

Individual Learning Packet

Teaching Unit

The Great Gatsby

by F. Scott Fitzgerald

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Introduction

F. Scott Fitzgerald (1896-1940), was born and grew up in St. Paul, Minnesota; he is related to the composer of *The Star-Spangled Banner*, Francis Scott Key, for whom he was named, Prior to WWI. he enrolled in Princeton, but he left in 1917 to join the army. As a young army lieutenant stationed in Alabama during the War, he met and fell in love with Zelda Sayre, the precocious daughter of a prominent family in the area.

After the success of his first novel, *This Side of Paradise* (1920), he and Zelda married; however, problems began soon afterwards. The success of the novel, life in New York City, successions of parties and celebrities, an exorbitant lifestyle, and heavy drinking soon made stability difficult. The couple moved to Paris, but Zelda's behavior was becoming more erratic;

Fitzgerald had begun writing *Gatsby*, but under a few different titles: *Trimalchio in West Egg*, *Gatsby*, *Gold-hatted Gatsby*, *The High-bouncing Lover*. It was actually Zelda who suggested the final title.

However, in 1930, Zelda was diagnosed with a form of schizophrenia and was hospitalized, spending the remaining eighteen years of her life in and out of institutions. Fitzgerald began a disappointing career as a Hollywood screenwriter. His drinking had become a significant issue in his life, and his work suffered as a result. In 1940, Fitzgerald died of a massive heart attack. Zelda died in 1948 in a fire that swept across the hospital in which she was being treated.

All references come from the Scribner's edition of *The Great Gatsby*, copyright 2004.

Objectives

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

1. pick out the nuances that contribute to a character's development.
2. describe the differences among the major characters.
3. discuss the following themes and concepts by using portions of the book to substantiate their opinions:
 - a. As American society becomes more materialistic and loses faith in ideals, the land turns into ashes.
 - b. The very rich are a different kind of people who are insensitive to others and exhibit a moral laxness because of their wealth.
 - c. Because he does have a dream, energy, and enthusiasm, Gatsby is superior to the idle rich that he wishes to emulate.
 - d. There is an element of anti-Semitism that runs throughout the book.
4. identify and comment on the various symbols in *The Great Gatsby*, including The Eyes of T. J. Eckleburg, the Valley of Ashes, the light at the end of the dock, the color yellow, the West and the East.
5. write an essay on Gatsby and his view of the American Dream.
6. discuss the significance of *The Great Gatsby* as the title of the novel.
7. compare and contrast Tom Buchanan and Jay Gatsby.
8. examine the role that society in general has on the characters and plot of the novel.
9. identify at least three allusions that are used in this novel, and point out the significance of each to the story.
10. offer an opinion and back it up as to whether Gatsby is a tragic figure.
11. analyze Fitzgerald's writing style.
12. discuss the role of Nick in the plot, besides his being the narrator.
13. agree with or dispute the idea that Gatsby really is worth more than "the whole damn bunch put together."

Questions for Essay and Discussion

1. Explain the following: “Gatsby’s death, like his life, is the product of an illusion.”
2. In your mind, does Gatsby’s “incorruptible dream” negate his business activities? Cite evidence from the book to support your opinion.
3. Since Gatsby and Buchanan are extremely rich, one would expect them to have similar outlooks, motivations, and desires. However, they are very different. Describe how they are dissimilar, using as many points as you can to differentiate between them.
4. Prove or disprove that the following is an idea developed in this novel: *America’s loss of devotion to an ideal has turned the land into an ash heap.*
5. In the last chapter, Nick compares the green New World that Dutch sailors would have seen with the green light at the end of the dock. How do they represent similar things?
6. In the prologue, we see that Nick has arrived at a definite point of awareness. Trace his developing consciousness in the novel and comment on how he functions as the narrator.
7. Explain, using examples from the book, why Fitzgerald’s style is described as “lushly evocative.”
8. Support the following themes referring to comments and incidents in the novel:
 - A. The extremely rich are careless, arrogant people who retreat behind their money.
 - B. While the East may hold more excitement, the Midwest offers continuity and stability.
 - C. Some dreams can hold on too long and require too high a price.
 - D. We spend our lives running to catch the dreams from our past.
 - E. The life of modern man is loud, raucous, and expensive; like the valley of ashes, it is a burnt-out affair with little meaning, significance, or joy.
9. Explain the links between Tom’s relationship with Daisy and his relationship with Myrtle. Is it one of money, control, love, class, etc? Use incidents from the novel to support your opinions.
10. Very little is said about the past relationship between Daisy and Jay. What is it that makes Gatsby so consumed with her?
11. What role in the plot does Wolfsheim play? How does Fitzgerald portray him?
12. Compare and contrast Daisy and Jordan.
13. Construct a timeline of Gatsby’s life, from his early years to his death.

The Great Gatsby

Chapter I

VOCABULARY

abortive – fruitless; cut short
abruptly – suddenly
acute – sharp, keen
banns – public announcement of a proposed marriage
coherence – clarity
compelled – forced
complacency – self-satisfaction
conferred – bestowed
contemptuous – disdainful
contour – the shape
conviction – a strong, certain belief
corroborated – confirmed
deft – skillful
divan – a couch
elations – joys
epigram – a short, witty poem or saying
erect – upright
extemporizing – improvising
fervent – intense
fractiousness – quarrelsomeness
hardy – tough
imperatively – commandingly
incredulously – skeptically
infinitesimal – incalculably small
intimation – a hint
irrelevant – not pertaining; unimportant
languidly – sluggishly
levity – happiness; frivolousness
parcelled – given out; measured
paternal – fatherly
peremptorily – urgently; commandingly
pungent – strong-smelling
reciprocal – returned
riotous – showy
rotogravure – a method of printing photographs
supercilious – coolly superior
tangible – solid; touchable

Chapter IV

VOCABULARY

bootlegger – a maker of illegal whiskey (especially during Prohibition)
denizen – a frequent visitor; a regular
disconcerting – embarrassing; jarring
dispensed – gave out
fluctuate – to rise and fall
gilt – golden
inevitably – unavoidably
knickerbockers – loose, short pants gathered at the knee
monopolizing – having sole access to
punctilious – careful; exacting
roved – wandered
sauterne – a white wine
sporadic – infrequent
succulent – juicy
unfathomable – immeasurable

1. Since most of his guests ignore him, why do they come to Gatsby's house?

2. In the list of guests, what further indication is there that the old money is in East Egg and the new money in West Egg?

3. Why is Nick a little disappointed with Gatsby?

8. Find an example of a paradox in the description of how Nick sees himself in relation to Gatsby and Daisy.

9. In the third-to-last paragraph of this chapter, what does Nick mean when he says, “There must have been moments even that afternoon Daisy tumbled short of his dreams—not through her own fault, but because of the colossal vitality of his illusion”?
