How do their ages compare with important dates from Fitzgerald's life? When did WWI end? When did the American Dream die?
9. Fitzgerald clearly draws parallels between geography, social values, and characters. What social values do West Egg, East Egg, New York City, the East, the West, and the Valley of Ashes represent? Which characters are associated with each?
10. Write an interpretation of the meaning of the new, real books on Nick's library shelves. Find the text and discuss the nuances implied by the titles of the books and the implications of the similes used to describe them.

The Great Gatsby

Chapter I

1. What purpose do the first four paragraphs serve?

2. What advice does Nick's father give him? Why does Fitzgerald have Nick share his father's advice with the reader?

3. What other method does Fitzgerald use to persuade the reader that Nick is credible?

4. What does the statement "When I came back from the East last autumn..." tell you about the story to follow?

5. What importance is there in Nick's statement that "My family have been prominent, well-to-do people...for three generations"?

6. What is the setting of the story?

Chapter III

1. What is the setting for Chapter III?

2. In what ways is Chapter II like Chapter III?

3. Why is it that Fitzgerald waits until Chapter III to introduce Gatsby?

4. There are at least two examples of a polysyndeton in Chapter III. Identify one of them, and explain what it contributes to the impact of the chapter.

5. What does Nick's twice insisting that he had "actually been invited" suggest?

6. Nick comments that the people at the party conduct "themselves according to the rules of behavior associated with an amusement park." Analyze what is being conveyed by the comparison.

Chapter V

1. When Nick comes home to West Egg that night, what does he find unusual? How does this description contribute to the mood?

2. Why does Gatsby suggest that he and Nick “go to Coney Island,” or “take a plunge in the swimming-pool”?

3. How does Gatsby show that he is grateful to Nick for his agreeing to call Daisy?

4. Throughout Chapter V, how does Fitzgerald use weather to reinforce the mood?

5. What effect is created by the greenhouse hyperbole?

6. How does Daisy’s agreeing to come to Nick’s house without Tom contribute to the theme of changing moral values?

7. Explain how the ambiguous metaphor about Daisy’s voice, is appropriate.

Chapter VII

1. What allusion does Trimalchio represent?

2. Identify and explain the personification.

“Automobiles...turned expectantly into his drive...and then drove sulkily away.”

3. What foreshadows trouble at the Gatsby mansion?

4. Why did Gatsby replace his servants?

5. What is the meaning of Gatsby's statement to Tom, “I'm right across from you”?

6. What does Daisy mean when she says “...everything's so confused”?

7. What alerts Tom that his wife has other interests? What is Tom's response?

Chapter IX

1. How does Catherine respond during the trial?

2. Why is it important to Catherine that her story seem true?

3. When it is time for the funeral, what becomes of Gatsby's friends?

4. Describe Gatsby's father.

5. Mr. Gatz compares his son, Jay Gatsby, to James J. Hill. Explain the significance of this allusion.
