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Literature Teaching Unit

Chapter-by-Chapter Study Guide



The Great Gatsby

by F. Scott Fitzgerald

- Learning objectives
- Study Guide with short-answer questions
- Background information
- Vocabulary in context
- Multiple-choice test
- Essay questions
- Literary terms



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The Great Gatsby

Note to the Teacher

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. The novel was published in 1925.

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. 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.

The Great Gatsby

Objectives

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

1. pick out the nuances that contribute to a character's development in the book.
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 Doctor T. J. Eckleburg, the valley of ashes, the light at the end of the dock, the color yellow, the West and the East, etc.
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 as to whether Gatsby is a tragic figure, and provide evidence to support your claim.
11. analyze Fitzgerald's writing style.

The Great Gatsby

Questions for Essay and Discussion

1. Explain the following: “Gatsby’s death, like his life, is the product of an illusion.”
2. 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 by 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 be held too long and require too high a price.
 - D. We spend our lives running to catch the dreams of our past.
 - E. The life of modern man is loud, raucous, and expensive; like the valley of ashes, however, 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, or something else? Use incidents from the novel to support your opinions.
10. Very little is said about the past relationship between Daisy and Gatsby. What is it that makes him so consumed with her?
11. What role does Wolfsheim play in the plot? How does Fitzgerald portray him?

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?

4. Why does Nick have to "restrain his incredulous laughter" when Gatsby says he is "...trying to forget something very sad that had happened to me a long time ago"?

4. When Nick asks Gatsby what business he is in, Gatsby responds, "That's my affair," before he realizes that it is not an appropriate reply. Why does Gatsby give that answer, and why is it not an appropriate reply?

5. Why does Gatsby throw all his shirts on the table?

6. Obviously, Daisy, with all her money, is not going to cry over some shirts; why does she cry?

7. As the three of them look across the bay toward Daisy's house, the narrator states,

"Possibly it had occurred to him that the colossal significance of that light had now vanished forever. Compared to the great distance that had separated him from Daisy it had seemed very near to her, almost touching her. It had seemed as close as a star to the moon. Now it was again a green light on a dock. His count of enchanted objects had diminished by one."

Explain what Fitzgerald means by:

- A. "the colossal significance of that light."

- B. "Compared to the great distance" between Gatsby and Daisy.

- C. "Now it was again a green light on a dock. His count of enchanted objects had diminished by one."
