



# The Great Gatsby

by F. Scott Fitzgerald

A Lively Learning Guide  
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## Introduction

### In a Nutshell

*The Great Gatsby*, published in 1925, is set in New York City and Long Island during the Prohibition era. Author [F. Scott Fitzgerald](#) associated this moment in American history – "[The Jazz Age](#)" – with the materialism and immorality that accompanied newfound wealth in the post-[World War I](#) era. The novel's protagonist is Jay Gatsby, a young, wealthy man in love with a society girl from his past.

*Gatsby* tackles issues such as the American Dream, wealth and class, materialism, and marital infidelity. Although now widely regarded as one of the Great American Novels, *The Great Gatsby* did not sell very many copies when it was initially published. In fact, it wasn't until the novel was re-published after [World War II](#) that it gained its immense popularity – after Fitzgerald passed away from a heart attack at the age of forty-four.

While *Gatsby* is a work of fiction, the story has many similarities to Fitzgerald's real life experiences. Fitzgerald's own personal history is interwoven between the fictitious backgrounds of both Jay Gatsby and Nick Carraway. Nick is simultaneously mesmerized and disgusted by Gatsby's extravagant lifestyle, which is similar to how Fitzgerald professed to feel about the "Jazz Age" excesses that he himself adopted. As an Ivy League educated, middle-class Midwesterner, Fitzgerald (like Nick) saw through the shallow materialism of the era. But (like Gatsby) Fitzgerald came back from [World War I](#) and fell in love with a wealthy southern socialite – Zelda Sayre. *The Great Gatsby* is swaddled in Fitzgerald's simultaneous embrace of and disdain for 1920s luxury.

Since Fitzgerald did indeed partake in the [Jazz Age](#)'s high life of decadence, it's not surprising that the details of the setting and characters make *The Great Gatsby* a sort of time capsule preserving this particular time in American history. *Gatsby* is taught in many high schools and colleges in part because it's both a history lesson and a novel. You may find that when many people refer to the "[Jazz Age](#)," they automatically associate it with *Gatsby*, and vice versa.

### Why Should I Care?

*The Great Gatsby* is a delightful concoction of [MTV Cribs](#), VH1's [The Fabulous Life Of...](#), and HBO's [Sopranos](#). Shake over ice, add a twist of jazz, a spritz of adultery, and the little pink umbrella that completes this long island iced tea and you've got yourself a 5 o'clock beverage that, given the 1920's setting, you wouldn't be allowed to drink.

The one thing all these shows and *Gatsby* have in common is the notion of the American Dream. The Dream has seen its ups and downs. But from [immigration](#) (certainly not a modern

concern, right?) to the [Depression](#) (stock market crashing? We wouldn't know anything about that), the American Dream has always meant the same thing: it's all about the Benjamins, baby.

Yet *Gatsby* reminds us that the dollars aren't always enough. As we learned from DiCaprio in [Titanic](#), you can put on the tuxedo, but you still aren't going to know which fork to use. At least back in the 1920's – especially if you're bootlegging to make the money for the tuxedo. Even when they have the cash, newly-made millionaires are still knocking at the door for the accepted elite to let them in. If the concept of the *nouveau riche* (the newly rich) has gone by the wayside, the barriers to the upper echelon (education, background) certainly haven't.

So there you have it. There's more to the *Gatsby* cocktail than sex, lies, and organized crime. Although those are there, too, which, as far as reading the book goes, is kind of a motivation in itself.

## Summary

### Book Summary

Our narrator, Nick Carraway, begins the book by giving us some advice of his father's about not criticizing others. Through Nick's eyes, we meet his second cousin, Daisy Buchanan, her large and aggressive husband, Tom Buchanan, and Jordan Baker, who quickly becomes a romantic interest for our narrator (probably because she's the only girl around who isn't his cousin). While the Buchanans live on the fashionable [East Egg](#) (we're talking [Long Island, NY](#) in the 1920's, by the way), Nick lives on the less-elite but not-too-shabby West Egg, which sits across the bay from its twin town. We are soon fascinated by a certain Mr. Jay Gatsby, a wealthy and mysterious man who owns a huge mansion next door to Nick and spends a good chunk of his evenings standing on his lawn and looking at an equally mysterious green light across the bay.

Tom takes Nick to the city to show off his mistress, a woman named Myrtle Wilson who is, of course, married. (Fidelity is a rare bird in this novel.) Myrtle's husband, George, is a passive, working class man who owns an auto garage and is oblivious to his wife's extramarital activities. Nick is none too impressed by Tom.

Back on West Egg, this Gatsby fellow has been throwing absolutely killer parties, where everyone and his mother can come and get wasted and try to figure out how Gatsby got so rich. Nick meets and warily befriends the mystery man at one of his huge Saturday night affairs. He also begins spending time with Jordan, who turns out to be loveable in all her cynical practicality.

Moving along, Gatsby introduces Nick to his "business partner," Meyer Wolfsheim. Everyone



(that is, Nick and readers everywhere) can tell there's something fishy about Gatsby's work, his supposed [Oxford](#) education, and his questionable place among society's elite. Next, Gatsby reveals to Nick (via Jordan, in the middle school phone-tag kind of way) that he and Daisy had a love thing before he went away to the war and she married Tom (after a serious episode of cold feet that involved whisky and a bath tub). Gatsby wants Daisy back. The plan is for Nick to invite her over to tea and have her casually bump into Gatsby.

Nick executes the plan; Gatsby and Daisy are reunited and start an affair. Everything continues swimmingly until Tom meets Gatsby, doesn't like him, and begins investigating into his affairs. Nick, meanwhile, has revealed Gatsby's true past to us: he grew up in a poor, uneducated family, and would in all likelihood have stayed that way had he not met the wealthy and elderly Dan Cody, who took him in as a companion and taught him what he needed to know. Yet it wasn't Dan that left Gatsby his oodles of money – that part of his life is still suspicious.

The big scene goes down in the city, when Tom has it out with Gatsby over who gets to be with Daisy; in short, Gatsby is outed for being a bootlegger and Daisy is unable to leave her husband for her lover. As the party drives home to Long Island, Tom's mistress, Myrtle, is struck and killed by Gatsby's car (in which Gatsby and Daisy are riding). Gatsby tells Nick that Daisy was driving, but that he's going to take the blame for it. Tom, meanwhile, feeds Gatsby to the wolves by telling George where to find the man that killed his wife, Myrtle. George Wilson shoots and kills Gatsby before taking his own life.

Daisy and Tom take off, leaving their mess behind. Nick, who by now is fed up with ALL of these people, breaks things off with Jordan in a rather brusque way. He is the only one left to take care of Gatsby's affairs and arrange for his funeral, which, save one peculiar former guest, none of Gatsby's party-goers attend. Nick does meet Gatsby's father, who fills in the picture we have of Gatsby's youth. Standing on Gatsby's lawn and looking at the green light (which, not accidentally, turned out to be the light in front of Daisy's house across the bay), Nick concludes that our nostalgia, our desire to replicate the past, forces us constantly back into it.

## Chapter One

- We meet our narrator. But before we really know who he is, we hear the advice that he got from his father: "Whenever you feel like criticizing anyone, just remember that all the people in this world haven't had the advantages that you've had."
- We learn that our narrator is non-judgmental. As a result, people tell him their life stories like he's the bartender on [Cheers](#).
- We find out that he is "a Carraway," which means something in the way of wealth and class. And he went to Yale.
- This Carraway fellow introduces us to the setting: New York City and the twin villages of [West Egg and East Egg](#) in [Long Island](#). Please note that West Egg, where Carraway lives, is not as fancy-shmancy as East Egg. But it's still pretty fancy-shmancy compared to the



rest of the world.

- On this "less fashionable" Egg, Nick Carraway (who, by the way, is a "bond man") lives next to a huge mansion inhabited by a mysterious Mr. Gatsby. More on him later.
- Nick heads over to East Egg to have dinner with Daisy, his second cousin, and her husband, Tom Buchanan, whom he went to college with.
- The Buchanans have tons of money, and Nick likes to tell us all about it.
- We see that Tom is a rather large and "aggressive" former football player. In other words, this guy is not the sensitive, lyric-writing type.
- We then meet two women dressed in white – Daisy, of course, and her friend, Jordan Baker.
- Daisy and Tom have a child, who spends the majority of her three-year-old time sleeping in the other room.
- When, in friendly cocktail conversation, Nick casually mentions Gatsby, Daisy gets *particularly* interested.
- In general, Daisy spends Chapter One being happy and excited about life and having a bruise that Tom accidentally gave her. There's also talk of the peculiar qualities of her excited little voice.
- The following is a rather dramatic scene: Tom gets a phone call, Daisy freaks out and goes to yell at him, and Jordan reveals that Tom is screwing around on the side. Not only that, but he's screwing around with a woman tactless enough to call his house all the time to ask what's up.
- Jordan reveals to Nick that *everyone* knows about the affair.
- Daisy comes back and talks about when her daughter was born: Tom wasn't there, and she wished that her daughter would be a "beautiful little fool."
- It turns out that Jordan is an athlete (golf). Nick feels like he's heard about her before, but he can't remember the story. More on that later.
- Daisy then jokes about Jordan and Nick getting together.
- When Nick finally gets home to West Egg, he notices that his neighbor, Mr. Gatsby, is out on the lawn, just chilling and perhaps contemplating the addition of some plastic flamingoes to his "blue lawn." Why is the lawn always blue? Good question.
- Except that Gatsby is not just chilling and thinking about flamingoes. He stares across the water at a lone green light before stretching his arm out towards it oh-so-symbolically.

## Chapter Two

- Nick describes the land that lies in between the Eggs and New York. He calls it a "valley of ashes," which sounds really unpleasant.
- Above this dead land are the eyes of Doctor T.J. Eckleburg, or rather, a billboard that features the eyes of Doctor T.J. Eckleburg. (It's not socialite graffiti, just an advertisement for an eye doctor.)
- In case you are interested in colors (and in this book, we recommend it), the eyes are blue and the spectacles yellow.
- Anyway, the whole reason we hear about these ashes and eyes is that Nick is traveling to

the city with Tom, who insists on stopping to show Nick his mistress.

- The mistress is the wife of an auto mechanic named George B. Wilson – at least, that's the name he has on the front of his repair shop.
- Tom acts like a jerk towards the husband (who is doing some sort of car work for him) and then sends the wife (Myrtle) a not-so-covert message to meet him later.
- George (Myrtle's husband) doesn't know about the affair. He thinks Myrtle just goes to the city to visit her sister.
- On the train on the way to the city, Myrtle wants a puppy.
- Tom buys her a puppy. Yes, he's her sugar-daddy.
- This whole situation is so wrong that Nick tries to jump ship. But the happy, adulterous couple doesn't let him.
- When they get to the city, they head to the adulterous sex apartment and meet up with others, including a Mr. McKee and Myrtle's sister, Catherine. They all play Kings (roughly speaking) with Tom's whiskey.
- Nick gets drunk for the second time in his life.
- When Nick reveals that he lives in West Egg, one of the drunken many goes on and on about the *fabulous* parties that this guy Gatsby throws.
- Myrtle's sister whispers to Nick that Myrtle and Tom both hate their spouses. It becomes clear that Tom has told Myrtle some lies to string her along without having to divorce Daisy.
- There is some discussion of not marrying below your social caste, which apparently Myrtle did.
- Tom tells Myrtle to stop saying Daisy's name.
- Myrtle says "Daisy, Daisy, Daisy."
- Tom backhands Myrtle.
- Myrtle's nose is broken.
- Nick gets too drunk to remember how he got into bed.

## Chapter Three

- Nick describes the elaborate parties (complete with an orchestra) that Jay Gatsby throws most nights throughout the summer. Hordes of people arrive to get their collective grooves on. Many of them never meet Gatsby, and most were not invited.
- Nick goes to his first party at Jay Gatsby's after receiving an invitation via Gatsby's chauffeur.
- He meets Jordan at the party, we are reminded she is a golfer, and everybody gossips about the mysterious Gatsby and how he might be a murderer or in the CIA or something.
- Nick wanders into the library (you can tell he's not a big party aficionado) and meets a man with owl-eyed spectacles who is in awe that all these books are real – pages and everything!
- Owl-eyed man also mentions one of the famous Fitzgerald lines: "I've been drunk for about a week now, and I thought it might sober me up to sit in a library."

- Back outside, Nick meets an unknown man who gives him the old "you look familiar" line. They chat about having both been in the war (WWI).
- Turns out, the mysterious man is the mysterious Gatsby. Who'd have thought? Certainly not Nick, who expected Gatsby to be older (whereas in reality, he is about Nick's age).
- Gatsby leaves to take a phone call, and later sends his butler to get Jordan, as he wants to speak with her alone.
- Inside the house, Nick watches a woman with red hair singing along to a piano and weeping black mascara tears.
- Everyone is fighting with his or her spouse. The men are mad because they're not being allowed to talk to the hot young things, and the women are mad because their husbands are trying to talk to the hot young things.
- Jordan comes back from the chat with Gatsby; she taunts Nick (and us) about the "tantalizing" news without revealing any of it. She then tells Nick to come and visit her at her aunt's house.
- Gatsby says goodnight to Nick with his signature "old sport" usage. They have plans to go up in his "hydroplane" tomorrow.
- BUT the excitement isn't over yet. Nick sees that a coupe leaving the driveway has hit a wall and lost a wheel.
- The driver? None other than the owl-eyed man himself.
- No, wait – moments after that we find out he was not, in fact, the driver. There was someone else in the car. We suggest you dog-ear this page for later reference.
- That's it for the night of the party.
- Nick falls into his work-eat-sleep routine and Jordan doesn't pop up again until mid-summer, when they start hanging out together.
- Nick tells us it isn't love, but that it's curiosity. Whatever you need to tell yourself.
- When Jordan lies about leaving the top down in a borrowed convertible, and it jogs Nick's memory about that "story" he had been trying to remember regarding Jordan: she may have cheated in a professional golf tournament once.
- Yet another classic Fitzgerald line: "Dishonesty in a woman is something you never blame deeply." Ha.
- She's also a horrible driver, but we're not making any women jokes about that.
- Nick tells her to be careful, but Jordan says no, it's fine, as long as *other* people are careful drivers. She says she hopes that she never meets a person as careless as herself. "I hate careless people," she tells Nick. "That's why I like you."
- With that conversation, Nick is sold. He realizes he needs to break things off with a certain girl back in Chicago.
- Nick then says everyone suspects himself of one of the cardinal virtues – and he is one of the few honest people he has ever known.

## Chapter Four

- We hear some more guesses as to Gatsby's occupation. (Murderer? Bootlegger? Alien?)
- Nick goes on and on about the names, occupations, and personal histories of all the people who come to Gatsby's parties.
- Gatsby comes to get Nick for lunch in his huge and fancy yellow [Rolls-Royce](#).
- He explains to Nick his own personal history: he's the son of the wealthy Midwesterners and he was educated at [Oxford](#).
- Nick recalls that the general public, and more specifically Jordan, has some doubts about Gatsby's Oxford claim.
- Gatsby says he's from San Francisco (which doesn't exactly seem like the Middle West to us, but whatever). He also talks about the war and shows Nick a medal that says "Major Jay Gatsby." If that were not enough, he shows a photograph of him with the old Oxford gang.
- Nick is sold. He believes Gatsby. But FYI, if you ever need to see photographic proof to believe your friends' stories, it's probably a bad sign.
- AHA! Turns out Gatsby was just buttering him up to ask for a big favor; he wants Nick to talk with Jordan about something, but is vague and won't give further specifics.
- Nick resents being treated like a tool.
- When he's pulled over by a policeman, Gatsby simply reveals his identity and gets off the hook ([Tony Soprano](#) style).
- Once they get to the city, Gatsby introduces Nick to his business partner, Mr. Wolfsheim.
- Nick instinctively knows that there is something fishy about the working partnership (which is also [Tony Soprano](#) style).
- Supposedly, Mr. Wolfsheim fixed the [World Series of 1919](#). We don't even have to tell you whose style that is.
- Oh, we forgot to mention: Mr. Wolfsheim's cufflinks are made of human molars. (Kurtz style from *Heart of Darkness*.)
- Nick sees none other than Tom Buchanan across the room. He goes to introduce Gatsby, but Gatsby has bolted.
- They meet Tom by accident, but when Nick turns to introduce Gatsby to Tom, Gatsby has disappeared. The plot thickens.
- Nick later meets up with Jordan and she tells Nick the story of how Gatsby and Daisy met in October, 1917. Jordan herself saw them together; Daisy (all dressed in white – get used to that) was eighteen and the Queen Bee of high society, and Gatsby was a young officer head-over-heels in love with her.
- By 1918, Jordan had her own boyfriends and had begun to play in tournaments. We don't think this is relevant, but Jordan clearly did.
- Daisy's family, meanwhile, had prevented Daisy from going to say good-bye to this soldier. Daisy responded with a teenage "I hate you! I'm never leaving my room again!" which lasted until the next fall, when she was once again Queen Bee'ing her way around town. This time, though, she was running in "older" circles with the more sophisticated crowd.

- By June of 1919, Daisy was married to Tom, whose massive wealth probably helped with the proposal.
- BUT, Jordan saw Daisy the night before her wedding, completely drunk. She was waving a letter about in the air and saying she's "chang' her mine!" which is drunk Daisy for "I don't want to marry Tom because I still love Gatsby and also Tom's kind of a jerk and potentially abusive."
- Apparently Jordan failed to deliver Daisy's sloshed message, because by the following April, in 1920, Daisy had given birth to a little girl.
- Daisy, it seemed, was crazy about her husband by the time she got back from the honeymoon. This probably speaks to Tom's skills in the bedroom more than anything else.
- Whether Tom felt the same way about Daisy is up for grabs, since shortly after their honeymoon it is suggested that he was screwing a hotel maid.
- Also, Daisy doesn't drink. Well, at least since that wedding eve incident.
- Jordan continues the story. Six weeks ago, when Daisy first heard of Gatsby again, she started to ask questions and realized it was the man she had loved so long ago.
- That's it for Jordan's history of Daisy. Jordan then explains to Nick that Gatsby only bought his house so he would be near Daisy.
- She also proposes Gatsby's plan: that Nick invite Daisy over for tea (without Tom) and then have Gatsby casually drop by.
- Nick says, "Sure, but let's stop talking about them so we can make out." Roughly speaking.

## Chapter Five

- When Nick arrives home after his talk with Jordan, Gatsby is waiting for him, excited as a little kid on Christmas morning. But he tries to hide it and play Mr. Cool.
- Gatsby offers Nick the opportunity to make some money on the side...very suspicious. Nick says no, playing it off as though he's just too busy.
- On the big day, Gatsby is all nerves. He's afraid that she's not coming, that the food isn't right, that the sky is too blue, etc.
- When Daisy gets there, as usual, we hear all about her voice and how special and excited it is.
- Nick tries to leave the two alone for a minute but even the silence sounds awkward, so he joins them again.
- Gatsby gives Nick the old "can I see you for a minute?" and in the other room flips out about how badly things are going.
- Nick suggests Daisy might feel less uncomfortable were they NOT speaking about her in clearly audible tones in the next room. Right.
- Nick runs outside and chills in the rain while the two do their thing.
- When he finally comes back, Gatsby is glowing, and Daisy is crying. We'll let you deduce what transpired in the interim. (But really, all they did is talk.)

- While Daisy is powdering her nose, Nick and Gatsby look with awe on Gatsby's house. Gatsby slips up a little when he says it took him three years to earn the money for it, and when Nick questions his earlier statement that he inherited the money, Gatsby gets suddenly defensive. Hmm!
- As they explore Gatsby's house, Nick thinks he hears the ghostly laughter of the owl-eyed man in the library.
- It becomes painfully obvious that Gatsby only has such a fine house and such fine things for the purpose of impressing Daisy.
- When Daisy sees Gatsby's collection of expensive shirts, she cries about how beautiful they are.
- Nick muses that, since Daisy is now here with Gatsby, the green light loses its magical mystery significance. The present, it seems, is inadequate when compared to past ideals.
- OK, this is important: While they are perusing his house, Gatsby explains that a large framed picture is one Mr. Dan Cody, supposedly an "old friend." Keep this in mind.
- They go downstairs and have this man Klipspringer play "[The Love Nest](#)" on the piano.
- Nick heads home, leaving Gatsby and Daisy alone together.

## Chapter Six

- A newspaper man from the city has heard the great rumors about this mysterious Mr. Gatsby who throws lavish parties. He comes (in vain) to get information from Jay.
- Nick decides to tell us the truth about Gatsby's past. Apparently, the man lied about everything. Even his name. So here's the real deal:
- Gatsby grew up poor with the name "James Gatz." (It is kind of cute how he just played around with the "y" sound.)
- The creation that is "Jay Gatsby" was born the day James Gatz, at 17-years-old, rowed out to meet Dan Cody's yacht, to tell him that a "wind might catch up and break him up in half an hour." Dan Cody (sound familiar?) became his mentor and best friend. He spent the next five years as Cody's steward, mate, skipper, secretary, and, sometimes, when Cody got too drunk, jailor (and probably head-holder, too). Cody's negative example, we are told, is why Gatsby drinks so little.
- Nick recalls the portrait of the man in Gatsby's bedroom. We're a step ahead of you, Nick.
- According to Cody's will, Gatsby was supposed to inherit his money – but Cody's mistress intervened and kept it for herself.
- And that's the real deal. Nick says he didn't find this out until much later, but he wants to dish it to us now.
- Back to the story at hand. Nick is chilling at Gatsby's place when this man Sloane and the girl he's with stop by – with Tom Buchanan.
- Gatsby goes about entertaining the guests who dropped in unannounced and rather presumptuously.
- Now that Gatsby has, in his mind, secured Daisy, he's rather aggressive to Tom, taunting



subtly, "I know your wife."

- Tom, who hates to be out-manned by anyone, takes an instant disliking to Gatsby.
- When they go to leave, Gatsby tries to get them to stay and have dinner with him. He wants to see more of Tom.
- The woman in the trio invites Gatsby to come to dinner with *them*; although he clearly isn't wanted by the men (and even the woman may have asked with [Mean Girls](#) sentiment), Gatsby decides to join anyway.
- As Gatsby goes to get dressed, the trio leaves without him. Nick recognizes how horrible this is for Gatsby.
- The next Saturday, Tom and Daisy both come to Gatsby's party. Now that's just asking for trouble.
- Gatsby, with his tongue-in-cheek, consistently introduces Tom as "the [polo](#) player," despite objections.
- Daisy and Gatsby sneak over to Nick's house to have some couple time on his front steps.
- At dinner, Tom leaves to eat at another table. Daisy knows what it's all about – she tells Nick that the girl is "common but pretty" and even goes so far as to give Tom her "little gold pencil" in case he needs to write anything down (like a phone number, for instance, or a "let's meet here to have an affair" address).
- Nick tells us that the tone of this party is different from the others; everyone is hostile, drunk, and kind of rude.
- There is some general fascination with a movie star who is there with her director. Said director has been staring at her loveliness and finally goes to kiss her on the neck. This woman, sitting under a WHITE tree, is clearly the object of this man's fascination. Hmm.
- Aside from the pretty actress, Daisy doesn't like the crudeness of the crowd, or of West Egg in general. But she pretends to be impressed with it when Tom starts knocking the party.
- Tom wants to find out "the truth" about Gatsby – mostly how he got his money, which to a mind like Tom's is pretty much your defining feature.
- Daisy is extremely certain that Gatsby's money came from drug stores. We still don't know. She leaves with Tom.
- Nick stays until the bitter end. He talks with Gatsby, who is concerned that he "can't make Daisy understand."
- "Understand what?" you might be thinking. And rightly so. Nick tells us that Gatsby wants the impossible out of Daisy: "He wanted nothing less of Daisy than that she should go to Tom and say: 'I never loved you.'"
- Nick cautions Gatsby that he can't repeat the past.
- Gatsby incredulously replies that "of course you can!"
- Nick imagines Gatsby as a younger man courting the eighteen-year-old Daisy. Gatsby wanted to "gulp" down everything that surrounded her – her life, the culture of the wealthy, the wonder. It's all very poetic and lovely. You should definitely check out the full passage in your book.
- Nick says he is "reminded of" something that he has long forgotten – but it escapes his mind. Very curious, indeed.



## Chapter Seven

- The next Saturday night rolls around, but Gatsby has locked himself up in his house like an angry curmudgeon on Halloween. No party tonight, folks.
- He has also fired all his servants and hired new ones who won't gossip; Daisy has started coming around often in the afternoons. Yes, what you think is happening on those afternoons is indeed happening.
- Nick is instructed to go over to East Egg and hang at the Buchanan's house with everyone.
- Perhaps fittingly, it is the hottest day ever.
- Nick enters the house to see Daisy and Jordan doing what they do best: wearing white dresses and listening to Tom talk on the phone to his mistress.
- Nick tries to pretend it isn't Tom's mistress on the phone. He's not fooling anyone.
- Gatsby shows up. Daisy sends Tom into the other room to make a drink and kisses Jay wildly, declaring that she loves him.
- Daisy's daughter makes a minor appearance before being taken back into the care of the Nurse (or nanny).
- Gatsby is slightly upset (although he tries to hide it) at the existence of the child.
- Tom comes back with drinks, and they all have an extraordinarily strained cocktail time with one another.
- Daisy utters yet another famous Fitzgerald line: "What'll we do with ourselves this afternoon? And the day after that, and the next thirty years?" Good question.
- Despite the heat, Daisy makes the comment to Gatsby: "You always look so cool."
- Don't worry – Nick interprets for us. This is Daisy-speak, he tells us, for "I love you," and since Tom speaks Daisy-speak, the cocktail hour strain increases tenfold.
- To break this tension, they all decide to go into town.
- They bring whiskey...because that's sure to help the situation.
- While everyone is getting ready, Nick and Gatsby are alone to discuss Daisy's voice, which Gatsby decides is "full of money." Nick agrees.
- Daisy and Gatsby go in the Buchanans' car (blue) and Tom drives Gatsby's car (yellow) with Nick and Jordan as passengers.
- Tom realizes two things: First, his wife is having an affair with Gatsby. Second, Jordan and Nick know about the whole thing.
- They pass the eyes of T.J. Eckleburg and stop for gas at Wilson's station. The Tom's mistress's husband Wilson? Yes, that very one.
- Wilson, who now knows about his wife's affair but doesn't know it's with Tom, reveals that he needs money because he and his wife are going to move out West.
- Nick makes the astute observation that both men (Tom and Wilson) have recently discovered their wives are cheating on them, and that such a discovery can make one physically ill. Well, that and the oppressive heat.
- Nick *again* sees the eyes of T.J. Eckleburg keeping "their vigil," and compares them to

another set of eyes; Myrtle Wilson watching from an upstairs window.

- The person she's staring at is Jordan, who she thinks is Tom's wife.
- Tom realizes he's losing control – of his wife and of his mistress.
- The two cars finally stop to figure out where exactly they are going, which is a nice thing to know when you're trying to get there.
- They end up at a suite in the Plaza hotel in an attempt to cool off.
- Tensions increase (yes, it is possible) between Gatsby and Tom. Tom accuses him (again, in the subtle [Mean Girls](#) way) of lying about his being an [Oxford](#) man.
- Gatsby clarifies that he *was* at Oxford, but only for a few months.
- Tom finally explodes and explicitly calls out the affair. Interestingly, he doesn't seem so much bothered by the infidelity as by the fact that Gatsby is "Mr. Nobody from Nowhere."
- Gatsby waits for Daisy to say her line, but she doesn't, so *he* tells Tom, "Daisy never loved you."
- Tom says that she does love him, and that in fact he loves her too, even though he's been banging everything that walks since they got married.
- Daisy tells Tom he's "revolting" and asks how she could possibly love him now. She has a really hard time saying she never loved him, but she does eventually, after much internal deliberation.
- Tom gets all puppy-dog sad, asking if she loved him here, or there, or that time when he carried her over all those puddles so it wouldn't ruin her favorite pair of shoes.
- Daisy breaks down and admits that, aw, fine, she did at one point love him. But not anymore.
- Gatsby has a major freak out about this. He then insists to Tom that Daisy is leaving him.
- Tom reveals that Gatsby is a bootlegger (don't forget, alcohol was illegal back then).
- Gatsby gets excited and tries to deny it.
- Daisy begs to go, and they head home with Daisy and Gatsby together in Gatsby's car.
- Nick realizes it is his birthday – he is thirty.
- Everything is progressing quite skippily until Nick narrates, "So we drove on toward death through the cooling twilight."
- Things are pretty much downhill from there.
- Tom, Jordan, and Nick stop at the Wilson's place again – it is obvious a tragedy has occurred.
- Michaelis, Wilson's neighbor, reveals that Myrtle came running out when she saw a yellow car. The car struck and killed her, and then sped off without stopping.
- It is obvious to Nick and company that the car was Gatsby's.
- Tom converses with a policeman at the scene of the crime about how the guilty car is YELLOW, but his own car is BLUE.
- As they drive away, Tom whimpers that Gatsby is a "god-damned coward" because he didn't even stop.
- When they get back to Long Island, Nick finds Gatsby waiting outside the Buchanans' house to make sure Tom doesn't get violent with Daisy.
- Gatsby reveals that Daisy was driving the car when it struck Myrtle – but he is prepared to sacrifice himself, to let everybody think that *he* was the one driving the car.

- Observing a scene of intimacy between Tom and Daisy, Nick realizes that the couple has reconciled. When he leaves, Jay Gatsby is still watching the house, which in Nick's words is "watching over nothing."

## Chapter Eight

- Gatsby waits all night but nothing happens. (Good call, Nick.)
- The next morning, Nick warns Gatsby that he should go away for a while. Gatsby can't imagine leaving Daisy at this moment, so he stays.
- Nick tells us that this was the first moment he learned of Gatsby's history – the history he revealed to us back in Chapter Six.
- But we get a few more details, courtesy of the Nick grapevine:
- Daisy was the first "nice" girl Gatsby had ever known or met. His initial plan was to get some backseat action, but then he accidentally fell in love. It happens.
- There's a great discussion of class and wealth, here. Gatsby felt uncomfortable in Daisy's house – she was simply from a finer world than he. When he finally "took" her (in the sex sense of the word), it was because he wasn't dignified enough to have any other relationship.
- Nick reveals that Gatsby misled her, too, making her believe he was in a position to offer her the safety and financial security of a good marriage, when in fact all he had to give was some lousy undying love.
- In the war, Gatsby did well for himself (medals and such). He tried to get home as soon as the war was over, but through some administrative error or possibly the hand of God, he was sent to Oxford.
- Meanwhile, Daisy got tired of waiting for him and married Tom (right after the drunken sobfest we heard about earlier).
- Gatsby, desperate, tries to figure out what will happen "now." He tries to reassure himself that Daisy *does* still love him and that the two of them can live happily ever after.
- In an interesting moment, one of Gatsby's servants details that he's going to have the pool drained. Gatsby comments that he hasn't used the pool all summer. Just wait for it.
- As he leaves, Nick reveals his feelings for Gatsby when he says, "They're a rotten crowd [...]. You're worth the whole damn bunch put together." And YET, Nick reminds us that he "disapproved" of Gatsby "from beginning to end."
- Once he's at work, Jordan calls him on the phone. They are both sort of cold to each other. Their status just changed from "in a relationship" to "it's complicated."
- No, wait, they are both now officially "single." In some way, Nick is just sick of the entire crowd and doesn't want to have anything more to do with them.
- Back to the Myrtle death story. We find all of this out from Nick who found out from Michaelis (or possibly some other intermediary):
- Wilson, in the midst of his grieving, revealed that he had recently started to suspect his wife of having an affair. He had found an expensive dog collar in her room (from Tom) and

- huge bruises on her face one day (also from Tom).
- Wilson came to the sudden conclusion that whoever was driving the car was the same man having an affair with his wife.
  - Before she died, Wilson had taken his wife over to the window and told her that she couldn't fool God – that God was always watching. Conveniently, the large eyes of T.J. Eckleburg emerged visible from the fog.
  - And that's the end of that story.
  - Back in present time, Wilson goes on a crazy vengeance mission to find out who owns that yellow car. He, of course, ends up at Gatsby's house.
  - Gatsby, meanwhile, has decided that it's time to use that pool of his.
  - Shots are fired.
  - Nick ends up at Gatsby's house, and together with the staff discovers that Wilson has shot Gatsby and then himself. Both are dead.

## Chapter Nine

- After dealing with police, photographers, and rubberneckers, Nick tries to get in touch with Daisy. He finds that the Buchanans have gone and left no forwarding address.
- Nick tries to track down friends and family for Gatsby, but no one wants to come and pay their respects.
- Nick gets a mysterious phone call at Gatsby's house that is obviously intended for Gatsby; it confirms that Jay was indeed involved in illegalities.
- Nick is able to delay the funeral, however, until Gatsby's father arrives.
- Mr. Gatz (the father) has typical parental misconceptions; he believes his boy was going to help "build up the country," had he lived.
- A man who knew Gatsby calls – he's too busy to come to the funeral, but he wants a pair of shoes back that he left at the house. We feel good about the fact that Nick hangs up on him.
- Nick begins to feel "shame" for Gatsby, who was so generous to so many people but ultimately had only one friend – Nick.
- Nick can't even get Gatsby's business partner, Meyer Wolfsheim, to show up.
- From Gatsby's father, Nick learns how Gatsby wanted always to improve himself as a child – how he wanted to rise above the life of the poor, uneducated family into which he was born.
- He even wrote out little schedules and "resolves" for himself.
- When we finally get to the funeral, it's a terribly rainy day.
- One other person does show up – three guesses who it is. Fine, we'll just tell you. It's the man with owl-eyed glasses.
- He agrees with Nick that it's horrible how hundreds of people came to Gatsby's parties, but how none came to his funeral.
- Nick is reminded of waiting in train stations on holiday vacations during his youth.

- He goes on about the train stations in the Midwest, and concludes that he and the whole crowd – Daisy, Tom, Jordan, Gatsby – were all westerners who just couldn't cut it in the East.
- He has an interesting vision of something out of an El Greco painting – a drunken woman in white being carried on a stretcher, a woman whose name no one knows or cares about. Those carrying her then bring her into the wrong house.
- After this little vision, Nick decides to go back home. He's had enough of this East business.
- But before he goes, he meets up with Jordan, who accuses him of being "dishonest" after all. She says she trusted him, but it turned out he was as "careless" a driver as she is.
- Nick's cryptic response? "I'm thirty. I'm five years too old to lie to myself and call it honor." He then remarks that he's "half in love with her" and "tremendously sorry" when he leaves.
- Some time later (it seems he's taking it slow with the moving back home bit), Nick runs into Tom Buchanan.
- Tom reveals that he is the one who told Mr. Wilson that the car belonged to Gatsby.
- Nick can't bring himself to utter the truth – that Daisy was the one driving. He doesn't even know anymore whom to believe.
- Nick realizes that Tom and Daisy were "careless people," people who made messes and then left others to clean them up.
- Outside of Gatsby's large, empty house, Nick wanders the "blue lawn" and gazes at the "green light" across the bay – the light on Daisy's house.
- He thinks of what the island must have looked like years ago to the first sailors that came to "the new world."
- He says the problem is that Gatsby was trying to run *towards* his dream, not realizing it was in the past behind him.
- We end with what is arguably one of the most famous passages in American Literature:

"Gatsby believed in the green light, the orgastic future that year by year recedes before us. It eluded us then, but that's no matter – to-morrow we will run faster, stretch out our arms farther...And one fine morning –

So we beat on, boats against the current, borne back ceaselessly into the past."

## Themes

### Theme of Society and Class

*The Great Gatsby* is set among wealthy, educated people, who have lots of leisure time and little concern about people who are not in their social milieu. Nobody's concerned about politics or spiritual matters but everybody cares about how they are perceived socially. Those who do come from other classes seek and envy the glamour and lifestyle that they see in the elite. Jay Gatsby, the protagonist, is able to attain a certain amount of wealth, but he cannot fake education or social behaviors that only come with "old money." The novel's two main locales, West Egg and East Egg, are distinguished also by class. East Egg represents "old money" while West Egg represents the *nouveau riche*. East Eggers consistently look down on West Eggers for precisely this fact. Class and wealth are virtually indistinguishable from each other, but if a person lacks education, then he is clearly not part of the upper echelon.

### Questions About Society and Class

1. In *The Great Gatsby*, does wealth alone decide which class a character belongs to?
2. In this text, what are the various markings of the upper class? What distinguishes it from the other classes?
3. Is society what stands in the way of Gatsby having Daisy, or is it something else?
4. What are the differences between West Egg and East Egg? How might the symbolic distance between the Eggs comment on the distance between Gatsby and Daisy?
5. Is Gatsby in the same class as Wilson? If not, is he closer to Wilson's class, or to Tom's? Where does Meyer Wolfsheim stand in all of this?
6. Does Gatsby love Daisy, or does he love the lifestyle she represents? Is she only his ticket to the upper classes? If so, does Gatsby realize this?

### Chew on Society and Class

In *The Great Gatsby*, the only element not restricted to one class is unhappiness. All members of all classes have this in common.

In *The Great Gatsby*, social norms and expectations lead to insurmountable barriers for relationships between men and women of different classes. The inter-class relationship is ultimately impossible in this text.

### Theme of Love

*The Great Gatsby* does not offer a definition of love, or a contrast between love and romance – but it does suggest that what people believe to be love is often only a dream. Gatsby thinks he loves Daisy when in fact he loves a memory of her. Daisy, too, thinks she loves Gatsby, but she



really loves being adored. Our narrator is "half" in love with Jordan at the end of the novel, but recognizes the impossibility of being with her anyway. Love is a source of conflict in *The Great Gatsby* as well, driving men to fight and ultimately causing three deaths. This text seems to argue that there is a violence and destruction inherent in love.

## Questions About Love

1. Is there a difference between love and romance in *The Great Gatsby*?
2. Is love an expected part of marriage in *The Great Gatsby*? Why or why not?
3. Are love and sex separated in *The Great Gatsby*?
4. Is Gatsby's love for Daisy genuine? Does he love her, or his conception of her? What about Tom – does he really love Daisy? And whom does Daisy really love, after all? Is it possible, as she said, that she loved both Tom and Gatsby at once?

## Chew on Love

Wilson's feelings for Myrtle are the only example of genuine love in *The Great Gatsby*.

Love in *The Great Gatsby* is only the result of self-deception and denial.

## Theme of Visions of America

America in *The Great Gatsby* is presented mostly through the scope of class: the rich, the poor, and everyone in between are identified by how much money they have. We see America in the microcosm of New York City (and its suburbs), where all classes are pitted fairly close together. There's Wilson, the working-class man who has to work constantly to stay afloat; the Buchanans, who have an unimaginable amount of money; and Nick, whose upper-middle-class existence allows him many luxuries, but not everything he wants. Then there's Gatsby. Even when Gatsby gets to the top, he's looked down upon by those with old money.

In *Gatsby*, the American Dream seems corrupted. Whereas it used to stand for independence and the ability to make something of one's self with hard work, in *Gatsby*, the American Dream seems more about materialism and selfish pursuit of pleasure. Not to mention, no amount of hard work can change where Gatsby came from, and the old money folks maintain their sense of superiority because of that simple fact. The indication is that merit and hard work aren't enough. The idea of the American Dream proves to be disappointing and false in Fitzgerald's classic novel.

## Questions About Visions of America

1. Does Gatsby achieve the American Dream? If yes, when exactly can he say that he reaches it? If no, what prevents him from truly achieving it?



2. Do you agree with Fitzgerald's criticisms of American culture during the [Jazz Age](#)? Would you rather be living then, or are you happy in present-day America?
3. Would you rather live in East Egg or West Egg? The North-East or the Mid-West? Why?
4. How would the novel be different through Tom or Daisy's eyes? How do you think their view of America would differ from Nick's?
5. Nick leaves the East coast, jaded by his experiences with Gatsby, the Buchanans, Jordan Baker, etc. Do you think he'll remain cynical even in the Mid-West, or will he leave his disgust in New York?

## Chew on Visions of America

Gatsby's experiences in New York prove that the "American Dream" is not only a difficult goal to reach for, but is truly an impossible dream to achieve during this era of American life. Nick's narration presents a very cynical, critical view of American life in the 1920's.

## Theme of Wealth

In *The Great Gatsby*, wealth can be distinguished from class; it is possible to achieve great wealth without being accepted into the elite class, as evidenced by Jay Gatsby's experience. Poverty, on the other hand, restricts decision and action. George Wilson, for example, is unable to "go West" with his wife because he hasn't enough money. It is money that allows Tom and Daisy to go here and there, leaving other people to clean up their messes. The life of ease and luxury that Tom and others enjoy is contrasted sharply with the stranglehold of poverty containing Myrtle and George Wilson or the life from which Jay Gatsby emerges. Wealth is what separates Gatsby from his love, as he notes of Daisy that "her voice is full of money."

## Questions About Wealth

1. In *The Great Gatsby*, what role does wealth play in people's life expectations? Could Gatsby have achieved his life-altering childhood goals without wealth? That is, did he really want wealth, or did he want what he thought wealth could get him?
2. Why are there barriers between men and women due to wealth in this text?
3. Does money bring happiness in *The Great Gatsby*, destroy happiness, or have no effect?
4. What does Gatsby mean when he says that Daisy's voice is "full of money?" Does he mean this negatively? Why does Nick agree with him? Does this comment say more about Daisy or Gatsby?

## Chew on Wealth

Although Fitzgerald presents wealthy society as careless and selfish, ultimately all of the characters in the book, regardless of wealth or poverty, fail to demonstrate loyalty and

friendship. These failures are the common denominators between the classes. In *The Great Gatsby*, materialism may appear to be beneficial, but it is an impediment to the achievement of lifelong desires.

A Marxist interpretation of *The Great Gatsby* demonstrates the emptiness and moral vacuum created by the decadence and wealth of capitalism.

## Theme of Memory and The Past

*The Great Gatsby* deals at great length with issues of the past, present, and future. In love with a girl of the past, Gatsby is unable to have her again in the present. He wants a future with her, but only if she will lie to erase the marriage in her past. The narrator indicates in the final lines of the text that nobody can ever reach the future – it is a beacon of light that calls to us, but even as we try to reach it, we are beaten back into the past. The manipulation of time in the narrative adds to this theme. Nick tells the whole tale with a tone of nostalgia – beginning the text with mention of his father's advice to him in his youth.

## Questions About Memory and The Past

1. Nick Carraway suggests that the future is always receding in front of us, and that we are forever beaten back towards the past. Is the future attainable in *The Great Gatsby*?
2. Nick tells Gatsby that "you can't repeat the past," yet chapters later he insists we are constantly "borne back" into it. Did he change his mind, or are these two different ways of saying the same thing?
3. Is the past remembered realistically? Jay Gatsby and Daisy Buchanan alike think nostalgically about the past, but are they ever able to confront reality?
4. Is Gatsby driven by his memory of the past or his dream for the future? Is there a difference?
5. What are Nick's visions of his own future?

## Chew on Memory and The Past

Gatsby ends up dead because of his inability to live in the present.

Daisy, unlike Gatsby, is ultimately able to face reality and live in the present.

## Theme of Dissatisfaction

*The Great Gatsby* presents an array of characters dissatisfied with life. No one is happy with marriage, with love, with life in general, and they all destroy the lives of others in seeking to fix it. Tom destroys his wife's love for him by committing adultery; Daisy nearly destroys her marriage by seeking another life with Gatsby, and Gatsby destroys himself in seeking Daisy. We see the results of such a jaded ennui in Jordan, who has everything, needs nothing, yet is still

dissatisfied.

## Questions About Dissatisfaction

1. How does Jordan's "carelessness" indicate dissatisfaction? Why is wealthy society so careless?
2. Which characters are dissatisfied, and what would actually make them happy? Do they even know what they want?
3. Nick reveals that James Gatz created Jay Gatsby "from the Platonic conception of himself." What was it that dissatisfied James such that he had to create a new persona? Did this new persona solve his problems?

## Chew on Dissatisfaction

Although the wealthy characters in *The Great Gatsby* appear to "have it all," not a single one of them demonstrates satisfaction with his life, marriage, or friends.

According to *The Great Gatsby*, wealth, instead of satisfying one's desires, provides an avenue for always craving more.

## Theme of Isolation

Isolation in *The Great Gatsby* is not the same as being alone. Although the characters are always in the company of others, the isolation is an internal one, stemming from their inability to truly experience intimacy with one another. The narrator reveals his fear of loneliness when he mentions his thirtieth birthday; his fear of aging seems to be tied to his fear of isolation. Gatsby, despite throwing lavish parties with hundreds of people, dies alone. Daisy's need to be adored is most likely the cause of her own fear of isolation.

## Questions About Isolation

1. Who is lonely in this book and why? Are there any characters *not* alienated from others?
2. Jordan remarks that she prefers large parties because they are more intimate than small parties, where there isn't any privacy. What does this say about the nature of isolation and intimacy in *The Great Gatsby*?
3. Nick comments on an "unmistakable air of natural intimacy" around Daisy and Tom after Myrtle is killed. Do these two share intimacy? More so than Daisy and Gatsby?
4. Nick shouts at Gatsby that "They're a rotten crowd!" speaking of Tom, Daisy, and Jordan. Does Nick see Gatsby as part of them, or isolated from them?
5. Does Nick see himself as part of that crowd? What about his comment that they are all westerners who don't belong in the East – is this his way of finding commonalities they share? Does he *want* to be a part of them?

## Chew on Isolation

Although Nick seems to be everybody's closest friend and confidante, he is the loneliest, most alienated character in the book.

Although Nick seems to fear isolation, he is self-destructive in his relationship with Jordan, ending things when he fears they are becoming *too* intimate.

## Theme of Mortality

*The Great Gatsby* culminates in death; one accidental death, one murder, and one suicide. Death takes all forms in *Gatsby*, including the metaphorical. By creating a new name and life for himself, Gatsby kills his old self. When his love fails to live up to his standards, so dies his idealized conception of her. Our narrator is constantly addressing the idea of mortality as he feels himself getting older and older while the text progresses. The various characters' obsession with the past, as well as Nick's belief that life draws people back to the past, is also an indication of the nearly universal fear of death.

## Questions About Mortality

1. Why does no one come to Gatsby's funeral?
2. Whose fault is it that Gatsby died? His own? Tom's? Daisy's? Wilson's?
3. The characters in *The Great Gatsby* never explicitly discuss death or life after death. Why do you suppose they neglect these topics? What does it say about them?
4. What is the effect of Nick realizing he has turned thirty in the midst of Gatsby and Tom's fight over Daisy?
5. Speaking of, check out those times when Nick refers to his age. He later refers to his being thirty with the jaded tone that he is "too old to lie" to himself. What is it about aging that bothers Nick so much?
6. Before Myrtle's death, Nick says that they "drove on toward death through the cooling twilight." Literally, this means they are driving towards the scene of Myrtle's death. But in what other ways are they driving toward death? Might they also be driving to Gatsby's impending death? Or (gasp) to their own?
7. How did the death of Dan Cody interact with the birth of Jay Gatsby, and the death of James Gatz?
8. Did the real man behind the mask die when Jay Gatsby died, or when James Gatz died?

## Chew on Mortality

Even though death is part of the overarching story arc of *The Great Gatsby* for *all* characters in the novel, only Nick Carraway is willing to confront the reality of death and its meaning for his

own life.

## Theme of Marriage

*The Great Gatsby* questions marriage as representative of love and loyalty. The two marriages we do see here are marked by adultery on the part of one or both spouses. One begins to wonder if marriage is more a matter of convenience than it is of love. The issue is frequently raised of marrying below one's caste; Myrtle fears that she has done so and Daisy may have not married Gatsby because of it – at least in part.

## Questions About Marriage

1. In *The Great Gatsby*, how common is infidelity? How common is fidelity?
2. Do people marry the ones they love in *The Great Gatsby*? Can people marry whomever they love? Why or why not?
3. What are the advantages of marriage in this text?

## Chew on Marriage

It has been said that love cannot exist without trust – yet *The Great Gatsby* suggests otherwise: love and trust are in fact mutually exclusive.

Although Fitzgerald suggests that infidelity is widespread in society, he also indicates that the common choice is to maintain a marriage in spite of it. *The Great Gatsby* therefore argues for the stabilizing force of marriage – and individuals' need for it.

## Theme of Gender

*The Great Gatsby* gives us a glimpse into the gender roles of post-WWI America. Gender roles are in part decided by societal roles, as Tom's upper class masculinity (strength, intimidation, virility) is contrasted with Wilson's lower class version (hard working nature, naiveté). Unfaithfulness is a trait of both women and men, as we see in the text's prevalent adultery. Women take physical abuse at the hands of Tom's overly-macho persona, which seems a right of his gender at the time. His abuse is a form of the control that he exercises over both his mistress and his wife. Even Gatsby, who treats Daisy as if she is the most precious jewel in the world, does not ultimately understand women. He treats his love as a prize, rather than a person. Daisy and Jordan, interestingly, seem to do as they please – but they still define themselves by their ability to attract men.

## Questions About Gender

1. What are the expectations for male behavior depending on class?
2. Of all the men in *The Great Gatsby*, which comes closest to society's expectations? Why?

3. What is "work life" like for men of Tom's class, Nick's class, and George Wilson's class?
4. How do men treat women in *The Great Gatsby*? How does Tom treat his wife Daisy and his mistress Myrtle? How does Nick treat Jordan? How does Gatsby treat Daisy? How does George Wilson treat his wife Myrtle? More interestingly, how does the way that a man treats a woman comment on his character in this text?
5. What are the expectations for female behavior and how do they vary by class?
6. How do females behave at Gatsby's parties? Is this behavior "normal" or induced by alcohol?
7. Does Daisy present the "ideal woman" of the upper class? Why or why not?
8. What do women want from men in *The Great Gatsby*? Is it different for different women?

## Chew on Gender

Although the reader's inclination is to pass judgment on the men in *The Great Gatsby*, one must remember that they were living up to the expectations society placed on them: to be in charge and in control and to take care of women.

Although the majority of the men in *The Great Gatsby* are selfish, both George Wilson and Gatsby are willing to sacrifice their own lives for the women they love. This is what sets them on a moral high ground above Tom.

In *The Great Gatsby*, neither men nor women appear to have a mitigating influence on each other's desires; rather, they seem to inflame and incite selfish behavior, leading ultimately to tragedy.

Women in *The Great Gatsby* are consigned to minor roles, in which their major function is to entice and subvert men.

## Theme of Education

In *The Great Gatsby*, education is a must-have for the socially elite. For the most part, characters in *The Great Gatsby* are well-educated – this is reflected by their speech and dialogue. The narrator takes note, however, of Gatsby's effort to sound like everybody else. It is clear that Gatsby must *practice* sounding educated and wealthy. Mr. Wolfsheim speaks in a dialect that indicates his lack of education, lack of class, and general lack of what wealthy people in the 1920s might have called "good breeding." Oxford becomes "Oggsford." "Connection" becomes "gonnection." The use of different dialects works to reveal the differences between the working class and the upper class. By contrasting Wolfsheim's and Gatsby's diction with that of people like Nick Carraway, Fitzgerald suggests that people involved in organized crime are from the working class only, no matter how wealthy and powerful they are or how educated they appear to be. Education is what distinguishes the upper class from those below them. It is also a source of connection as loyalty – Nick and Tom have Yale in common and are therefore tied to each other.



## Questions About Education

1. In *The Great Gatsby*, are wealth and education inextricably tied together? Why? Is education more of a mark of status than wealth?
2. What is the difference between education and experience, or "street smarts"? Which does Gatsby have? Which is more useful in *The Great Gatsby*?

## Chew on Education

Gatsby, despite his lack of education and the evident lack of time he spends reading the books he owns, has the kind of "street smarts" it takes to fool a lot of very well-educated, savvy people. Because of this, he is intellectually superior to the elite classes he wishes to join.

In *The Great Gatsby*, education is more important to the elite classes than wealth.

In *The Great Gatsby*, wealth is more important to the elite classes than education.

## Theme of Lies and Deceit

Deception is a nearly universal trait in *The Great Gatsby*. While our narrator claims that he is "one of the few honest people" he has ever known, we come to doubt even his integrity. The claim that Gatsby is "great" is of course called into question, as Gatsby has fabricated his entire life to please a woman. This text seems to suggest that all human beings are inherently dishonest – as well as selfish, hypocritical, and destructive. The point is raised in the text that, while one may fool many men, no one can fool God – he is always watching.

## Questions About Lies and Deceit

1. At one point, Jordan claims that Nick deceived her. Is this true? Or was Jordan deceiving Nick? What kind of dishonesty is she talking about, anyway?
2. There is an interesting scene where Jordan Baker and Nick discuss the fact that a "bad" driver is all-right until he meets another one. This forms a significant moment later in the novel when Jordan recognizes that Nick is not who she thought he was. How does this relate to the transformation Daisy undergoes as she realizes Gatsby is not who she thought he was?
3. Nick briefly mentions that Tom discovered Daisy's deception very close to the time that Wilson discovered that of his own wife. How do these men each deal with the discovery? Does it make them seem more similar, or highlight their differences? Check out what Nick says about it.
4. Nick assures us he is "one of the few honest people" he knows. How does this affect the way we read his story? Do we trust his narration?
5. Are Nick and Gatsby more similar than Nick would like to admit? Is it possible to see Nick



and Gatsby as possessing the same fundamental characteristic – deception?

6. In the showdown scene at the Plaza, Daisy Buchanan is ultimately honest with her husband and Gatsby despite what she might lose. Why does she choose honesty?

## Chew on Lies and Deceit

In *The Great Gatsby*, Nick Carraway presents himself as the voice of reason and reliability, yet ultimately he proves to be an unreliable narrator.

Nick Carraway and Jay Gatsby are two sides of the same coin: each has built a successful façade to fool others, yet they can now no longer distinguish their true selves from the one they have created for the world.

Although characters throughout the book are consistently dishonest, their disappointment with the lies of others betrays the existence of a tangible, moral structure that guides the characters' behavior.

## Theme of Compassion and Forgiveness

The characters in *The Great Gatsby* all show a unique combination of a willingness to forgive and a stubbornness not to. Gatsby is willing to forgive Daisy's marriage to another man, but not her loving him. Daisy is willing to forgive Tom for cheating but unwilling to forgive Gatsby for deceiving her about what kind of person he is. Much of the sadness of *The Great Gatsby* comes from this kind of almost-forgiveness; the characters are taunted with the possibility that all will be forgiven, only to have it torn away because of another character's stubbornness.

## Questions About Compassion and Forgiveness

1. What gets forgiven and what does not get forgiven in this novel? Why?
2. Nick claims in the first page of the novel that he was told to never criticize. Is he compassionate towards Gatsby, or does he judge the man? Does this evolve over the course of the novel?
3. Are we, the reader, compelled to forgive Wilson for murdering Gatsby?
4. Back to Nick's father's advice at the beginning of the novel: what is the effect of this opening? Might it be intended as advice for us, as we read the story? If so, how easy is it to read *The Great Gatsby* without criticizing? Is the advice perhaps ironic, indicating that we *are* supposed to judge?

## Chew on Compassion and Forgiveness

Although all of the characters behave badly in the novel, Daisy is the one who seems to demonstrate forgiveness by her constant acceptance of her husband's behavior.

Although it might appear that Tom and Daisy "forgive" each other, the reality is that they simply choose to ignore each other's transgressions. Forgiveness plays no role in their actions or their marriage.

## Theme of Religion

The fact that religion is absent among the upper echelons of society suggests that a moral standard might also be absent – as much is borne out by characters' actions. When God does appear, it is only in George Wilson's dialogue, when he lets his wife know that she can't fool God, that he sees and judges all. Instead of being guided by the moral precepts of religion or of God, other characters find other codes to determine their behaviors: a father's advice, or a self-serving mantra, a jaded viewpoint, or an undying love. In Fitzgerald's jaded America, the only God that can exist takes the form of a billboard (the eyes of T.J. Eckleburg), perhaps suggesting that capitalism rules where religion once did.

## Questions About Religion

1. What is the effect of the absence of religion or of God among the wealthy in *The Great Gatsby*? What role does "God" play when he *does* show up?
2. You knew we were going to ask it. You knew it was coming...What do the eyes of T.J. Eckleburg have to do with God? We ranted about this for a while already, but seriously, what are the chances we've said all that needs to be said? And what are the chances we are right?
3. What guides behavior in *The Great Gatsby*? Do characters have a concept of "sin," "morality," or "immorality"?
4. Are people governed by choice or by fate in *The Great Gatsby*?

## Chew on Religion

Each character in *The Great Gatsby* is guided by his or her personal ethic, yet Nick Carraway has the final word, and his judgment reigns supreme; because we see the events through his eyes, there is no moral objectivity in the text.

Although only George Wilson invokes God in *The Great Gatsby*, his statement that, "God sees everything," and, "You can't fool God," indicts each character in the book through the eyes of T.J. Eckleburg. Nick, because he so frequently describes the eyes, is the only other character besides Wilson to recognize this indictment.

Although people are governed by both choice and fate in *The Great Gatsby*, it is ultimately Tom's choice that seals Gatsby's fate.

In *The Great Gatsby*, capitalism and the desire for wealth have replaced religion.

## Quotes

### Society and Class Quotes

*In my younger and more vulnerable years my father gave me some advice that I've been turning over in my mind ever since.*

*"Whenever you feel like criticizing any one," he told me, "just remember that all the people in this world haven't had the advantages that you've had."*

*He didn't say any more, but we've always been unusually communicative in a reserved way, and I understood that he meant a great deal more than that. In consequence, I'm inclined to reserve all judgments [...]. (1.1-3)*

Thought: The very opening of *The Great Gatsby* sets the tone for a book about society and class. We know immediately that our narrator is privileged, and that he is painfully conscious of it.

*"About Gatsby! No, I haven't. I said I'd been making a small investigation of his past."*

*"And you found he was an Oxford man," said Jordan helpfully.*

*"An Oxford man!" He was incredulous. "Like hell he is! He wears a pink suit."*

*"Nevertheless he's an Oxford man."*

*"Oxford, New Mexico," snorted Tom contemptuously, "or something like that."*

*"Listen, Tom. If you're such a snob, why did you invite him to lunch?" demanded Jordan crossly.*

*"Daisy invited him; she knew him before we were married – God knows where!" (7.130-136)*

Thought: Tom demonstrates that wealth alone cannot win a man entrance to the upper echelons of society. They must be educated as well.

*I called up Daisy half an hour after we found him, called her instinctively and without hesitation. But she and Tom had gone away early that afternoon, and taken baggage with them.*

*"Left no address?"*

*"No."*

*"Say when they'd be back?"*

*"No."*

*"Any idea where they are? How I could reach them?"*

*"I don't know. Can't say." (9.4-10)*

Thought: Because of their wealth and privilege, Daisy and Tom manage to escape the consequences of their actions.

*We shook hands and I started away. Just before I reached the hedge I remembered something and turned around.*

*"They're a rotten crowd," I shouted across the lawn. "You're worth the whole damn bunch put together."*

*I've always been glad I said that. It was the only compliment I ever gave him, because I disapproved of him from beginning to end. First he nodded politely, and then his face broke into that radiant and understanding smile, as if we'd been in ecstatic cahoots on that fact all the time. His gorgeous pink rag of a suit made a bright spot of color against the white steps, and I thought of the night when I first came to his ancestral home, three months before. The lawn and drive had been crowded with the faces of those who guessed at his corruption – and he had stood on those steps, concealing his incorruptible dream, as he waved them good-by.*

*I thanked him for his hospitality. We were always thanking him for that – I and the others.*

*"Good-by," I called. "I enjoyed breakfast, Gatsby." (8.44-48)*

Thought: Nick points out that wealth and class mean nothing in terms of character.

*I am still a little afraid of missing something if I forget that, as my father snobbishly suggested, and I snobbishly repeat, a sense of the fundamental decencies is parceled out unequally at birth. (1.3)*

Thought: Nick is fully aware of how important class is to personal identity, especially in the society in which lives. He knows that he was born into a life of privilege and a certain amount of wealth. The rich may be "above" him, but there are many people "below" him, and Nick keeps the influence of class in mind with everyone he meets.

*When I came back from the East last autumn I felt that I wanted the world to be in uniform and at a sort of moral attention forever; I wanted no more riotous excursions with privileged glimpses into the human heart. Only Gatsby, the man who gives his name to this book, was exempt from my reaction—Gatsby, who represented everything for which I have an unaffected scorn. (1.4)*

Thought: Nick tells us from the get-go that he's done with the upper class's shenanigans. By saying he wanted "the world to be in uniform," we can guess that class difference will play a huge role in this story's events (and indeed it does). Nick also wants everyone to be at "moral attention" forever... so we can guess that some sort of immoral behavior happens. When we read this for the first time, we don't really know what Nick is talking about, but the second time around we recognize it as a pretty awesome bit of foreshadowing.

*I lived at West Egg, the – well, the least fashionable of the two, though this is a most superficial tag to express the bizarre and not a little sinister contrast between them. My house was at the very tip of the egg, only fifty yards from the Sound, and squeezed between two huge places that rented for twelve or fifteen thousand a season. The one on my right was a colossal affair by any standard – it was a factual imitation of some Hôtel de Ville in Normandy, with a tower on one side, spanking new under a thin beard of raw ivy, and a marble swimming pool, and more than forty acres of lawn and garden. It was Gatsby's mansion. Or, rather, as I didn't know Mr. Gatsby, it was a mansion inhabited by a gentleman of that name. My own house was an eyesore, but it was a small eyesore, and it had been overlooked, so I had a view of the water, a partial view of my neighbor's lawn, and the consoling proximity of millionaires—all for eighty dollars a month. (1.14)*

Thought: Here we get Nick's perspective on class. First, he's honest about the fact that he lives on the less fashionable island. What makes an Egg fashionable? We don't quite know yet, but we know the difference is "bizarre and not a little sinister." Nick has issues with class differences. But the West Eggers and the East Eggers are all wealthy, so to some extent, it's just a matter of whether they were born rich or climbed the social ladder to get where they are. This divide will prove "sinister" in some way in the pages ahead. Also, look at those last two sentences of this passage. Nick knows his place is small, but he seems happy with it and with the fact that he's only paying eighty dollars a month. He's more concerned with his own happiness than he is with what others think of his wallet.

*"You live in West Egg," she remarked contemptuously. "I know somebody there."*

*"I don't know a single——"*

*"You must know Gatsby."*

*"Gatsby?" demanded Daisy. "What Gatsby?" (1.58-61)*

Thought: Well, nice to meet you too, Jordan Baker. It sounds like she doesn't even try to hide her contempt for the "other" Egg. Jordan, like the Buchanans, is from old money, and she only knows one person who lives in West Egg. Daisy doesn't know a single person in West Egg. The Eggs are so close in distance, but they seem to be worlds apart.

*"You make me feel uncivilized, Daisy," I confessed on my second glass of corky but rather impressive claret. "Can't you talk about crops or something?"*

*I meant nothing in particular by that remark, but it was taken up in an unexpected way.*

*"Civilization's going to pieces," broke out Tom violently. "I've gotten to be a terrible pessimist about things. Have you read 'The Rise of the Colored Empires' by this man Goddard?"*

*"Why, no," I answered, rather surprised by his tone.*

*"Well, it's a fine book, and everybody ought to read it. The idea is if we don't look out the white race will be—will be utterly submerged. It's all scientific stuff; it's been proved."*

*"Tom's getting very profound," said Daisy, with an expression of unthoughtful sadness.*

*"He reads deep books with long words in them. What was that word we——"*

*"Well these books are all scientific," insisted Tom, glancing at her impatiently. "This fellow has worked out the whole thing. It's up to us, who are the dominant race, to watch out or these other races will have control of things."*

*"We've got to beat them down," whispered Daisy, winking ferociously toward the fervent sun. (1.74-81)*

Thought: Nick's playful suggestion that they talk about something less upper-class-ish gets Tom ranting about race and class. Tom thinks he's at the top of society, and wants to stay there.



*Their interest rather touched me and made them less remotely rich – nevertheless, I was confused and a little disgusted as I drove away. (1.150)*

*"I told that boy about the ice." Myrtle raised her eyebrows in despair at the shiftlessness of the lower orders. "These people! You have to keep after them all the time."*

*She looked at me and laughed pointlessly... (2.69-70)*

Thought: Myrtle tries to fake being a part of upper class by dissing on the lower classes. Clearly that's what she thinks that all rich people do. It's ironic, since she herself is technically in the lower class.

*There was music from my neighbor's house through the summer nights. In his blue gardens men and girls came and went like moths among the whisperings and the champagne and the stars. At high tide in the afternoon I watched his guests diving from the tower of his raft, or taking the sun on the hot sand of his beach while his motor-boats slid the waters of the Sound, drawing aquaplanes over cataracts of foam. On week-ends his Rolls-Royce became an omnibus, bearing parties to and from the city between nine in the morning and long past midnight, while his station wagon scampered like a brisk yellow bug to meet all trains. And on Mondays eight servants, including an extra gardener, toiled all day with mops and scrubbing-brushes and hammers and garden-shears, repairing the ravages of the night before. (3.1)*

Thought: This is just a little glimpse into the extravagant lifestyle of Mr. Jay Gatsby. Pretty crazy, huh?

*I had been actually invited. A chauffeur in a uniform of robin's-egg blue crossed my lawn early that Saturday morning with a surprisingly formal note from his employer: the honor would be entirely Gatsby's, it said, if I would attend his "little party" that night. He had seen me several times, and had intended to call me long before, but a peculiar combination of circumstances had prevented it—signed Jay Gatsby, in a majestic hand. (3.8)*

Thought: We learn here that most of Gatsby's guests are just random people taking advantage of his immense wealth and open door. The invitation he sends to Nick is slightly over the top – a bit like Myrtle's imitation of upper-class women in the previous chapter. It's our first big hint that Gatsby might be somewhat new to his wealthy lifestyle.

*A stout, middle-aged man, with enormous owl-eyed spectacles, was sitting somewhat drunk on the edge of a great table, staring with unsteady concentration at the shelves of books. As we entered he wheeled excitedly around and examined Jordan from head to foot.*

*"What do you think?" he demanded impetuously.*

*"About what?"*

*He waved his hand toward the book-shelves.*

*"About that. As a matter of fact you needn't bother to ascertain. I ascertained. They're real."*

*"The books?"*

*He nodded.*

*"Absolutely real - have pages and everything. I thought they'd be a nice durable cardboard. Matter of fact, they're absolutely real. Pages and - Here! Lemme show you."*

*Taking our scepticism for granted, he rushed to the bookcases and returned with Volume One of the "Stoddard Lectures."*

*"See!" he cried triumphantly. "It's a bona-fide piece of printed matter. It fooled me. This fella's a regular Belasco. It's a triumph. What thoroughness! What realism! Knew when to stop, too - didn't cut the pages. But what do you want? What do you expect?"*

*He snatched the book from me and replaced it hastily on the shelf, muttering if one brick was removed the whole library was liable to collapse. (3.41-51)*

Thought: Well, at least one person in the partying crowd knows about the lengths to which Gatsby has gone in order to show off his wealth. The owl-eyed man is amazed that the books are real, as opposed to cardboard imitations with which some people stocked their libraries. Gatsby didn't "cut the pages," though, which means he had never actually opened any of the books. That Gatsby hasn't gotten around to reading any of his books just highlights the difference between Gatsby's modest beginnings and the highly educated, old money East Eggers. Gatsby's books are only for show, while the books of his old money counterparts would have been read. Education is a major factor that divides the *nouveau riche* from the old money aristocrats. For more analysis of what both Gatsby's books and the owl-eyed man symbolize, check out the "[Symbols, Imagery, Allegory](#)."

*"All right, old sport," called Gatsby. We slowed down. Taking a white card from his wallet, he waved it before a man's eyes.*

*"Right you are," agreed the policeman, tipping his cap. "Know you next time, Mr. Gatsby. Excuse me!"*

*"What was that?" I inquired. "The picture from Oxford?"*

*"I was able to do the commissioner a favor once, and he sends me a Christmas card every year." (3.50-53)*

Thought: Evidently, money buys certain privileges in New York. Money, influence, and power are all closely linked in this society.

*The largest of the banners and the largest of the lawns belonged to Daisy Fay's house. She was just eighteen, two years older than me, and by far the most popular of all the young girls in Louisville. She dressed in white, and had a little white roadster, and all day long the telephone rang in her house and excited young officers from Camp Taylor demanded the privilege of monopolizing her that night. "Anyways, for an hour!" (4.130)*

Thought: Back home in Louisville, Daisy was the richest and most coveted girl in town. This sheds some light on the concept of old money. Daisy was born and raised in the highest class, and she's never known anything else. For more on Daisy Buchanan, check out her "[Character Analysis](#)."

*By the next autumn she was gay again, gay as ever. She had a debut after the Armistice, and in February she was presumably engaged to a man from New Orleans. In June she married Tom Buchanan of Chicago, with more pomp and circumstance than Louisville ever knew before. He came down with a hundred people in four private cars, and hired a whole floor of the Seelbach Hotel, and the day before the wedding he gave her a string of pearls valued at three hundred and fifty thousand dollars. (4.135)*

Thought: Daisy had her pick of any man she wanted, presumably in the entire United States. She and Tom didn't have a long courtship, so we can assume their marriage is based more in their reputations than in their actual personalities. This insight into their world is also another example of how insanely rich Tom is. And \$350,000 was a *lot* more money back in the 1920s than it is today.

*Something worried me.*

*"Why didn't he ask you to arrange a meeting?"*

*"He wants her to see his house," she explained. "And your house is right next door." (4.156-158)*

Thought: Gatsby counts on his wealth to win Daisy back. This implies that she only cares about wealth, or that she can only marry someone who's in her class.

*I suppose he'd had the name ready for a long time, even then. His parents were shiftless and unsuccessful farm people – his imagination had never really accepted them as his parents at all. The truth was that Jay Gatsby of West Egg, Long Island, sprang from his Platonic conception of himself. He was a son of God – a phrase which, if it means anything, means just that – and he must be about His Father's business, the service of a vast, vulgar, and meretricious beauty. So he invented just the sort of Jay Gatsby that a seventeen-year-old boy would be likely to invent, and to this conception he was faithful to the end. (6.7)*

Thought: Even before he met Daisy, Gatsby placed importance on being wealthy, and he was determined to abandon his modest roots. He came up with his alter ego at a young age, and immersed himself in doing whatever it took to climb the social ladder. "Jay Gatsby" comes from a materialistic conception of what it means to be successful. For the whole history on Gatsby's class-bending past, you should read his "[Character Analysis](#)."

*He stayed there two weeks, dismayed at its ferocious indifference to the drums of his destiny, to destiny itself, and despising the janitor's work with which he was to pay his way through. Then he drifted back to Lake Superior, and he was still searching for something to do on the day that Dan Cody's yacht dropped anchor in the shallows alongshore. (6.10)*

Thought: Young Gatsby's frustration with his education at a Midwestern college (read: not Ivy League) leads him to strike out on his own and look for an easier way to climb the social ladder. His big break comes in the form of Dan Cody. This paragraph pinpoints the exact time in Gatsby's life that he actively chased his destiny. (Get the full scoop on Gatsby by checking out his "[Character Analysis](#)."

*At any rate Cody asked him a few questions (one of them elicited the brand new name) and found that he was quick and extravagantly ambitious. A few days later he took him to Duluth and bought him a blue coat, six pairs of white duck trousers, and a yachting cap. And when the Toulumne left for the West Indies and the Barbary Coast Gatsby left too. (6.12)*

Thought: *Voila!* New clothes make a new man. Does this remind you of a character who dons a new outfit to masquerade as "old money"?

*"I'm delighted to see you," said Gatsby, standing on his porch. "I'm delighted that you dropped in."*

*As though they cared!*

*"Sit right down. Have a cigarette or a cigar." He walked around the room quickly, ringing bells. "I'll have something to drink for you in just a minute."*

Thought: This shows Gatsby's need to please, almost in a desperate way. He caters to Tom's riding party in sort of an over-the-top manner. Nick's interjection of "As though they cared!" says a lot; people see right through Gatsby's act, and they look down on his hunger for their approval.

*But the rest offended her – and inarguably, because it wasn't a gesture but an emotion. She was appalled by West Egg, this unprecedented "place" that Broadway had begotten upon a Long Island fishing village – appalled by its raw vigor that chafed under the old euphemisms and by the too obtrusive fate that herded its inhabitants along a short-cut from nothing to nothing. She saw something awful in the very simplicity she failed to understand. (6.96)*

Thought: Daisy has a hard time understanding what goes on in West Egg (i.e., Gatsby's crazy parties) because she's so used to doing exactly what society expects her to do. The idea of doing something only "because you want to" is foreign to her. Indeed, while high society is ruled by stiff behavior and petty gestures, West Egg's wealth seems less restricted. Their money goes toward making themselves happy in the moment (i.e., all those parties), without having to worry about society's judgmental gaze. What happens in West Egg stays in West Egg, and it seems that Daisy doesn't really know how to live guided by her emotions. Read more about Daisy in her "[Character Analysis](#)."

*"Who is this Gatsby anyhow?" demanded Tom suddenly. "Some big bootlegger?"*

*"Where'd you hear that?" I inquired.*

*"I didn't hear it. I imagined it. A lot of these newly rich people are just big bootleggers, you know."*

*"Not Gatsby," I said shortly.*

*He was silent for a moment. The pebbles of the drive crunched under his feet.*

*"Well, he certainly must have strained himself to get this menagerie together."*

*A breeze stirred the gray haze of Daisy's fur collar.*

*"At least they're more interesting than the people we know," she said with an effort. (6.98-105)*

Thought: First, we have Tom's comment that most newly rich people are bootleggers – this was true in some cases, but the generalization allows Tom to write off all of the *nouveau riche* as crooks or imposters. Nick stands up for Gatsby – possibly because Nick is starting to like the guy. Daisy ventures to comment that at least West Eggers are more interesting. This marks one of the few occasions when Daisy recognizes that someone's wealth and family history isn't the only way to identify a person.

*"She's got an indiscreet voice," I remarked. "It's full of—" I hesitated.*

*"Her voice is full of money," he said suddenly.*

*That was it. I'd never understood before. It was full of money—that was the inexhaustible charm that rose and fell in it, the jingle of it, the cymbals' song of it... High in a white palace the king's daughter, the golden girl... (7.102-104)*

Thought: This says a lot about Daisy. We're still unclear on what exactly a voice "full of money" actually sounds like, but we take it to mean that Daisy simply exudes wealth in everything she does. Even the simple act of speaking somehow reminds people that her wealth and lifestyle are ingrained into every aspect of her identity. For more on Daisy's voice, check out her "[Character Analysis](#)."

*Through this twilight universe Daisy began to move again with the season; suddenly she was again keeping half a dozen dates a day with half a dozen men, and drowsing asleep at dawn with the beads and chiffon of an evening dress tangled among dying orchids on the floor beside her bed. And all the time something within her was crying for a decision. She wanted her life shaped now, immediately – and the decision must be made by some force – of love, of money, of unquestionable practicality – that was close at hand. (8.19)*

Thought: After Gatsby has been absent from her life for a while, Daisy gets restless and re-adopts the luxurious lifestyle that her family's wealth affords her. Unwilling to wait for long, and probably somewhat fearful that Gatsby would never make enough money to earn her hand in marriage, she throws herself back into finding a husband. If Tom Buchanan hadn't scooped Daisy up to be his wife, we get the impression that someone else of a similar background would have.

*Even when the East excited me most, even when I was most keenly aware of its superiority to the bored, sprawling, swollen towns beyond Ohio, with their interminable inquisitions which spared only the children and the very old – even then it had always for me a quality of distortion. West Egg, especially, still figures in my more fantastic dreams. (9.123)*



Thought: This is a complicated comment. We're thinking that he's referring to the old money way of life, a way of life that is inherited. The West Egg lifestyle, or the world populated with the *nouveau riche*, seems more of a dream world to Nick. The dream of working your way up the social ladder and into a life of financial comfort? The American Dream? Nick seems to believe that one should have to earn one's rewards rather than simply being born into them.

*They were careless people, Tom and Daisy – they smashed up things and creatures and then retreated back into their money or their vast carelessness, or whatever it was that kept them together, and let other people clean up the mess they had made... (9.143)*

Thought: Tom and Daisy's money allows them to be careless in their actions and in the way they treat others, because they can always run back to their immense wealth or their family's name. They take no responsibilities for their actions; rather, when the going gets tough, they abandon the people who they've hurt and the tragic situations they've caused.

## Love Quotes

*[Jordan's] gray, sun-strained eyes stared straight ahead, but she had deliberately shifted our relations, and for a moment I thought I loved her. But I am slow-thinking and full of interior rules that act as brakes on my desires, and I knew that first I had to get myself definitely out of that tangle back home. I'd been writing letters once a week and signing them: "Love, Nick," and all I could think of was how, when that certain girl played tennis, a faint mustache of perspiration appeared on her upper lip. Nevertheless there was a vague understanding that had to be tactfully broken off before I was free. (3.169)*

Thought: Nick's love for another is disturbed by something petty and immaterial (her sweat). Love, it seems, is fragile in *The Great Gatsby*.

*He nodded sagely. "And what's more, I love Daisy too. Once in a while I go off on a spree and make a fool of myself, but I always come back, and in my heart I love her all the time."*

*"You're revolting," said Daisy. She turned to me, and her voice, dropping an octave lower, filled the room with thrilling scorn: "Do you know why we left Chicago? I'm surprised that they didn't treat you to the story of that little spree." (7.251-252)*

Thought: For Tom, love is compatible with infidelity. He and Daisy are at odds because each defines love differently than the other – just like Daisy and Gatsby.

*She looked at him blindly. "Why – how could I love him – possibly?"*

*"You never loved him."*

*She hesitated. Her eyes fell on Jordan and me with a sort of appeal, as though she realized at last what she was doing – and as though she had never, all along, intended doing anything at all. But it was done now. It was too late.*

*"I never loved him," she said, with perceptible reluctance.*

*"Not at Kapiolani?" demanded Tom suddenly.*

*"No."*

*The ballroom beneath, muffled and suffocating chords were drifting up on hot waves of air.*

*"Not that day I carried you down from the Punch Bowl to keep your shoes dry?" There was a husky tenderness in his tone [...] "Daisy?"*

*"Please don't." Her voice was cold, but the rancor was gone from it. She looked at Gatsby. "There, Jay," she said – but her hand as she tried to light a cigarette was trembling. Suddenly she threw the cigarette and the burning match on the carpet.*

*"Oh, you want too much!" she cried to Gatsby. "I love you now – isn't that enough? I can't help what's past." She began to sob helplessly. "I did love him once – but I loved you too."*

*Gatsby's eyes opened and closed.*

*"You loved me TOO?" he repeated.*

*"Even that's a lie," said Tom savagely. "She didn't know you were alive. Why – there're things between Daisy and me that you'll never know, things that neither of us can ever forget."*

*The words seemed to bite physically into Gatsby.*

*"I want to speak to Daisy alone," he insisted. "She's all excited now –"*

*"Even alone I can't say I never loved Tom," she admitted in a pitiful voice. "It wouldn't be true."  
(7.255-271)*

Thought: For Daisy, love can change over time. She claims she loved only Gatsby, then Gatsby and Tom, and now only Gatsby. But to Gatsby, for whom love is unchanging, this is inconceivable. Gatsby and Daisy can never really be reunited because of these fundamental

disagreements about time and love.

*"Who wants to go to town?" demanded Daisy insistently. Gatsby's eyes floated toward her. "Ah," she cried, "you look so cool."*

*Their eyes met, and they stared together at each other, alone in space. With an effort she glanced down at the table.*

*"You always look so cool," she repeated.*

*She had told him that she loved him, and Tom Buchanan saw. He was astounded. His mouth opened a little, and he looked at Gatsby, and then back at Daisy as if he had just recognized her as some one he knew a long time ago. (7.79-82)*

Thought: This is an interesting line to reveal Daisy's feelings to the world. The words are based on Gatsby's appearance, against the persona he projects, not his true self. We know, for instance, that Gatsby is uncomfortable in the Buchanans' house (as he reveals later to Nick that he "can't say anything" there), yet to Daisy, he looks calm and cool – and she loves him for it.

*"Nevertheless you did throw me over," said Jordan suddenly. "You threw me over on the telephone. I don't give a damn about you now, but it was a new experience for me, and I felt a little dizzy for a while."*

*We shook hands.*

*"Oh, and do you remember." – she added – "a conversation we had once about driving a car?"*

*"Why – not exactly."*

*"You said a bad driver was only safe until she met another bad driver? Well, I met another bad driver, didn't I? I mean it was careless of me to make such a wrong guess. I thought you were rather an honest, straightforward person. I thought it was your secret pride."*

*"I'm thirty," I said. "I'm five years too old to lie to myself and call it honor."*

*She didn't answer. Angry, and half in love with her, and tremendously sorry, I turned away. (9.129-135)*

Thought: Nick loves Jordan, but it's a shallow love borne out of his own selfishness, very much like Jordan's own.

*I decided to call to him. Miss Baker had mentioned him at dinner, and that would do for an introduction. But I didn't call to him, for he gave a sudden intimation that he was content to be alone—he stretched out his arms toward the dark water in a curious way, and, far as I was from him, I could have sworn he was trembling. Involuntarily I glanced seaward—and distinguished nothing except a single green light, minute and far away, that might have been the end of a dock. When I looked once more for Gatsby he had vanished, and I was alone again in the unquiet darkness. (1.152)*

Thought: This quiet observation of Nick's says so much. It's our first introduction to Gatsby, and he's reaching out toward Daisy's house, towards the green light. Remember, at this point Gatsby hasn't seen her for over five years. His love for her is overwhelming, and he expresses this by literally reaching out toward a light that he associates with her. For a full explanation of that green light, check out "[Symbols, Imagery, Allegory](#)."

*"Gratulate me," [Daisy] muttered. "Never had a drink before, but oh how I do enjoy it." "I was scared, I can tell you; I'd never seen a girl like that before.*

*"Here, deares'." She groped around in a waste-basket she had with her on the bed and pulled out the string of pearls. "Take 'em down-stairs and give 'em back to whoever they belong to. Tell 'em all Daisy's change' her mind. Say: 'Daisy's change' her mine!"*

*She began to cry – she cried and cried. I rushed out and found her mother's maid, and we locked the door and got her into a cold bath. She wouldn't let go of the letter. She took it into the tub with her and squeezed it up into a wet ball, and only let me leave it in the soap-dish when she saw that it was coming to pieces like snow. (4.127-131)*

Thought: All it takes is a little alcohol to get Daisy talking truthfully; it's actually one of the few times we see her being honest about her emotions. It's clear here that she experienced some major hesitation before marrying Tom, mostly due to a letter that we can only assume is from Gatsby. Daisy seems to truly have strong emotions for Gatsby. But, soon after she waltzes downstairs and marries Tom. From this we can see that Daisy is torn between following her heart and marrying a wealthy suitor for the sake of social and financial comfort. We all know that she chooses financial security. This could be considered foreshadowing of her crisis at the end of the novel when she once again must choose between Tom and Gatsby.

*I saw them in Santa Barbara when they came back, and I thought I'd never seen a girl so mad about her husband. If he left the room for a minute she'd look around uneasily, and say: "Where's Tom gone?" and wear the most abstracted expression until she saw him coming in the door. She used to sit on the sand with his head in her lap by the hour, rubbing her fingers over his eyes and looking at him with unfathomable delight. It was touching to see them together – it made you laugh in a hushed, fascinated way. (4.133)*

Thought: Post-honeymoon Daisy seems to be genuinely head-over-heels for Tom. Is it possible to love two people at the same time? If not, how should we explain Daisy's flip-flopping behavior?

*"It was a strange coincidence," I said.*

*"But it wasn't a coincidence at all."*

*"Why not?"*

*"Gatsby bought that house so that Daisy would be just across the bay." (4.137-140)*

Thought: Gatsby's gone to extreme lengths to win back the girl. If he weren't so darn earnest and unabashedly smitten with Daisy, we may think he was a creepy.

*"When I said you were a friend of Tom's, he started to abandon the whole idea. He doesn't know very much about Tom, though he says he's read a Chicago paper for years just on the chance of catching a glimpse of Daisy's name." (4.152)*

Thought: Gatsby has read a Chicago paper for years just on the chance of catching a glimpse of Daisy's name. He's either very devoted to, or somewhat obsessed with Daisy.

*He hadn't once ceased looking at Daisy, and I think he revalued everything in his house according to the measure of response it drew from her well-loved eyes. Sometimes, too, he stared around at his possessions in a dazed way, as though in her actual and astounding presence none of it was any longer real. Once he nearly toppled down a flight of stairs. (5.112)*

Thought: Gatsby is blinded by love. Gatsby is cute in his admiration of Daisy, but we wonder what it is that Gatsby loves. Everyone has different definitions of what love is, but at this point in the story we have to wonder if Gatsby is in love with Daisy as a person or that lifestyle that Daisy represents.

*Suddenly, with a strained sound, Daisy bent her head into the shirts and began to cry stormily.*

*"They're such beautiful shirts," she sobbed, her voice muffled in the thick folds. "It makes me sad because I've never seen such – such beautiful shirts before." (5.118-119)*

Thought: Clearly Daisy is not crying about Gatsby's shirts. We assume that the shirts symbolize to Daisy how wealthy he truly is, and this is when it really hits her. He's back, he's totally loaded, and she's... married.

*His heart beat faster and faster as Daisy's white face came up to his own. He knew that when he kissed this girl, and forever wed his unutterable visions to her perishable breath, his mind would never romp again like the mind of God. So he waited, listening for a moment longer to the tuning-fork that had been struck upon a star. Then he kissed her. At his lips' touch she blossomed for him like a flower and the incarnation was complete. (6.134)*

Thought: This is the moment when Gatsby went from being a guy with free-roaming ambition to a man with a purpose: to earn Daisy Fay's hand in marriage. All other aspirations went right out the window and Gatsby's sole purpose in life was to be with her.

*Tom drove slowly until we were beyond the bend—then his foot came down hard, and the coupe raced along through the night. In a little while I heard a low husky sob, and saw that the tears were overflowing down his face.*

*"The God damned coward!" he whimpered. "He didn't even stop his car." (7.363-364)*

*"Nothing happened," he said wanly. "I waited, and about four o'clock she came to the window and stood there for a minute and then turned out the light." (8.3)*

Thought: Little does Gatsby know what that pause by the window means when he witnesses it. This is the last time he sees Daisy, and that pause might just be her way of saying good-bye. That gaze out the window does imply that she has mixed emotions about choosing Tom, but that her decision is final.

*It excited him, too, that many men had already loved Daisy – it increased her value in his eyes. He felt their presence all about the house, pervading the air with the shades and echoes of still vibrant emotions. (8.10)*

Thought: You might wonder why the fact that other men have loved Daisy influences how Gatsby feels. Does he view this as a competition? That winning Daisy's heart really is just a way to prove his worth? This comment makes us question Gatsby's motives for loving Daisy. Is



he deluding himself when he declares that he loves her for who she is? How much does Daisy's class influence Gatsby's love of her? Does Gatsby even realize how much it affects the pull of his heart?

*"They're a rotten crowd," I shouted across the lawn. You're worth the whole damn bunch put together."*

*I've always been glad I said that. It was the only compliment I ever gave him, because I disapproved of him from beginning to end. (8.45-46)*

Thought: This quote isn't about romantic love. But at this point in the novel, Nick realizes that he truly cares for Gatsby, despite Gatsby's many flaws. What is it about Gatsby that earns Nick's friendship and admiration? His motivations for doing what he does? His loyalty to people he loves? When does Nick first realize how he really feels about Gatsby?

## Visions of America Quotes

*My family have been prominent, well-to-do people in this Middle Western city for three generations.*

*The Carraways are something of a clan, and we have a tradition that we're descended from the Dukes of Buccleuch, but the actual founder of my line was my grandfather's brother, who came here in fifty-one, sent a substitute to the Civil War, and started the wholesale hardware business that my father carries on to-day. (1.5)*

Thought: We see here that Nick is from a "prominent, well-to-do" family; he's had a comfortable life, but by no means has he lived the luxurious existence that Daisy and Tom have. Based on what Nick says here, it seems as though his family has lived the "American Dream" – hard work got them to where they are today.

*I lived at West Egg, the—well, the less fashionable of the two, though this is a most superficial tag to express the bizarre and not a little sinister contrast between them. [...] Across the courtesy bay the white palaces of fashionable East Egg glittered along the water, and the history of the summer really begins on the evening I drove over there to have dinner with the Tom Buchanans. Daisy was my second cousin once removed, and I'd known Tom in college. And just after the war I spent two days with them in Chicago. (1.14-15)*

Thought: The main difference between the two Eggs has to do with the type of upper-class people living in each one. East Egg has mostly people who come from old money, or were born into their riches. West Egg inhabitants are mostly members of the *nouveau riche* – people who haven't always been wealthy, but instead have worked their way into their riches.

*I decided to call to him. Miss Baker had mentioned him at dinner, and that would do for an introduction. But I didn't call to him, for he gave a sudden intimation that he was content to be alone—he stretched out his arms toward the dark water in a curious way, and, far as I was from him, I could have sworn he was trembling. Involuntarily I glanced seaward—and distinguished nothing except a single green light, minute and far away, that might have been the end of a dock. When I looked once more for Gatsby he had vanished, and I was alone again in the unquiet darkness. (1.152)*

Thought: Gatsby's reaching out for the green light, which symbolizes the American Dream for him, among other things. He seems so close to achieving it, or... is he?

*"Meyer Wolfsheim? No, he's a gambler." Gatsby hesitated, then added coolly: "He's the man who fixed the World's Series back in 1919."*

*"Fixed the World's Series?" I repeated.*

*The idea staggered me. I remembered, of course, that the World's Series had been fixed in 1919, but if I had thought of it at all I would have thought of it as a thing that merely happened, the end of some inevitable chain. It never occurred to me that one man could start to play with the faith of fifty million people – with the single-mindedness of a burglar blowing a safe.*

*"How did he happen to do that?" I asked after a minute.*

*"He just saw the opportunity."*

*"Why isn't he in jail?"*

*"They can't get him, old sport. He's a smart man." (112-118)*

Thought: Meyer Wolfsheim saw an opportunity to achieve the American Dream (by making tons of dough fast), and he didn't let it pass him by. The same goes for Gatsby, but his opportunity came in the form of Dan Cody.

*"If it wasn't for the mist we could see your home across the bay," said Gatsby. "You always have a green light that burns all night at the end of your dock." Daisy put her arm through his abruptly, but he seemed absorbed in what he had just said. 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. (5.121-122)*

Thought: It's strange for Gatsby to know that the green light is still on across the bay, because for so long it's symbolized Daisy in his mind, and she was always so far away. Now she's right in front of him, and this realization is a difficult one. It seems as though his dream is now coming true, or at least it seems to be. For more explanation of the green light and everything it symbolizes, check out the "[Symbols, Imagery, Allegory](#)."

*"Good morning, old sport. You're having lunch with me to-day and I thought we'd ride up together."*

*He was balancing himself on the dashboard of his car with that resourcefulness of movement that is so peculiarly American—that comes, I suppose, with the absence of lifting work or rigid sitting in youth and, even more, with the formless grace of our nervous, sporadic games. This quality was continually breaking through his punctilious manner in the shape of restlessness.*

*He was never quite still; there was always a tapping foot somewhere or the impatient opening and closing of a hand. (4.12-13)*

Thought: Despite how hard Gatsby tries, Nick can tell that he isn't genuinely comfortable in his upper-class act. There's something very "peculiarly American" about Gatsby's demeanor – an inability to sit still that identifies Gatsby more with the middle classes (at least, that's how Nick interprets his movements).

*One of my most vivid memories is of coming back West from prep school and later from college at Christmas time. Those who went farther than Chicago would gather in the old dim Union Station at six o'clock of a December evening, with a few Chicago friends, already caught up into their own holiday gayeties, to bid them a hasty good-by.*

*I remember the fur coats of the girls returning from Miss This-or-That's and the chatter of frozen breath and the hands waving overhead as we caught sight of old acquaintances, and the matchings of invitations: "Are you going to the Ordways'? the Herseys'? the Schultzes'?" and the long green tickets clasped tight in our gloved hands. And last the murky yellow cars of the Chicago, Milwaukee & St. Paul railroad looking cheerful as Christmas itself on the tracks beside the gate.*

*When we pulled out into the winter night and the real snow, our snow, began to stretch out beside us and twinkle against the windows, and the dim lights of small Wisconsin stations moved by, a sharp wild brace came suddenly into the air. We drew in deep breaths of it as we walked back from dinner through the cold vestibules, unutterably aware of our identity with this country for one strange hour, before we melted indistinguishably into it again.*

*That's my Middle West – not the wheat or the prairies or the lost Swede towns, but the thrilling returning trains of my youth, and the street lamps and sleigh bells in the frosty dark and the shadows of holly wreaths thrown by lighted windows on the snow. I am part of that, a little solemn with the feel of those long winters, a little complacent from growing up in the Carraway house in a city where dwellings are still called through decades by a family's name. (9.120-122)*

Thought: Here Nick seems to be implying that identity is not entirely dependent on socio-economic class. Nick remembers when he took an unbiased look at life, without concern about what society deemed it was worth.

*Most of the big shore places were closed now and there were hardly any lights except the shadowy, moving glow of a ferryboat across the Sound. And as the moon rose higher the inessential houses began to melt away until gradually I became aware of the old island here that flowered once for Dutch sailors' eyes – a fresh, green breast of the new world. Its vanished trees, the trees that had made way for Gatsby's house, had once pandered in whispers to the last and greatest of all human dreams; for a transitory enchanted moment man must have held his breath in the presence of this continent, compelled into an aesthetic contemplation he neither understood nor desired, face to face for the last time in history with something commensurate to his capacity for wonder. (9.182)*

Thought: Nick reflects on what America used to be: an unknown world that stood for anything and everything for which a man could dream. At the time of *The Great Gatsby*, that world is completely gone: class and socio-economic restraints limit how high a person can reach.

*And as I sat there brooding on the old, unknown world, I thought of Gatsby's wonder when he first picked out the green light at the end of Daisy's dock. He had come a long way to this blue lawn, and his dream must have seemed so close that he could hardly fail to grasp it. He did not know that it was already behind him, somewhere back in that vast obscurity beyond the city, where the dark fields of the republic rolled on under the night. Gatsby believed in the green light, the orgastic future that year by year recedes before us. It eluded us then, but that's no matter – to-morrow we will run faster, stretch out our arms farther...and one fine morning–*

*So we beat on, boats against the current, borne back ceaselessly into the past. (9.149-151)*

Thought: Here Nick is reflecting on what America stood for when it was first discovered – a land of new possibilities, where everything was up for the taking for anyone willing to work hard. Gatsby had believed in that idea, but to Nick it seems that his Gatsby's true greatness was in his ambition itself. The green light, in which Gatsby believed for so long, stands for several things, but now that Gatsby is gone, it seems to no longer hold any significance.

## Wealth Quotes

*In my younger and more vulnerable years my father gave me some advice that I've been turning over in my mind ever since.*

*"Whenever you feel like criticizing any one," he told me, "just remember that all the people in this world haven't had the advantages that you've had."*

*He didn't say any more, but we've always been unusually communicative in a reserved way, and I understood that he meant a great deal more than that. In consequence, I'm inclined to reserve all judgments [...]. (1.1-3)*

Thought: Nick paints the portrait that, despite his wealthy family, he maintains a removed objectivity. This of course, is entirely untrue, as is evidenced repeatedly throughout the novel.

*"I can't say anything in his house, old sport."*

*"She's got an indiscreet voice," I remarked. "It's full of –" I hesitated.*

*"Her voice is full of money," he said suddenly.*

*That was it. I'd never understood before. It was full of money – that was the inexhaustible charm that rose and fell in it, the jingle of it, the cymbals' song of it... high in a white palace the king's daughter, the golden girl [...]. (7.99)*

Thought: Gatsby feels unable to speak in the Buchanans' house because of the barriers of wealth. Although he has money, it isn't the kind that allows him into Daisy's world. Even her voice, the very essence of her character, is off limits for him. In fact, Nick and Gatsby find commonalities in feeling excluded from the Buchanan's world. Nick's description of Daisy as "the golden girl" also brings us back to the epigraph, a quotation quite useful for this scene. (See "[What's Up with the Epigraph?](#)" for more.)

*"Self-control!" Repeated Tom incredulously. "I suppose the latest thing is to sit back and let Mr. Nobody from Nowhere make love to your wife. Well, if that's the idea you can count me out [...] Nowadays people begin by sneering at family life and family institutions, and next they'll throw everything overboard and have intermarriage between black and white." (7.229)*

Thought: It is ironic that Tom's scorn for Gatsby's is based on his background – Gatsby's lack of money, education, and class – and not the fact that Gatsby has been sleeping with his wife.

*I couldn't forgive him or like him, but I saw that what he had done was, to him, entirely justified. It was all very careless and confused. They were careless people, Tom and Daisy – they smashed up things and creatures and then retreated back into their money or their vast carelessness, or whatever it was that kept them together and let other people clean up the mess they had made [...]. (9.136-145)*

Thought: Tom and Daisy are able to escape what they do to people only because they have the monetary means to do it.

*His family were enormously wealthy – even in college his freedom with money was a matter for reproach – but now he'd left Chicago and come East in a fashion that rather took your breath away; for instance, he'd brought down a string of polo ponies from Lake Forest. It was hard to realize that a man in my own generation was wealthy enough to do that.*

*Why they came East I don't know. They had spent a year in France for no particular reason, and then drifted here and there unrestfully wherever people played polo and were rich together. (1.16-17)*

Thought: Tom and Daisy flit from here to there without a care in the world. That's what their money allows. While it's easy to see why most people would envy them, it's also easy to see how they could irritate Nick over time. Daisy and Tom seem to have no purpose in their lives beyond cultivating their reputations and spending money.

*His speaking voice, a gruff husky tenor, added to the impression of fractiousness he conveyed. There was a touch of paternal contempt in it, even toward people he liked—and there were men at New Haven who had hated his guts. (1.20)*

Thought: Tom's wealth gives him a lot of power, and he knows it. It's this wealth and power that allows Tom to treat others poorly. Tom is certainly elitist and believes he should be entitled to be condescending to whomever he chooses. (At least we think so. Judge for yourself after reading his "[Character Analysis](#)."

*The younger of the two was a stranger to me. She was extended full length at her end of the divan, completely motionless, and with her chin raised a little, as if she were balancing something on it which was quite likely to fall. (1.28)*

Thought: This first description of Jordan Baker notes that "her chin is raised a little"... this also means that her nose is literally up in the air. This makes her seem a bit snobby from the first time Nick meets her.



*There was music from my neighbor's house through the summer nights. In his blue gardens men and girls came and went like moths among the whisperings and the champagne and the stars. At high tide in the afternoon I watched his guests diving from the tower of his raft, or taking the sun on the hot sand of his beach while his motor-boats slid the waters of the Sound, drawing aquaplanes over cataracts of foam. On week-ends his Rolls-Royce became an omnibus, bearing parties to and from the city between nine in the morning and long past midnight, while his station wagon scampered like a brisk yellow bug to meet all trains. And on Mondays eight servants, including an extra gardener, toiled all day with mops and scrubbing-brushes and hammers and garden-shears, repairing the ravages of the night before.* (3.1)

Thought: The extravagance of Gatsby's parties shows how much money he has to burn. He also pays for all his guests' wild times, which makes his wealth all the more incomprehensible.

*"I like to come," Lucille said. "I never care what I do, so I always have a good time. When I was here last I tore my gown on a chair, and he asked me my name and address – inside of a week I got a package from Croirier's with a new evening gown in it." "Did you keep it?" asked Jordan.*

*"Sure I did. I was going to wear it tonight, but it was too big in the bust and had to be altered. It was gas blue with lavender beads. Two hundred and sixty-five dollars." (3.23-25)*

Thought: Gatsby is wealthy enough to drop two hundred and sixty-five dollars on a dress for a woman 1) who he doesn't know, and 2) who tore her own dress. No doubt he did so to show off how generous he's capable of being, and how generous his fortune enables him to be.

*A stout, middle-aged man, with enormous owl-eyed spectacles, was sitting somewhat drunk on the edge of a great table, staring with unsteady concentration at the shelves of books. As we entered he wheeled excitedly around and examined Jordan from head to foot.*

*"What do you think?" he demanded impetuously.*

*"About what?"*

*He waved his hand toward the book-shelves.*

*"About that. As a matter of fact you needn't bother to ascertain. I ascertained. They're real."*

*"The books?"*

*He nodded.*

*"Absolutely real - have pages and everything. I thought they'd be a nice durable cardboard. Matter of fact, they're absolutely real. Pages and - Here! Lemme show you."*

*Taking our scepticism for granted, he rushed to the bookcases and returned with Volume One of the "Stoddard Lectures."*

*"See!" he cried triumphantly. "It's a bona-fide piece of printed matter. It fooled me. This fella's a regular Belasco. It's a triumph. What thoroughness! What realism! Knew when to stop, too - didn't cut the pages. But what do you want? What do you expect?"*

*He snatched the book from me and replaced it hastily on the shelf, muttering if one brick was removed the whole library was liable to collapse. (3.41-51)*

Thought: Although Gatsby can afford to purchase real books (which is a surprising and impressive feat in itself, according to Mr. Owl-eyes), he doesn't ever actually open them. This reveals that Gatsby may have only bought the books for show; his library is stocked to impress others. A fully stocked library implies that the owner has had an extensive education, which also implies that he was born into old money. But, since Gatsby's books are unread, it's clear that Gatsby's not educated, therefore not from old money. His uncut books might reveal him to be a phony. For more on Gatsby's books and the owl-eyed man, see [Symbols, Imagery, Allegory](#)."

*"Meyer Wolfsheim? No, he's a gambler." Gatsby hesitated, then added coolly: "He's the man who fixed the World's Series back in 1919."*

*"Fixed the World's Series?" I repeated.*

*The idea staggered me. I remembered, of course, that the World's Series had been fixed in 1919, but if I had thought if it all I would have thought of it as a thing that merely happened, the end of some inevitable chain. It never occurred to me that one man could start to play with the faith of fifty million people – with the single-mindedness of a burglar blowing a safe.*

*"How did he happen to do that?" I asked after a minute.*

*"He just saw the opportunity." (4.112-116)*

Thought: Gatsby's association with Meyer Wolfsheim shows us that he's rolling with the bad boys. This is some seriously illegal stuff that Gatsby's up to. That last line – "he just saw the opportunity" – could go for Gatsby as well as Wolfsheim. When Gatsby jumped aboard Dan Cody's boat, he was taking advantage of a bit of luck that came his way in order to make as much money as possible. The similarity between these two men is not only that they both saw a certain opportunity in their lives, but also that both were ready and eager to take advantage of that opportunity.

*I realize now that under different circumstances that conversation might have been one of the crises of my life. But, because the offer was obviously and tactlessly for a service to be rendered, I had no choice except to cut him off there.*

*"I've got my hands full," I said. "I'm much obliged but I couldn't take on any more work."  
(5.26-27)*

Thought: Nick doesn't think about it at the time because, in a practical sense, he can't take on any more work, but he also admits that making the temptation to partake in illegal business ventures for a huge payoff is a very difficult temptation to resist. We know Nick is an honest guy, so we can deduce that the promise of wealth is capable of corrupting anyone.

## Memory and The Past Quotes

*"It was a strange coincidence," I said.*

*"But it wasn't a coincidence at all."*

*"Why not?"*

*"Gatsby bought that house so that Daisy would be just across the bay." Then it had not been merely the stars to which he had aspired on that June night. He came alive to me, delivered suddenly from the womb of his purposeless splendor. (4.147-151)*

Thought: Nick can't understand Gatsby until he understands the man's motives. This is why he reveals Gatsby's past to us in the order that he does; Nick tells the story the way he would have needed to be told. Because Nick gets the information about Gatsby's history later than we do, it is only natural that he initially dislikes the man.

*He hadn't once ceased looking at Daisy, and I think he revalued everything in his house according to the measure of response it drew from her well-loved eyes. Sometimes, too, he stared around at his possessions in a dazed way, as though in her actual and astounding presence none of it was any longer real. Once he nearly toppled down a flight of stairs.*

*His bedroom was the simplest room of all – except where the dresser was garnished with a toilet set of pure dull gold. Daisy took the brush with delight, and smoothed her hair, whereupon Gatsby sat down and shaded his eyes and began to laugh.*

*"It's the funniest thing, old sport," he said hilariously. "I can't – When I try to –"*

*He had passed visibly through two states and was entering upon a third. After his embarrassment and his unreasoning joy he was consumed with wonder at her presence. He had been full of the idea so long, dreamed it right through to the end, waited with his teeth set, so to speak, at an inconceivable pitch of intensity. Now, in the reaction, he was running down like an over-wound clock. (5.111-114)*

Thought: While Gatsby may have at one point loved the real Daisy, the love that survived over time is of his dream-like conception of her.

*After the house, we were to see the grounds and the swimming-pool, and the hydroplane and the mid-summer flowers – but outside Gatsby's window it began to rain again, so we stood in a row looking at the corrugated surface of the Sound.*

*"If it wasn't for the mist we could see your home across the bay," said Gatsby. "You always have a green light that burns all night at the end of your dock."*

*Daisy put her arm through his abruptly, but he seemed absorbed in what he had just said. 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. (5.120-122)*

Thought: Nick sees sadness, not joy, in Gatsby's reunion with Daisy. Nick, it seems, recognizes the impossibility of Gatsby's plans.

*As I went over to say good-by I saw that the expression of bewilderment had come back into Gatsby's face, as though a faint doubt had occurred to him as to the quality of his present happiness. Almost five years! There must have been moments even that afternoon when Daisy tumbled short of his dreams – not through her own fault, but because of the colossal vitality of his illusion. It had gone beyond her, beyond everything. He had thrown himself into it with a creative passion, adding to it all the time, decking it out with every bright feather that drifted his way. No amount of fire or freshness can challenge what a man will store up in his ghostly heart.*

*As I watched him he adjusted himself a little, visibly. His hand took hold of hers, and as she said something low in his ear he turned toward her with a rush of emotion. I think that voice held him most, with its fluctuating, feverish warmth, because it couldn't be over-dreamed – that voice was a deathless song. (5.152-153)*

Thought: Already, the reality of Daisy in the present is tarnishing the dream of the past.

*Gatsby and I in turn leaned down and took the small, reluctant hand. Afterward he kept looking at the child with surprise. I don't think he had ever really believed in its existence before. (7.53)*

Thought: The fact that Daisy has a child, that she is actually married, has never seemed real to Gatsby before.

*It passed, and he began to talk excitedly to Daisy, denying everything, defending his name against accusations that had not been made. But with every word she was drawing further and further into herself, so he gave that up, and only the dead dream fought on as the afternoon slipped away, trying to touch what was no longer tangible, struggling unhappily, undesperingly, toward that lost voice across the room.*

*The voice begged again to go.*

*"PLEASE, Tom! I can't stand this any more."*

*Her frightened eyes told that whatever intentions, whatever courage, she had had, were definitely gone. (7.292-295)*

Thought: Daisy changes her mind, not because she wants to stay with Tom, but because she realizes that she can never live up to the expectations – the requirements – of Gatsby's love for her.

*"I don't think she ever loved him." Gatsby turned around from a window and looked at me challengingly. "You must remember, old sport, she was very excited this afternoon. He told her those things in a way that frightened her – that made it look as if I was some kind of cheap sharper. And the result was she hardly knew what she was saying."*

*He sat down gloomily.*

*"Of course she might have loved him just for a minute, when they were first married – and loved me more even then, do you see?"*

*Suddenly he came out with a curious remark.*

*"In any case," he said, "it was just personal."*

*What could you make of that, except to suspect some intensity in his conception of the affair*

*that couldn't be measured? (8.22-27)*

Thought: Gatsby is only able to maintain his love for Daisy over time by denial.

*"You ought to go away," I said. "It's pretty certain they'll trace your car."*

*"Go away NOW, old sport?"*

*"Go to Atlantic City for a week, or up to Montreal."*

*He wouldn't consider it. He couldn't possibly leave Daisy until he knew what she was going to do. He was clutching at some last hope and I couldn't bear to shake him free. (8.5-8)*

Thought: Nick understands that the passing of time has rendered Daisy an impossibility for Gatsby. Yet he is unable to pass this knowledge onto Gatsby.

*No telephone message arrived, but the butler went without his sleep and waited for it until four o'clock – until long after there was any one to give it to if it came. I have an idea that Gatsby himself didn't believe it would come, and perhaps he no longer cared. If that was true he must have felt that he had lost the old warm world, paid a high price for living too long with a single dream. He must have looked up at an unfamiliar sky through frightening leaves and shivered as he found what a grotesque thing a rose is and how raw the sunlight was upon the scarcely created grass. A new world, material without being real, where poor ghosts, breathing dreams like air, drifted fortuitously about [...] like that ashen, fantastic figure gliding toward him through the amorphous trees. (8.111)*

Thought: It is no coincidence that Gatsby dies shortly after the realization that his dream his dead. Daisy to him was past, present, and future – without the hope of her love, Gatsby no longer has a future. It is beyond the logic of the text to allow him to live.

*[...] And as the moon rose higher the inessential houses began to melt away until gradually I became aware of the old island here that flowered once for Dutch sailors' eyes – a fresh, green breast of the new world. Its vanished trees, the trees that had made way for Gatsby's house, had once pandered in whispers to the last and greatest of all human dreams; for a transitory enchanted moment man must have held his breath in the presence of this continent, compelled into an aesthetic contemplation he neither understood nor desired, face to face for the last time in history with something commensurate to his capacity for wonder.*

*And as I sat there brooding on the old, unknown world, I thought of Gatsby's wonder when he first picked out the green light at the end of Daisy's dock. He had come a long way to this blue*



*lawn, and his dream must have seemed so close that he could hardly fail to grasp it. He did not know that it was already behind him, somewhere back in that vast obscurity beyond the city, where the dark fields of the republic rolled on under the night.*

*Gatsby believed in the green light, the orgastic future that year by year recedes before us. It eluded us then, but that's no matter – to-morrow we will run faster, stretch out our arms farther... And one fine morning –*

*So we beat on, boats against the current, borne back ceaselessly into the past. (9.149-153)*

Thought: By comparing Gatsby's stretch toward the green light to the sailor's desire for the green new world, Nick makes Gatsby's struggle universal. *The Great Gatsby*, then, is not the story of one man's love for one woman, but about man's attempt to grasp the dream ahead of him – a task Nick deems impossible.

*One October day in nineteen-seventeen – (said Jordan Baker that afternoon, sitting up very straight on a straight chair in the tea-garden at the Plaza Hotel) – I was walking along from one place to another, half on the sidewalks and half on the lawns. I was happier on the lawns because I had on shoes from England with rubber nobs on the soles that bit into the soft ground. I had on a new plaid skirt also that blew a little in the wind, and whenever this happened the red, white, and blue banners in front of all the houses stretched out stiff and said tut-tut-tut-tut, in a disapproving way. (4.128-119)*

Thought: Jordan's story seems all the more realistic because she includes small details that only she would remember. Clearly her shoes don't matter at all to the story she's telling, but Fitzgerald includes them to mimic the way memory works and to establish her point of view. We're used to seeing everything from Nick's perspective; now, this mini-story divulges information that only Jordan can share. For us readers, it helps for Fitzgerald to take an extra paragraph in order to reinforce that he's changed to a different narrator for a few pages.

*[Daisy] went with a slightly older crowd – when she went with anyone at all. Wild rumors were circulating about her – how her mother had found her packing her bag one winter night to go to New York and say good-bye to a soldier who was going overseas. She was effectually prevented, but she wasn't on speaking terms with her family for several weeks. (4.134)*

Thought: We can assume that Daisy was trying to flee to New York to say good-bye to Gatsby. This adds a small insight into the drama that was occurring behind Daisy's pristine public reputation.

*"Gratulate me," [Daisy] muttered. "Never had a drink before, but oh how I do enjoy it." "I was scared, I can tell you; I'd never seen a girl like that before.*

*"Here, deares'." She groped around in a waste-basket she had with her on the bed and pulled out the string of pearls. "Take 'em down-stairs and give 'em back to whoever they belong to. Tell 'em all Daisy's change' her mind. Say: 'Daisy's change' her mine!" " She began to cry—she cried and cried. I rushed out and found her mother's maid, and we locked the door and got her into a cold bath. She wouldn't let go of the letter. She took it into the tub with her and squeezed it up into a wet ball, and only let me leave it in the soap-dish when she saw that it was coming to pieces like snow. (4.137-141)*

Thought: Again, this is only something that Jordan could share. Clearly it wasn't easy for Daisy to abandon a future with Gatsby in order to marry Tom, and Jordan was privy to this crisis. This memory of Jordan's attests not only to the fact that Daisy did indeed love Gatsby, but also that she did not want to give up on that love. This memory provides an important insight into Daisy's character and the relationship between Daisy and Gatsby (not to mention the relationship between Daisy and Tom).

*Well, about six weeks ago, she heard the name Gatsby for the first time in years. It was when I asked you – do you remember? – if you knew Gatsby in West Egg. After you had gone home she came into my room and woke me up, and said: "What Gatsby?" and when I described him – I was half asleep – she said in the strangest voice that it must be the man she used to know. It wasn't until then that I connected this Gatsby with the officer in her white car. (4.145)*

Thought: Originally, when Gatsby's name was mentioned earlier and Daisy didn't seem to really care, we thought that meant she wasn't too interested in this mysterious Gatsby fellow. Here we see that it is clearly not the case. With Jordan's addendum regarding the conversation between her and Daisy later that night after Nick had left, we see that Daisy was interested in Jordan's flippant mention of Gatsby's name.

*He wanted nothing less of Daisy than that she should go to Tom and say: "I never loved you." After she had obliterated four years with that sentence they could decide upon the more practical measures to be taken. One of them was that, after she was free, they were to go back to Louisville and be married from her house—just as if it were five years ago. (6.125)*

Thought: In Gatsby's mind, the last five years have been unimportant and expendable, since he was just building himself up in society to win Daisy back. Daisy, however, has spent the past five years building a relationship with her husband, with whom she shares not only a place in society but also a child. Daisy has a lot more at stake than Gatsby does. Were they to reunite and run off together, Daisy would miss some things from the life she had built with Tom. On the other hand, Gatsby doesn't really have anything to lose.

*He talked a lot about the past, and I gathered that he wanted to recover something, some idea of himself perhaps, that had gone into loving Daisy. His life had been confused and disordered since then, but if he could once return to a certain starting place and go over it all slowly, he could find out what that thing was...*

*...One autumn night, five years before, they had been walking down the street when the leaves were falling, and they came to a place where there were no trees and the sidewalk was white with moonlight. They stopped here and turned toward each other. Now it was a cool night with that mysterious excitement in it which comes at the two changes of the year. The quiet lights in the houses were humming out into the darkness and there was a stir and bustle among the stars. Out of the corner of his eye Gatsby saw that the blocks of the sidewalks really formed a ladder and mounted to a secret place above the trees – he could climb to it, if he climbed alone, and once he was there he could suck on the pap of life, gulp down the incomparable milk of wonder.*

*His heart beat faster and faster as Daisy's white face came up to his own. He knew that when he kissed this girl, and forever wed his unutterable visions to her perishable breath, his mind would never romp again like the mind of God. So he waited, listening for a moment longer to the tuning-fork that had been struck upon a star. Then he kissed her. At his lips' touch she blossomed for him like a flower and the incarnation was complete. (6.132-134)*

Thought: Gatsby remembers this time as that perfect time in his life to which he's desperate to return. But he doesn't take into consideration that he and Daisy have both changed a lot since the autumn five years prior. He's trying to recreate the past in the present. Both times Daisy has a crisis over whether to choose him or Tom; both times she chooses Tom. Gatsby's memory of their original love affair must have been very powerful, especially considering the lengths to which he went to win her back.

*"Oh, you want too much!" she cried to Gatsby. "I love you now – isn't that enough? I can't help what's past." She began to sob helplessly. "I did love him once – but I loved you too." (7.261)*

Thought: It seems like Daisy truly did love both Gatsby and Tom at the same time, a fact that Gatsby doesn't want to face. Gatsby's wish to blot out the last five years is thus ruined, since Daisy's emotional life hasn't been as uneventful as his own.

*On the last afternoon before he went abroad, he lay with Daisy in his arms for a long, silent time. It was a cold fall day, with fire in the room and her cheeks flushed. Now and then she moved and he changed his arm a little, and once he kissed her dark, shining hair. The afternoon had made them tranquil for a while, as if to give them a deep memory for the long parting the*

*next day promised. They had never been closer in their month of love, nor communicated more profoundly one with another, than when she brushed silent lips against his coat's shoulder or when he touched the end of her fingers, gently, as though she were asleep. (8.16)*

Thought: Again, a very tender memory of Gatsby's, that shows us how profoundly enamored he is with Daisy.

*"Look here, this is a book he had when he was a boy. It just shows you."*

*He opened it at the back cover and turned it around for me to see. On the last fly-leaf was printed the word SCHEDULE, and the date September 12, 1906. And underneath:*

*Rise from bed.....6.00 A.M.  
Dumbbell exercise and wall-scaling.....6.15-6.30 "  
Study electricity, etc. ....7.15-8.15 "  
Work.....8.30-4.30 P.M.  
Baseball and sports.....4.30-5.00 "  
Practice elocution, poise and how to attain it.....5.00-6.00 "  
Study needed inventions.....7.00-9.00 "*

#### GENERAL RESOLVES

*No wasting time at Shafters or [a name, indecipherable]  
No more smoking or chewing  
Bath every other day  
Read one improving book or magazine per week  
Save \$5.00 [crossed out] \$3.00 per week  
Be better to parents*

*"I come across this book by accident," said the old man. "It just shows you, don't it?"*

*"It just shows you."*

*"Jimmy was bound to get ahead. He always had some resolves like this or something. Do you notice what he's got about improving his mind? He was always great for that. He told me I et like a hog once, and I beat him for it."*

*He was reluctant to close the book, reading each item aloud and then looking eagerly at me. I think he rather expected me to copy down the list for my own use. (9.104-109)*

Thought: Gatsby's father clearly cherished this remnant of his son's past ambition, and we see how driven and disciplined James Gatz was. Keep in mind, he had never even heard of Daisy at this point, and Dan Cody hadn't yet stumbled into his life either. It seems that James Gatz ferociously pursued the American Dream, and he broke through every hurdle that got in his way. That early schedule, written in the back of a children's book, proved how deep the roots of Gatsby's dream truly reached. Read [Gatsby's "Character Analysis"](#) for more information.

*I tried to think about Gatsby then for a moment, but he was already too far away, and I could only remember, without resentment, that Daisy hadn't sent a message or a flower. (9.113)*

Thought: After Gatsby's death, Nick already has trouble remembering his friend clearly, as so often happens when people lose those close to them.

## Dissatisfaction Quotes

*Why they came East I don't know. They had spent a year in France for no particular reason, and then drifted here and there unrestfully wherever people played polo and were rich together. This was a permanent move, said Daisy over the telephone, but I didn't believe it – I had no sight into Daisy's heart, but I felt that Tom would drift on forever seeking, a little wistfully, for the dramatic turbulence of some irrecoverable football game. (1.17)*

Thought: Daisy and Tom's constant roaming is an indication that they are dissatisfied with their married life.

*"Who wants to go to town?" demanded Daisy insistently. Gatsby's eyes floated toward her. "Ah," she cried, "you look so cool."*

*Their eyes met, and they stared together at each other, alone in space. With an effort she glanced down at the table.*

*"You always look so cool," she repeated.*

*She had told him that she loved him, and Tom Buchanan saw. He was astounded. His mouth opened a little, and he looked at Gatsby, and then back at Daisy as if he had just recognized her as some one he knew a long time ago. (7.79-82)*

Thought: Daisy only starts the affair with Gatsby because she sees in him the qualities that Tom lacks. Her feelings for Gatsby are more about her present marriage than her past love.

*I couldn't forgive him or like him, but I saw that what he had done was, to him, entirely justified. It was all very careless and confused. They were careless people, Tom and Daisy – they smashed up things and creatures and then retreated back into their money or their vast carelessness, or whatever it was that kept them together, and let other people clean up the mess they had made [...]. (9.145)*

Thought: Tom and Daisy's dissatisfaction with their own lives results in their causing destruction in the lives of others.

*Instead of being the warm center of the world, the Middle West now seemed like the ragged edge of the universe—so I decided to go East and learn the bond business. (1.6)*

Thought: Knowing what the country has to offer – and the lifestyle that is possible in the East – Nick has a rough time trying to re-adapt to the Midwest. He can't go backwards now, because his pre-college home isn't enough to satisfy him.

*"That's true." [Daisy] hesitated. "Well, I've had a very bad time, Nick, and I'm pretty cynical about everything."*

*Evidently she had reason to be. I waited but she didn't say any more, and after a moment I returned rather feebly to the subject of her daughter.*

*"I suppose she talks, and – eats, and everything."*

*"Oh, yes." She looked at me absently. "Listen, Nick; let me tell you what I said she was born. Would you like to hear?"*

*"Very much."*

*"It'll show you how I've gotten to feel about – things. Well, she was less than an hour old and Tom was God knows where. I woke up out of the ether with an utterly abandoned feeling, and asked the nurse right away if it was a boy or a girl. She told me it was a girl, and so I turned my head away and wept. 'All right,' I said, 'I'm glad it's a girl. And I hope she'll be a fool – that's the best thing a girl can be in this world, a beautiful little fool.'*

*"You see I think everything's terrible anyhow," she went on in a convinced way. "Everybody thinks so – the most advanced people. And I know. I've been everywhere and seen everything and done everything." Her eyes flashed around her in a defiant way, rather like Tom's, and she laughed with a thrilling scorn. "Sophisticated – God, I'm sophisticated!" (1.113-119)*



Thought: Daisy claims to know the ways of the world, yet she finds herself unsatisfied with what life has to offer. It seems that her unhappiness stems from Tom's infidelity, and her inability to control him. She probably feels that she has been a fool and seems to imply that being a sensible girl has led to her current disillusionment.

*James Gatz – that was really, or at least legally, his name. He had changed it at the age of seventeen and at the specific moment that witnessed the beginning of his career – when he saw Dan Cody's yacht drop anchor over the most insidious flat on Lake Superior.*

[...]

*I suppose he'd had the name ready for a long time, even then. His parents were shiftless and unsuccessful farm people – his imagination had never really accepted them as his parents at all. (4.6-7)*

Thought: Gatsby had been dreaming of working his way into the upper class from a young age; he was always unsatisfied with being poor, and he was always ready to do whatever he could to move on up. Nick surmises that Gatsby had ready his new name for a while, so it was just a matter of time before Cody dropped anchor on his shore.

*He talked a lot about the past, and I gathered that he wanted to recover something, some idea of himself perhaps, that had gone into loving Daisy. His life had been confused and disordered since then, but if he could return to a certain starting place and go over it all slowly, he could find out what that thing was... (6.132)*

Thought: Post-Daisy, Gatsby can't be satisfied with scrambling up the social ladder, using ambition alone as incentive. It seems that he needs something on which to concentrate, and since Daisy brought unprecedented joy into his life, he now focuses all his drive into winning her.

*Usually her voice came over the wire as something fresh and cool, as if a divot from a green golf-links had come sailing in at the office window, but this morning it seemed harsh and dry.*

*"I've left Daisy's house," she said. "I'm at Hempstead, and I'm going down to Southampton this afternoon."*

*Probably it had been tactful to leave Daisy's house, but the act annoyed me, and her next remark made me rigid.*

*"You weren't so nice to me last night."*

*"How could it have mattered then?"*

*Silence for a moment. Then:*

*"However – I want to see you."*

*"I want to see you, too."*

*"Suppose I don't go to Southampton, and come into town this afternoon?"*

*"No – I don't think this afternoon."*

*"Very well."*

*"It's impossible this afternoon. Various – "*

*We talked like that for a while, and then abruptly we weren't talking any longer. I don't know which of us hung up with a sharp click, but I know I didn't care. I couldn't have talked to her across a tea-table that day if I never talked to her again in the world. (8.49-61)*

Thought: Nick's sudden, overwhelming disgust with upper-class selfishness – specifically with how Daisy and Tom treated Gatsby and Wilson – leaves him unable to view Jordan in the same loving light as he did previously. Her membership in the upper class makes her guilty by association in Nick's mind.

*I wanted to get somebody for him. I wanted to go into the room where he lay and reassure him: "I'll get somebody for you, Gatsby. Don't worry. Just trust me and I'll get somebody for you – " (9.11)*

Thought: Nick is desperately saddened by the fact that no one comes to Gatsby's funeral. No one – not one of his party friends, business acquaintances, or Daisy – seems to care that he's gone. Nick's compassion for Gatsby leaves him angry with those who are not compassionate.

## Isolation Quotes

*I was thirty. Before me stretched the portentous, menacing road of a new decade.*

*It was seven o'clock when we got into the coupe with him and started for Long Island. Tom talked incessantly, exulting and laughing, but his voice was as remote from Jordan and me as the foreign clamor on the sidewalk or the tumult of the elevated overhead. Human sympathy has its limits, and we were content to let all their tragic arguments fade with the city lights behind.*

*Thirty – the promise of a decade of loneliness, a thinning list of single men to know, a thinning brief-case of enthusiasm, thinning hair. But there was Jordan beside me, who, unlike Daisy, was too wise ever to carry well-forgotten dreams from age to age. As we passed over the dark bridge her wan face fell lazily against my coat's shoulder and the formidable stroke of thirty died away with the reassuring pressure of her hand.*

*So we drove on toward death through the cooling twilight. (7.307-309)*

Thought: Nick only fears growing older because he sees isolation in old age.

*A little before three the Lutheran minister arrived from Flushing, and I began to look involuntarily out the windows for other cars. So did Gatsby's father. And as the time passed and the servants came in and stood waiting in the hall, his eyes began to blink anxiously, and he spoke of the rain in a worried, uncertain way. The minister glanced several times at his watch, so I took him aside and asked him to wait for half an hour. But it wasn't any use. Nobody came.(9.113)*

Thought: That Gatsby is alone in death has a profound effect upon Nick; this is why Gatsby's death bothers him so – it confirms his fears of his own eventual isolation.

*"Oh, yes." She looked at me absently. "Listen, Nick; let me tell you what I said she was born. Would you like to hear?"*

*"Very much."*

*"It'll show you how I've gotten to feel about – things. Well, she was less than an hour old and Tom was God knows where. I woke up out of the ether with an utterly abandoned feeling, and asked the nurse right away if it was a boy or a girl. She told me it was a girl, and so I turned my head away and wept. 'All right,' I said, 'I'm glad it's a girl. And I hope she'll be a fool – that's the best thing a girl can be in this world, a beautiful little fool.'" (1.116-118)*

Thought: Daisy is virtually alone – nurses are present, but Tom is not – when she gives birth to her daughter. Clearly she feels very isolated from Tom at this point in their marriage, and hopes that her daughter never has to feel the same way.

*The bar is in full swing, and floating rounds of cocktails permeate the garden outside, until the air is alive with chatter and laughter, and casual innuendo and introductions forgotten on the spot, and enthusiastic meetings between women who never knew each other's names. (3.4)*

Thought: Nick talks about a typical party as crowded and rambunctious, yet lonely. In his description of various parties, Nick uses two short phrases that say a ton: "forgotten on the spot," and "who never knew each other's names." This creates the paradox of feeling alone in a crowded room.

*As soon as I arrived I made an attempt to find my host, but the two or three people of whom I asked his whereabouts stared at me in such an amazed way, and denied so vehemently any knowledge of his movements, that I slunk off in the direction of the cocktail table – the only place in the garden where a single man could linger without looking purposeless and alone. (3.10)*

Thought: Guests may have been able to let down their guard at Gatsby's parties, but there were still social rules to be followed. Nick feels awkward about being alone without someone to talk to. He worries what the other guests might wonder about him, so he drowns his awkwardness at the bar.

*At the enchanted metropolitan twilight I felt a haunting loneliness sometimes, and felt it in others – poor young clerks who loitered in front of windows waiting until it was time for a solitary restaurant dinner – young clerks in the dusk, wasting the most poignant moments of night and life. (3.156)*

Thought: This aside of Nick's hints at the overwhelming loneliness of city life that so many modernists comment on in their writing. In the early 20th century, cities began to hold more of the American population than the countryside did and the paradox of feeling alone in a crowd set in.

*"Your place looks like the World's Fair," I said.*

*"Does it?" He turned his eyes toward it absently. "I have been glancing into some of the rooms. Let's go to Coney Island, old sport. In my car."*

*"It's too late."*

*"Well, suppose we take a plunge in the swimming-pool? I haven't made use of it all summer."*

*"I've got to go to bed."*

*"All right." (5.3-8)*

Thought: Clearly Gatsby's in need of some company. Although he has all the toys a man can buy, he's still bored and lonely.

*He stayed there a week, walking the streets where their footsteps had clicked together through the November night and revisiting the out-of-the-way places to which they had driven in her white car. (8.28)*

Thought: Gatsby's longing for Daisy is only exacerbated by his actions when he gets back to Louisville, such as revisiting all the places they had gone together.

*Next morning I sent the butler to New York with a letter to Wolfsheim, which asked for information and urged him to come out on the next train. That request seemed superfluous when I wrote it. I was sure he'd start when he saw the newspapers, just as I was sure a there'd be a wire from Daisy before noon—but neither a wire nor Mr. Wolfsheim arrived; no one arrived except more police and photographers and newspaper men. When the butler brought back Wolfsheim's answer I began to have a feeling of defiance, of scornful solidarity between Gatsby and me against them all. (9.20)*

Thought: Much to Nick's surprise, everyone neglects to honor Gatsby's memory. It's tragic for two reasons. In the first place, Gatsby's life was full of people who didn't truly care about him. Second, abandoning Gatsby is a sad attestation to how shallow and selfish people can be. Nick's disgust with everyone who attended Gatsby's parties, Gatsby's business partners, and even Gatsby's one true love seems justified. What do you think?

## Mortality Quotes

*"No... I just remembered that to-day's my birthday."*

*I was thirty. Before me stretched the portentous, menacing road of a new decade.*

*It was seven o'clock when we got into the coupe with him and started for Long Island. Tom talked incessantly, exulting and laughing, but his voice was as remote from Jordan and me as the foreign clamor on the sidewalk or the tumult of the elevated overhead. Human sympathy has its limits, and we were content to let all their tragic arguments fade with the city lights behind. Thirty – the promise of a decade of loneliness, a thinning list of single men to know, a thinning brief-case of enthusiasm, thinning hair. But there was Jordan beside me, who, unlike Daisy, was too wise ever to carry well-forgotten dreams from age to age. As we passed over the dark bridge her wan face fell lazily against my coat's shoulder and the formidable stroke of thirty died away with the reassuring pressure of her hand.*

*So we drove on toward death through the cooling twilight. (7.306-309)*

Thought: It is no coincidence that Nick mentions his birthday right before he utters the line about driving toward death. Literally, they are approaching the scene of Myrtle's death, but figuratively, they are driving towards their own deaths.

*The chauffeur – he was one of Wolfsheim's protégés – heard the shots – afterward he could only say that he hadn't thought anything much about them. I drove from the station directly to Gatsby's house and my rushing anxiously up the front steps was the first thing that alarmed any one. But they knew then, I firmly believe. With scarcely a word said, four of us, the chauffeur, butler, gardener, and I, hurried down to the pool.*

*There was a faint, barely perceptible movement of the water as the fresh flow from one end urged its way toward the drain at the other. With little ripples that were hardly the shadows of waves, the laden mattress moved irregularly down the pool. A small gust of wind that scarcely corrugated the surface was enough to disturb its accidental course with its accidental burden. The touch of a cluster of leaves revolved it slowly, tracing, like the leg of compass, a thin red circle in the water.*

*It was after we started with Gatsby toward the house that the gardener saw Wilson's body a little way off in the grass, and the holocaust was complete. (8.112-114)*

Thought: Nick's description of Gatsby and Wilson as a "holocaust" is an interesting one. Perhaps Nick sees the murder as being of overwhelming magnitude because Gatsby's death represents the death of many ideals (the American Dream, or perhaps untarnished love). But the notion that it is "complete" leaves one wondering – what about the others involved? Why does Nick feel that the matter has been put to bed by the death of these two men?

*Most of those reports were a nightmare – grotesque, circumstantial, eager, and untrue. When Michaelis's testimony at the inquest brought to light Wilson's suspicions of his wife I thought the whole tale would shortly be served up in racy pasquinade – but Catherine, who might have said anything, didn't say a word. She showed a surprising amount of character about it too – looked at the coroner with determined eyes under that corrected brow of hers, and swore that her sister had never seen Gatsby, that her sister was completely happy with her husband, that her sister had been into no mischief whatever. She convinced herself of it, and cried into her handkerchief, as if the very suggestion was more than she could endure. So Wilson was reduced to a man "deranged by grief." in order that the case might remain in its simplest form. And it rested there. (9.2)*

Thought: In death, George Wilson is given a dignity denied to him in life.



*About five o'clock our procession of three cars reached the cemetery and stopped in a thick drizzle beside the gate – first a motor hearse, horribly black and wet, then Mr. Gatz and the minister and I in the limousine, and a little later four or five servants and the postman from West Egg in Gatsby's station wagon, all wet to the skin. As we started through the gate into the cemetery I heard a car stop and then the sound of someone splashing after us over the soggy ground. I looked around. It was the man with owl-eyed glasses whom I had found marveling over Gatsby's books in the library one night three months before.*

*I'd never seen him since then. I don't know how he knew about the funeral, or even his name. The rain poured down his thick glasses, and he took them off and wiped them to see the protecting canvas unrolled from Gatsby's grave.*

*I tried to think about Gatsby then for a moment, but he was already too far away, and I could only remember, without resentment, that Daisy hadn't sent a message or a flower. Dimly I heard someone murmur, "Blessed are the dead that the rain falls on," and then the owl-eyed man said "Amen to that," in a brave voice.*

*We straggled down quickly through the rain to the cars. Owl-eyes spoke to me by the gate.*

*"I couldn't get to the house," he remarked.*

*"Neither could anybody else."*

*"Go on!" He started. "Why, my God! They used to go there by the hundreds." He took off his glasses and wiped them again, outside and in.*

*"The poor son-of-a-bitch," he said. (9.114-122)*

Thought: It is interesting that the owl-eyed man is the one other character that attends Gatsby's funeral. It seems that the man from the library is not only perceptive, but also just. He recognizes the moral atrocity of the event, as does Nick.

*Gatsby believed in the green light, the orgastic future that year by year recedes before us. It eluded us then, but that's no matter – to-morrow we will run faster, stretch out our arms farther... And one fine morning –*

*So we beat on, boats against the current, borne back ceaselessly into the past. (9.152-153)*

Thought: Nick earlier feared that we were all driving "on toward death" – yet here he says that we all run forward, run faster. Nick's philosophy has been completely changed by Gatsby's death. The tragedy, he realizes, is not that we are rushing towards death in our futures, but rather that we are stuck in the dissatisfaction of the past.

*"It was on the two little seats facing each other that are always the last ones left on the train. I was going up to New York to see my sister and spend the night. He had on a dress suit and patent leather shoes, and I couldn't keep my eyes off him, but every time he looked at me I had to pretend to be looking at the advertisement over his head. When we came into the station he was next to me, and his white shirt-front pressed against my arm, and so I told him I'd have to call a policeman, but he knew I lied. I was so excited that when I got into a taxi with him I didn't hardly know I wasn't getting into a subway train. All I kept thinking about, over and over, was 'You can't live forever; you can't live forever.'" (2. 121)*

Thought: Myrtle feels life passing her by as Wilson's wife, where she lives a working class existence with a husband who bores her. When Myrtle makes the decision to become Tom's mistress she can finally live the life she wants to live. Many characters in the novel seem constantly aware of their mortality, as they make selfish, sometimes immoral decisions, with entertainment and excitement often taking first priority.

*"What'll we do with ourselves this afternoon?" cried Daisy, "and the day after that, and the next thirty years?"*

*"Don't be morbid," Jordan said. "Life starts all over again when it gets crisp in the fall." (7.74-75)*

Thought: Daisy and Jordan's lives seem to be endlessly carefree. They both take on a sort of immortal, no-rules-apply-to-us attitude in this scene; it's almost as though they both believe their lives are literally endless.

*I stared at (Wilson) and then at Tom, who had made a parallel discovery less than an hour before—and it occurred to me that there was no difference between men, in intelligence or race, so profound as the difference between the sick and the well. (7. 158)*

Thought: While the *The Great Gatsby* is concerned with class issues, Nick considers all men to be on the same level in this scene. Tom and Wilson couldn't be more different from one another, but both have just learned that their wives are unfaithful, and that shows a poignant similarity between the two.

*Michaelis and this man reached her first, but when they had torn open her shirtwaist, still damp with perspiration, they saw that her left breast was swinging loose like a flap, and there was no need to listen for the heart beneath. The mouth was wide open and ripped at the corners, as though she had choked a little in giving up the tremendous vitality she had stored for so long.*

(7.313)

Thought: Remember how Myrtle was so determined to live her life to the fullest? Well, Nick alludes to that aspect of her personality (albeit morbidly) here. Myrtle is a good example of a frustrated woman desperate to find something to make her life worth living.

*After a little while Mr. Gatz opened the door and came out, his mouth ajar, his face flushed slightly, his eyes leaking isolated and unpunctual tears. He had reached an age where death no longer has the quality of ghastly surprise, and when he looked around him now for the first time and saw the height and splendor of the hall and the great rooms opening out from it into other rooms, his grief began to be mixed with an awed pride. (9.40)*

Thought: Gatsby's father has just seen his son's dead body. Gatz's glimpse of the magnificence of his son's mansion helps him cope with such an unexpected loss. Again, money and materialistic things (like Gatsby's house) take prime importance in the society Fitzgerald presents.

*"Let us learn to show our friendship for a man when he is alive and not after he's dead," he suggested. "After that my own rule is to let everything alone." (9.96)*

Thought: When there's nothing else for Wolfsheim to gain from Gatsby's friendship, he pulls himself out of the situation. He treats his friendship with Gatsby almost like another business transaction, even though the two men have been through a lot together.

## Marriage Quotes

*"Who wants to go to town?" demanded Daisy insistently. Gatsby's eyes floated toward her. "Ah," she cried, "you look so cool."*

*Their eyes met, and they stared together at each other, alone in space. With an effort she glanced down at the table.*

*"You always look so cool," she repeated.*

*She had told him that she loved him, and Tom Buchanan saw. He was astounded. His mouth opened a little, and he looked at Gatsby, and then back at Daisy as if he had just recognized her as some one he knew a long time ago. (7.79-82)*

Thought: Daisy reveals her dissatisfaction in her marriage by revealing her love and admiration for another man.

*Daisy rose, smiling faintly, and went to the table.*

*"Open the whiskey, Tom," she ordered, "and I'll make you a mint julep. Then you won't seem so stupid to yourself [...] Look at the mint!"*

*"Wait a minute," snapped Tom, "I want to ask Mr. Gatsby one more question."*

*"Go on," Gatsby said politely.*

*"What kind of a row are you trying to cause in my house anyhow?"*

*They were out in the open at last and Gatsby was content.*

*"He isn't causing a row." Daisy looked desperately from one to the other. "You're causing a row. Please have a little self-control."*

*"Self-control!" Repeated Tom incredulously. "I suppose the latest thing is to sit back and let Mr. Nobody from Nowhere make love to your wife. Well, if that's the idea you can count me out [...] Nowadays people begin by sneering at family life and family institutions, and next they'll throw everything overboard and have intermarriage between black and white."*

*Flushed with his impassioned gibberish, he saw himself standing alone on the last barrier of civilization. (7.222-230)*

Thought: Tom tries to defend the idea of civilization by defending the sanctity of marriage, *his* marriage.

*Gatsby walked over and stood beside her.*

*"Oh, you want too much!" she cried to Gatsby. "I love you now – isn't that enough? I can't help what's past." She began to sob helplessly. "I did love him once – but I loved you too." Gatsby's eyes opened and closed.*

*"You loved me TOO?" he repeated. (7.264-266)*

Thought: Daisy reveals that, indeed, she loves both her husband and Gatsby. To her, this is a defense that morally exonerates her for marrying Tom instead of waiting for Gatsby. But to Gatsby, it is a betrayal. He could never love two people at the same time; therefore, he cannot

comprehend her doing it either.

*He nodded sagely. "And what's more, I love Daisy too. Once in a while I go off on a spree and make a fool of myself, but I always come back, and in my heart I love her all the time."*

*"You're revolting," said Daisy. She turned to me, and her voice, dropping an octave lower, filled the room with thrilling scorn: "Do you know why we left Chicago? I'm surprised that they didn't treat you to the story of that little spree." (7.251-252)*

Thought: Daisy clearly does *not* forgive Tom for his infidelities. Why, then, does she accept them later this very day, choosing to remain with her husband?

*"You don't understand," said Gatsby, with a touch of panic. "You're not going to take care of her any more."*

*"I'm not?" Tom opened his eyes wide and laughed. He could afford to control himself now. "Why's that?"*

*"Daisy's leaving you."*

*"Nonsense."*

*"I am, though," she said with a visible effort.*

*"She's not leaving me!" Tom's words suddenly leaned down over Gatsby. "Certainly not for a common swindler who'd have to steal the ring he put on her finger."*

*"I won't stand this!" cried Daisy. "Oh, please let's get out." (7.275-281)*

Thought: Daisy is already doubting her decision to leave Gatsby.

*The relentless beating heat was beginning to confuse me and I had a bad moment there before I realized that so far his [Wilson's] suspicions hadn't alighted on Tom. He had discovered that Myrtle had some sort of life apart from him in another world, and the shock had made him physically sick. I stared at him and then at Tom, who had made a parallel discovery less than an hour before – and it occurred to me that there was no difference between men, in intelligence or race, so profound as the difference between the sick and the well. Wilson was so sick that he looked guilty, unforgivably guilty – as if he had just got some poor girl with child. (7.160)*

Thought: Wilson's realization that he doesn't know his own wife has made him physically sick. This is in contrast to Tom's discovery of his own wife, which only made him angry.

*Before I could answer her eyes fastened with an awed expression on her little finger.*

*"Look!" she complained. "I hurt it."*

*We all looked – the knuckle was black and blue.*

*"You did it, Tom," she said accusingly. "I know you didn't mean to, but you did do it. That's what I get for marrying a brute of a man, a great, big, hulking physical specimen of a—"*

*"I hate that word hulking," objected Tom crossly, "even in kidding."*

*"Hulking," insisted Daisy. (1.67-72)*

Thought: We learn a lot about Daisy and Tom's relationship from this passage. First of all, Tom is rough with Daisy (he strikes Myrtle later, though). Daisy isn't just an innocent weakling, though; she needles Tom every chance she gets. They certainly have some baggage in their relationship.

*She sat down, glanced searchingly at Miss Baker and then at me, and continued: "I looked outdoors for a minute, and it's very romantic outdoors. There's a bird on the lawn that I think must be a nightingale come over on the Cunard or White Star Line. He's sing away—" Her voice sang: "It's romantic, isn't it, Tom?"*

*"Very romantic," he said, and then miserably to me: "If it's light enough after dinner, I want to take you down to the stables." (1.106-107)*

Thought: You have to hand it to Daisy, she tries really hard to get Tom thinking of her in a loving way. He's totally not feeling it though.

*"Her family is one aunt about a thousand years old. Besides, Nick is going to look after her, aren't you, Nick? She's going to spend lots of week-ends out here this summer. I think the home influence will be very good for her."*

*Daisy and Tom looked at each other for a moment in silence.*

*"Is she from New York?" I asked quickly.*



*"From Louisville. Our white girlhood was passed together there. Out beautiful white—"*

*"Did you give Nick a little heart-to-heart talk on the veranda?" demanded Tom suddenly.*

*"Did I?" She looked at me. "I can't seem to remember, but I think we talked about the Nordic race. Yes, I'm sure we did. It sort of crept up on us and first thing you know—"*

*"Don't believe everything you hear, Nick," he advised me. (1.137-143)*

Thought: Now they're starting to air their dirty laundry in public, so to speak. Nick gets in the middle of this tense marital spat, much to his chagrin. Clearly Tom and Daisy have been having issues for a while.

*The valley of ashes is bounded on one side by a small foul river, and, when the drawbridge is up to let the barges through, the passengers on the waiting trains can stare at the dismal scene for as long as half an hour. There is always a halt there of at least a minute, and it was because of this I first met Tom Buchanan's mistress.*

*The fact that he had one was insisted upon wherever he was known. His acquaintances resented the fact that he turned up in popular restaurants with her and, leaving her at a table, sauntered about, chatting with whomever he knew. (2.3-4)*

Thought: Tom's mistress is a huge issue between him and Daisy. Tom being so flippant about whether people know about it or not makes the situation even worse. It almost seems as though to Daisy the fact that people know about the affair is worse than the affair itself. This passage also helps make clear that infidelity is not OK in this society, even though marriage seems to be a problem for most couples. Tom and Myrtle's relationship is an interesting one, especially when taking the class divide into consideration.

*She smiled slowly and, walking through her husband as if he were a ghost, shook hands with Tom, looking him flush in the eye. Then she wet her lips, and without turning around spoke to her husband in a soft, coarse voice:*

*"Get some chairs, why don't you, so somebody can sit down."*

*"Oh, sure," agreed Wilson hurriedly, and went toward the little office, mingling immediately with the cement color of the walls. A white ashen dust veiled his dark suit and his pale hair as it veiled everything in the vicinity—except his wife, who moved close to Tom. (2.15-17)*

Thought: Wilson is a doting husband, and Myrtle treats him poorly. We're pretty sure it has more to do with the fact that's he's poor, and less to do with his actual personality. Read more in [George's "Character Analysis"](#).

*I saw them in Santa Barbara when they came back, and I thought I'd never seen a girl so mad about her husband. If he left the room for a minute she'd look around uneasily, and say: "Where's Tom gone?" and wear the most abstracted expression until she saw him coming in the door. She used to sit on the sand with his head in her lap by the hour, rubbing her fingers over his eyes and looking at him with unfathomable delight. It was touching to see them together – it made you laugh in a hushed, fascinated way. That was in August. A week after I left Santa Barbara Tom ran into a wagon on the Ventura road one night, and ripped a front wheel off his car. The girl who was with him got into the papers, too, because her arm was broken – she was one of the chambermaids in the Santa Barbara Hotel. (4.143)*

Thought: This flashback to Tom and Daisy's relationship right after their marriage is a nice contrast to their marriage during the time of the story. Tom was cheating on his wife from the very beginning, but their relationship once seemed very idyllic.

*"You're crazy!" he exploded. "I can't speak about what happened five years ago, because I didn't know Daisy then—and I'll be damned if I see how you got within a mile of her unless you brought the groceries to the back door. But all the rest of that's a God damned lie. Daisy loved me when she married me and she loves me now."*

*"No," said Gatsby, shaking his head.*

*"She does, though. The trouble is that sometimes she gets foolish ideas in her head and doesn't know what she's doing." He nodded sagely. "And what's more, I love Daisy too. Once in a while I go off on a spree and make a fool of myself, but I always come back, and in my heart I love her all the time." (7.246-248)*

Thought: When faced with losing Daisy, Tom gets protective all of a sudden. It seems that as long as he's the one cheating, it's no big deal, but her straying is something he absolutely cannot handle. Maybe Tom lost interest in Daisy over time because she was no longer a challenge. When suddenly he has to fight for her, she becomes desirable again.

*"I've got my wife locked in up there," explained Wilson calmly.*

*"She's going to stay there till the day after to-morrow, and then we're going to move away." Michaelis was astonished; they had been neighbors for four years, and Wilson had never seemed faintly capable of such a statement. Generally he was one of these worn-out men:*

*when he wasn't working, he sat on a chair in the doorway and stared at the people and the cars that passed along the road. When any one spoke to him he invariably laughed in an agreeable, colorless way. He was his wife's man and not his own.*

*So naturally Michaelis tried to find out what had happened, but Wilson wouldn't say a word—instead he began to throw curious, suspicious glances at his visitor and ask him what he'd been doing at certain times on certain days. (7.309)*

## Gender Quotes

*Some time toward midnight Tom Buchanan and Mrs. Wilson stood face to face discussing, in impassioned voices, whether Mrs. Wilson had any right to mention Daisy's name.*

*"Daisy! Daisy! Daisy!" shouted Mrs. Wilson. "I'll say it whenever I want to! Daisy! Dai — "*

*Making a short deft movement, Tom Buchanan broke her nose with his open hand. (2.125-127)*

Thought: In *The Great Gatsby*, the men are characterized by their physicality, while the women take a submissive role.

*Jordan Baker instinctively avoided clever, shrewd men, and now I saw that this was because she felt safer on a plane where any divergence from a code would be thought impossible. She was incurably dishonest. She wasn't able to endure being at a disadvantage and, given this unwillingness, I suppose she had begun dealing in subterfuges when she was very young in order to keep that cool, insolent smile turned to the world and yet satisfy the demands of her hard, jaunty body.*

*It made no difference to me. Dishonesty in a woman is a thing you never blame deeply – I was casually sorry, and then I forgot. It was on that same house party that we had a curious conversation about driving a car. It started because she passed so close to some workmen that our fender flicked a button on one man's coat. (3.159)*

Thought: Nick discusses the differences in judging men and women.

*"Well, I tried to swing the wheel —" He [Gatsby] broke off, and suddenly I guessed at the truth.*

*"Was Daisy driving?"*

*"Yes," he said after a moment, "but of course I'll say I was. You see, when we left New York she was very nervous and she thought it would steady her to drive – and this woman rushed out at us just as we were passing a car coming the other way. It all happened in a minute, but it seemed to me that she wanted to speak to us, thought we were somebody she knew. Well, first*

*Daisy turned away from the woman toward the other car, and then she lost her nerve and turned back. The second my hand reached the wheel I felt the shock – it must have killed her instantly." (7.396-398)*

Thought: Gatsby's decision to take the blame for Daisy's crime is simply the product of his desire to fill a chivalrous male role.

*The chauffeur – he was one of Wolfsheim's protégés – heard the shots – afterward he could only say that he hadn't thought anything much about them. I drove from the station directly to Gatsby's house and my rushing anxiously up the front steps was the first thing that alarmed any one. But they knew then, I firmly believe. With scarcely a word said, four of us, the chauffeur, butler, gardener, and I, hurried down to the pool.*

*There was a faint, barely perceptible movement of the water as the fresh flow from one end urged its way toward the drain at the other. With little ripples that were hardly the shadows of waves, the laden mattress moved irregularly down the pool. A small gust of wind that scarcely corrugated the surface was enough to disturb its accidental course with its accidental burden. The touch of a cluster of leaves revolved it slowly, tracing, like the leg of compass, a thin red circle in the water.*

*It was after we started with Gatsby toward the house that the gardener saw Wilson's body a little way off in the grass, and the holocaust was complete. (8.112-114)*

Thought: Wilson and Gatsby alike sacrifice their lives for the women they love, fulfilling their conception of gallantry.

*Across the courtesy bay the white palaces of fashionable East Egg glittered along the water, and the history of the summer really begins on the evening I drove over there to have dinner with the Tom Buchanans. Daisy was my second cousin once removed, and I'd known Tom in college. And just after the war I spent two days with them in Chicago. (1.15)*

Thought: Note how couples are referred to as "the (man's first name) (man's last name)s." Women had just gotten the right to vote a few years earlier, and in society, the genders were still worlds apart.

*The only completely stationary object in the room was an enormous couch on which two young women were buoyed up as though upon an anchored balloon. They were both in white, and their dresses were rippling and fluttering as if they had just been blown back in after a short flight around the house. I must have stood for a few moments listening to the whip and snap of the curtains and the groan of a picture on the wall. Then there was a boom as Tom Buchanan*

*shut the rear windows and the caught wind died out about the room, and the curtains and the rugs and the two young women ballooned slowly to the floor. (1.27)*

Thought: Jordan and Daisy are described as floating, ballooning, rippling, fluttering, carefree beings with no control whatsoever of their lives. They can't even control their dresses, Tom shuts the window to stop their fluttering.

*At any rate, Miss Baker's lips fluttered, she nodded at me almost imperceptibly, and then quickly tipped her head back again—the object she was balancing had obviously tottered a little and given her something of a fright. Again a sort of apology arose to my lips. Almost any exhibition of complete self-sufficiency draws a stunned tribute from me.*

*I looked back at my cousin, who began to ask me questions in her low, thrilling voice. It was the kind of voice that the ear follows up and down, as if each speech is an arrangement of notes that will never be played again. Her face was sad and lovely with bright things in it, bright eyes and a bright passionate mouth, but there was an excitement in her voice that men who had cared for her found difficult to forget: a singing compulsion, a whispered "Listen," a promise that she had done gay, exciting things just a while since and that there were gay, exciting things hovering in the next hour.*

*I told her how I had stopped off in Chicago for a day on my way East, and how a dozen people had sent their love through me.*

*"Do they miss me?" she cried ecstatically.*

*"The whole town is desolate. All the cars have the left rear wheel painted black as a mourning wreath, and there's a persistent wail all night along the north shore."*

*"How gorgeous! Let's go back, Tom. To-morrow!" Then she added irrelevantly: "'You ought to see the baby.'" (1.32-37)*

Thought: Daisy is very charming. While Jordan is more sporty, Daisy displays traditionally feminine characteristics all the time. As far as society is concerned, Daisy always knows how to carry herself. She even charms the shoes off Nick, and unlike anyone else in the novel, she continues to perplex him. Read more about Daisy in her "[Character Analysis](#)."

*"Listen, Nick; let me tell you what I said when she was born. Would you like to hear?"*

*"Very much."*

*"It'll show you how I've gotten to feel about – things. Well, she was less than an hour old and*

*Tom was God knows where. I woke up out of the ether with an utterly abandoned feeling, and asked the nurse right away if it was a boy or a girl. She told me it was a girl, and so I turned my head away and wept. 'All right,' I said, 'I'm glad it's a girl. And I hope she'll be a fool—that's the best thing a girl can be in this world, a beautiful little fool.'" (1.116-118)*

Thought: Daisy thinks that all girls would be happiest if they remained "beautiful little fools." We're going to translate "fool" to something a girl who's carefree, careless, light-hearted, and blissfully ignorant of the situations in which she finds herself. Keep in mind Daisy says this after being repeatedly abandoned by Tom. Her desire for her daughter to be more concerned with fun and foolish frivolities makes sense, given the hurt and isolation she's now feeling.

*Through this twilight universe Daisy began to move again with the season; suddenly she was again keeping half a dozen dates a day with half a dozen men, and drowsing asleep at dawn with the beads and chiffon of an evening dress tangled among dying orchids on the floor beside her bed. And all the time something within her was crying for a decision. She wanted her life shaped now, immediately – and the decision must be made by some force – of love, of money, of unquestionable practicality – that was close at hand. (8.19)*

Thought: Because of the dominance of men during this time, marriage was of central importance for a young woman's future. Daisy's restlessness without Gatsby makes sense, since society would be primarily concerned with her marriage plans.

## Education Quotes

*"About Gatsby! No, I haven't. I said I'd been making a small investigation of his past."*

*"And you found he was an Oxford man," said Jordan helpfully.*

*"An Oxford man!" He was incredulous. "Like hell he is! He wears a pink suit."*

*"Nevertheless he's an Oxford man."*

*"Oxford, New Mexico," snorted Tom contemptuously, "or something like that."*

*"Listen, Tom. If you're such a snob, why did you invite him to lunch?" demanded Jordan crossly.*

*"Daisy invited him; she knew him before we were married – God knows where!" (7.230-236)*



Thought: Tom demonstrates that wealth alone cannot make somebody fit in the upper echelons of society. They must be educated as well.

*Gatsby's foot beat a short, restless tattoo and Tom eyed him suddenly.*

*"By the way, Mr. Gatsby, I understand you're an Oxford man."*

*"Not exactly."*

*"Oh, yes, I understand you went to Oxford."*

*"Yes – I went there."*

*Pause. Then Tom's voice, incredulous and insulting: "You must have gone there about the time Biloxi went to New Haven."*

*Another pause. A waiter knocked and came in with crushed mint and ice but, the silence was unbroken by his "thank you." and the soft closing of the door. This tremendous detail was to be cleared up at last.*

*"I told you I went there," said Gatsby.*

*"I heard you, but I'd like to know when."*

*"It was in nineteen-nineteen, I only stayed five months. That's why I can't really call myself an Oxford man."*

*Tom glanced around to see if we mirrored his unbelief. But we were all looking at Gatsby.*

*"It was an opportunity they gave to some of the officers after the Armistice," he continued. "We could go to any of the universities in England or France."*

*I wanted to get up and slap him on the back. I had one of those renewals of complete faith in him that I'd experienced before. (7.208-221)*

Thought: Tom tries to discredit Gatsby by attacking his education.

*I graduated from New Haven in 1915, just a quarter of a century after my father, and a little later I participated in that delayed Teutonic migration known as the Great War. I enjoyed the counter-raid so thoroughly that I came back restless. Instead of being the warm centre of the world, the Middle West now seemed like the ragged edge of the universe—so I decided to go*

*East and learn the bond business. (1.6)*

Thought: Although Nick isn't upper-upper-class, he's still near the top of the social ladder. He went to Yale and his father also attended an Ivy League school. His legacy status gives him extra clout. Nick was also in a secret society at Yale, along with Tom Buchanan. In addition to the top-tier education that Yale bestowed on Nick, the connections that he made while a student in New Haven were just as important. His connection to Tom alone gets him into situations where usually only the wealthiest folks would be welcome.

## Lies and Deceit Quotes

*In my younger and more vulnerable years my father gave me some advice that I've been turning over in my mind ever since.*

*"Whenever you feel like criticizing any one," he told me, "just remember that all the people in this world haven't had the advantages that you've had." He didn't say any more, but we've always been unusually communicative in a reserved way, and I understood that he meant a great deal more than that. In consequence, I'm inclined to reserve all judgments [...]. (1.1-2)*

Thought: Nick presents himself as a reliable narrator, somebody we can trust, somebody who "reserves judgments." Yet we soon begin to doubt his credibility.

*Jordan Baker instinctively avoided clever, shrewd men, and now I saw that this was because she felt safer on a plane where any divergence from a code would be thought impossible. She was incurably dishonest. She wasn't able to endure being at a disadvantage and, given this unwillingness, I suppose she had begun dealing in subterfuges when she was very young in order to keep that cool, insolent smile turned to the world and yet satisfy the demands of her hard, jaunty body.*

*It made no difference to me. Dishonesty in a woman is a thing you never blame deeply – I was casually sorry, and then I forgot. It was on that same house party that we had a curious conversation about driving a car. It started because she passed so close to some workmen that our fender flicked a button on one man's coat. (3.159)*

Thought: Nick reveals that Jordan is a dishonest woman, as well as a careless person – careless with other people's feelings, emotions, and lives. Yet, we do not see this scene through an objective lens.

*A stout, middle-aged man, with enormous owl-eyed spectacles, was sitting somewhat drunk on the edge of a great table, staring with unsteady concentration at the shelves of books. As we entered he wheeled excitedly around and examined Jordan from head to foot.*

*"What do you think?" he demanded impetuously.*

*"About what?" He waved his hand toward the book-shelves.*

*"About that. As a matter of fact you needn't bother to ascertain. I ascertained. They're real."*

*"The books?"*

*He nodded.*

*"Absolutely real – have pages and everything. I thought they'd be a nice durable cardboard. Matter of fact, they're absolutely real. Pages and – Here! Lemme show you."*

*Taking our skepticism for granted, he rushed to the bookcases and returned with Volume One of the "Stoddard Lectures."*

*"See!" he cried triumphantly. "It's a bona-fide piece of printed matter. It fooled me. This fella's a regular Belasco. It's a triumph. What thoroughness! What realism! Knew when to stop, too – didn't cut the pages. But what do you want? What do you expect?" (3.41-49)*

Thought: The owl-eyed man is astounded that Gatsby's library is full of real books. This man – no doubt perceptive (given the symbolism of his large owl-like glasses) – is right to suspect falsity on Gatsby's part.

*"Who are you, anyhow?" broke out Tom. "You're one of that bunch that hangs around with Meyer Wolfsheim – that much I happen to know. I've made a little investigation into your affairs – and I'll carry it further to-morrow."*

*You can suit yourself about that, old sport." said Gatsby steadily.*

*"I found out what your 'drug-stores' were." He turned to us and spoke rapidly. "He and this Wolfsheim bought up a lot of side-street drug-stores here and in Chicago and sold grain alcohol over the counter. That's one of his little stunts. I picked him for a bootlegger the first time I saw him, and I wasn't far wrong."*

*"What about it?" said Gatsby politely. "I guess your friend Walter Chase wasn't too proud to come in on it."*

*"And you left him in the lurch, didn't you? You let him go to jail for a month over in New Jersey. God! You ought to hear Walter on the subject of YOU."*

*"He came to us dead broke. He was very glad to pick up some money, old sport."*

*"Don't you call me 'old sport'!" cried Tom. Gatsby said nothing. "Walter could have you up on the betting laws too, but Wolfsheim scared him into shutting his mouth."*

*That unfamiliar yet recognizable look was back again in Gatsby's face.*

*"That drug-store business was just small change," continued Tom slowly, "but you've got something on now that Walter's afraid to tell me about." (7.282-290)*

Thought: It soon becomes clear that Gatsby has spun many different webs of deception. As this one begins to unravel, so does Daisy's idealized conception of Gatsby, and so does her love for him.

*"Nevertheless you did throw me over," said Jordan suddenly. "You threw me over on the telephone. I don't give a damn about you now, but it was a new experience for me, and I felt a little dizzy for a while."*

*We shook hands.*

*"Oh, and do you remember." – she added – "a conversation we had once about driving a car?"*

*"Why – not exactly."*

*"You said a bad driver was only safe until she met another bad driver? Well, I met another bad driver, didn't I? I mean it was careless of me to make such a wrong guess. I thought you were rather an honest, straightforward person. I thought it was your secret pride."*

*"I'm thirty," I said. "I'm five years too old to lie to myself and call it honor."*

*She didn't answer. Angry, and half in love with her, and tremendously sorry, I turned away. (9.129-135)*

Thought: Jordan exposes Nick as a dishonest person, even though he prides himself on being trustworthy. What she considers dishonesty on his part may be the same kind of dishonesty of which Gatsby was at one time guilty of with Daisy; he led her to believe he could offer her safety and security. In fact, Nick is as emotionally unavailable to Jordan as Gatsby was practically unavailable to Daisy. This is how he has been dishonest.

*He broke off defiantly. "What if I did tell him? That fellow had it coming to him. He threw dust into your eyes just like he did in Daisy's, but he was a tough one. He ran over Myrtle like you'd run over a dog and never even stopped his car."*

*There was nothing I could say, except the one unutterable fact that it wasn't true.*

*"And if you think I didn't have my share of suffering – look here, when I went to give up that flat and saw that damn box of dog biscuits sitting there on the sideboard, I sat down and cried like a baby. By God it was awful –"*

*I couldn't forgive him or like him, but I saw that what he had done was, to him, entirely justified. It was all very careless and confused. They were careless people, Tom and Daisy – they smashed up things and creatures and then retreated back into their money or their vast carelessness, or whatever it was that kept them together, and let other people clean up the mess they had made [...]. (9.142-145)*

Thought: Tom is the ultimate deceiver – and it appears that he is deceiving himself as well. Tom could very well know that Daisy was driving and simply choose not to believe it.

*"You see," cried Catherine triumphantly. She lowered her voice again. "It's really his wife that's keeping them apart. She's a Catholic, and they don't believe in divorce." Daisy was not a Catholic, and I was a little shocked at the elaborateness of the lie.*

*"When they do get married," continued Catherine, "they're going West to live for a while until it blows over." (2.97-99)*

Thought: These lies – that Daisy's a Catholic and that Tom and Myrtle will eventually get married – are both blatant, but keep Myrtle content with being Tom's mistress.

*"Somebody told me they thought he killed a man once."*

*A thrill passed over all of us. The three Mr. Mumbles bent forward and listened eagerly.*

*"I don't think it's so much that," argued Lucille sceptically; "it's more that he was a German spy during the war."*

*One of the men nodded in confirmation.*

*"I heard that from a man who knew all about him, grew up with him in Germany," he assured us positively.*

*"Oh, no," said the first girl, "it couldn't be that, because he was in the American army during the war." As our credulity switched back to her she leaned forward with enthusiasm. "You look at him sometimes when he thinks nobody's looking at him. I'll bet he killed a man." (3.30-35)*

Thought: The rumors and lies spread about the enigmatic Gatsby are so ridiculous we have to wonder how they got started. Also, notice how positive each of the gossipers is that their lie is actually true. That, oddly, says a lot about the guests' gullibility – they assume that what they're told is true, no matter how outrageous. (Learn the truth about Gatsby by reading his "[Character Analysis](#).")

*"Now you're started on the subject," she answered with a wan smile. "Well, he told me once he was an Oxford man."*

*A dim background started to take shape behind him, but at her next remark it faded away.*

*"However, I don't believe it."*

*"Why not?"*

*"I don't know," she insisted, "I just don't think he went there."*

*Something in her tone reminded me of the other girl's 'I think he killed a man,' and had the effect of stimulating my curiosity. I would have accepted without question the information that Gatsby sprang from the swamps of Louisiana or from the lower East Side of New York. That was comprehensible. But young men didn't – at least in my provincial inexperience I believed they didn't – drift coolly out of nowhere and buy a palace on Long Island Sound. (3.83-88)*

Thought: Jordan's probably just as gullible as most people, but her high-class background gives her a keen level of insight into what a stereotypical Oxford man would be like. This comment also highlights how condescending upper-class people can be in this *Gatsby* world, skeptical of anyone who doesn't seem to be on their level but is trying to be. Jordan's social senses tell her that he's not genuinely upper class, but she can't give a specific reason why.

*"Whenever he sees I'm having a good time he wants to go home."*

*"Never heard anything so selfish in my life."*

*"We're always the first ones to leave."*

*"So are we."*



*"Well, we're almost the last to-night," said one of the men sheepishly. "The orchestra left half an hour ago."*

*In spite of the wives' agreement that such malevolence was beyond credibility, the dispute ended in a short struggle, and both wives were lifted, kicking, into the night. (3.105-110)*

Thought: This is a hilarious scene. The short conversation somehow manages to have several obvious lies crammed into it.

*Every one suspects himself of at least one of the cardinal virtues, and this is mine: I am one of the few honest people that I have ever known. (3.170)*

Thought: Nick tells us straight up that he believes most people are not very honest, but that he believes he always is. He's not so much proud of his honesty as he is aware of it; it seems like half the time he can't help his sincere remarks. But do you think that he's always trustworthy?

*"My house looks well, doesn't it?" he demanded. "See how the whole front of it catches the light." I agreed that it was splendid.*

*"Yes." His eyes went over it, every arched door and square tower. "It took me just three years to earn the money that bought it."*

*"I thought you inherited your money."*

*"I did, old sport," he said automatically, "but I lost most of it in the big panic – the panic of the war."*

*I think he hardly knew what he was saying, for when I asked him what business he was in he answered, "That's my affair," before he realized that it wasn't the appropriate reply.*

*"Oh, I've been in several things," he corrected himself. "I was in the drug business and then I was in the oil business. But I'm not in either one now." (5.97-103)*

Thought: Nick catches Gatsby in an outright lie about how he came to have so much money. Gatsby covers his mistake poorly and doesn't make much sense, because he doesn't seem to have any idea what he's actually talking about. Gatsby struggles to maintain an air of upper-class confidence, but he doesn't handle well those few times that he does slip.

*James Gatz – that was really, or at least legally, his name. He had changed it at the age of seventeen and at the specific moment that witnessed the beginning of his career – when he saw Dan Cody’s yacht drop anchor over the most insidious flat on Lake Superior. It was James Gatz who had been loafing along the beach that afternoon in a torn green jersey and a pair of canvas pants, but it was already Jay Gatsby who borrowed a rowboat, pulled out to the Tuolomee, and informed Cody that a wind might catch him and break him up in half an hour.*

*I suppose he’d had the name ready for a long time, even then. His parents were shiftless and unsuccessful farm people—his imagination had never really accepted them as his parents at all. The truth was that Jay Gatsby of West Egg, Long Island, sprang from his Platonic conception of himself. He was a son of God – a phrase which, if it means anything, means just that – and he must be about His Father’s business, the service of a vast, vulgar, and meretricious beauty. So he invented just the sort of Jay Gatsby that a seventeen-year-old boy would be likely to invent, and to this conception he was faithful to the end. (6.6-7)*

Thought: Here’s the explanation of the extent of Gatsby’s lies. How far he’s come; it seems his entire life has been dedicated to overcoming his poor origins.

*"I’ve made a small investigation of this fellow," he continued. "I could have gone deeper if I’d known—"*

*"Do you mean you’ve been to a medium?" inquired Jordan humorously.*

*"What?" Confused, he stared at us as we laughed. "A medium?"*

*"About Gatsby."*

*"About Gatsby! No, I haven’t. I said I’d been making a small investigation of his past."*

*"And you found he was an Oxford man," said Jordan helpfully.*

*"An Oxford man!" He was incredulous. "Like hell he is! He wears a pink suit."*

*"Nevertheless he’s an Oxford man."*

*"Oxford, New Mexico," snorted Tom contemptuously, "or something like that." (7.123-131)*

Thought: Tom is truly offended by the idea that Gatsby somehow belongs in the same class as him. Tom is judgmental, and quick to debunk Gatsby’s claim to have worked honorably for his riches. It seems to us Tom’s a bit threatened by this popular fellow that people seem to admire.

*Her eyes fell on Jordan and me with a sort of appeal, as though she realized at last what she was doing – and as though she had never, all along, intended doing anything at all. But it was done now. It was too late.*

*"I never loved him," she said, with perceptible reluctance.*

*"Not at Kapiolani?" demanded Tom suddenly.*

*"No."*

*From the ballroom beneath, muffled and suffocating chords were drifting up on hot waves of air.*

*"Not that day I carried you down from the Punch Bowl to keep your shoes dry?" There was a husky tenderness in his tone... "Daisy?"*

*"Please don't." Her voice was cold, but the rancor was gone from it. (7.254-260)*

Thought: Daisy's caught in her indecision between Gatsby and Tom. She claims that she truly loves both of them, and this is where Tom breaks her down. She does love Tom, no matter how much she'd like to deny it (and no matter how much Gatsby would like to believe that he's her one and only). Tom seems to love her, too, in his own way. The problem here is that everyone has a different view of what it means to love someone. Tom's got money and marriage on his side, but Gatsby's devotion to Daisy attests to how strongly he feels about her, and to what lengths he will go to for her and only her.

*Most of those reports were a nightmare – grotesque, circumstantial, eager, and untrue. When Michaelis's testimony at the inquest brought to light Wilson's suspicions of his wife I thought the whole tale would shortly be served up in racy pasquinade – but Catherine, who might have said anything, didn't say a word. She showed a surprising amount of character about it too – looked at the coroner with determined eyes under that corrected brow of hers, and swore that her sister had never seen Gatsby, that her sister was completely happy with her husband, that her sister had been into no mischief whatever. She convinced herself of it, and cried into her handkerchief, as if the very suggestion was more than she could endure. So Wilson was reduced to a man "deranged by grief" in order that the case might remain in its simplest form. And it rested there. (9.2)*

Thought: Rumors immediately swirl around the truth behind Gatsby's death. How could they not? Society is intensely curious and needed some sort of explanation, whether it was true or not. Michaelis's testimony stops the lies in one easy swoop, though. Also, Myrtle's sister Catherine clearly lies, but with the best of intentions. In this situation, the lies seem to be out of love.

*She was dressed to play golf, and I remember thinking she looked like a good illustration, her chin raised a little jauntily, her hair the color of an autumn leaf, her face the same brown tint as the fingerless glove on her knee. When I had finished she told me without comment that she was engaged to another man. I doubted that, though there were several she could have married at a nod of her head, but I pretended to be surprised. For just a minute I wondered if I wasn't making a mistake, then I thought it all over again quickly and got up to say good-by.*

*"Nevertheless you did throw me over," said Jordan suddenly.*

*"You threw me over on the telephone. I don't give a damn about you now, but it was a new experience for me, and I felt a little dizzy for a while." We shook hands.*

*"Oh, and do you remember" – she added – "a conversation we had once about driving a car?"*

*"Why – not exactly."*

*"You said a bad driver was only safe until she met another bad driver? Well, I met another bad driver, didn't I? I mean it was careless of me to make such a wrong guess. I thought you were rather an honest, straightforward person. I thought it was your secret pride."*

*"I'm thirty," I said. "I'm five years too old to lie to myself and call it honor." She didn't answer. Angry, and half in love with her, and tremendously sorry, I turned away. (9.126-133)*

Thought: Even when he wishes the truth were different, Nick can't lie. It seems like Nick feels that being unfailingly honest is sometimes more of a burden than a personal attribute or point of personal pride.

## Compassion and Forgiveness Quotes

*It passed, and he began to talk excitedly to Daisy, denying everything, defending his name against accusations that had not been made. But with every word she was drawing further and further into herself, so he gave that up, and only the dead dream fought on as the afternoon slipped away, trying to touch what was no longer tangible, struggling unhappily, undespairingly, toward that lost voice across the room.*

*The voice begged again to go.*

*"PLEASE, Tom! I can't stand this any more." Her frightened eyes told that whatever intentions, whatever courage, she had had, were definitely gone.*

*"You two start on home, Daisy," said Tom. "In Mr. Gatsby's car."*

*She looked at Tom, alarmed now, but he insisted with magnanimous scorn.*

*"Go on. He won't annoy you. I think he realizes that his presumptuous little flirtation is over."*  
(7.292-298)

Thought: For Tom, forgiving Daisy for her affair is easy; because he doesn't value their marriage or her love, he sees no need for it to exist untarnished. Gatsby, on the other hand, because of the intensity of his love for Daisy, cannot forgive her for loving Tom; he needs their love to be flawless in his mind.

*Daisy and Tom were sitting opposite each other at the kitchen table, with a plate of cold fried chicken between them, and two bottles of ale. He was talking intently across the table at her, and in his earnestness his hand had fallen upon and covered her own. Once in a while she looked up at him and nodded in agreement.*

*They weren't happy, and neither of them had touched the chicken or the ale – and yet they weren't unhappy either. There was an unmistakable air of natural intimacy about the picture, and anybody would have said that they were conspiring together. (7.409-410)*

Thought: Do Daisy and Tom forgive each other? Perhaps not. It may be that they simply don't care enough about their marriage emotionally to be bothered by their mutual infidelities. Yet they care about it in other ways – they choose to stay together for reasons of practicality.

*"And if you think I didn't have my share of suffering – look here, when I went to give up that flat and saw that damn box of dog biscuits sitting there on the sideboard, I sat down and cried like a baby. By God it was awful — "*

*I couldn't forgive him or like him, but I saw that what he had done was, to him, entirely justified. It was all very careless and confused. They were careless people, Tom and Daisy – they smashed up things and creatures and then retreated back into their money or their vast carelessness, or whatever it was that kept them together, and let other people clean up the mess they had made... (9.144-145)*

Thought: Nick draws an interesting distinction between understanding a person's motives and forgiving that person for his actions. By removing himself mentally from "that crowd," Nick puts himself at a psychological distance from Tom. He is then able to view the situation objectively, to comment but not to judge or criticize, just as his father recommended. This is why he can see that Tom's actions were justified in his mind. But, by revealing that he "couldn't forgive" Tom, Nick also makes it clear that he is slipping up, breaking from his father's advice, closing the psychological gap between himself and "that crowd."

*"I wanted to get somebody for him. I wanted to go into the room where he lay and reassure him: "I'll get somebody for you, Gatsby. Don't worry. Just trust me and I'll get somebody for you—" (9.11)*

Thought: Nick has much compassion for Gatsby after he's gone, he seems heartbroken that his friend has been abandoned by everyone. For a man who was so generous and loyal, no one is loyal or kind to him in return (besides Nick, of course, and the owl-eyed man). This says something about Gatsby's relationships with everyone around him and the shallowness of the society he was in.

*[Klipspringer's] tone made me suspicious.*

*"Of course you'll be there yourself." "Well, I'll certainly try. What I called up about is—"*

*"Wait a minute," I interrupted. "How about saying you'll come?"*

*"Well, the fact is—the truth of the matter is that I'm staying with some people up here in Greenwich, and they rather expect me to be with them to-morrow. In fact, there's a sort of picnic or something. Of course I'll do my very best to get away."*

*I ejaculated an unrestrained "Huh!" and he must have heard me, for he went on nervously: "What I called up about was a pair of shoes I left there. I wonder if it'd be too much trouble to have the butler send them on. You see, they're tennis shoes, and I'm sort of helpless without them. My address is care of B. F. —"*

*I didn't hear the rest of the name, because I hung up the receiver. (9.58-65)*

Thought: The man who was staying in Gatsby's house, won't even show up to the funeral. Not only that, but he has the audacity to ask Nick to ship his shoes to him. Nick's compassion for Gatsby spurs him to hang up, and not a moment too soon.

*We straggled down quickly through the rain to the cars. Owl-eyes spoke to me by the gate.*

*"I couldn't get to the house," he remarked.*

*"Neither could anybody else."*

*"Go on!" He started. "Why, my God! they used to go there by the hundreds."*

*He took off his glasses and wiped them again, outside and in.*



*"The poor son-of-a-bitch," he said. (9.114-119)*

Thought: The owl-eyed man is the only party-goer who comes through to say good-bye to his periodic host. He obviously feels some connection to Gatsby, otherwise he wouldn't have come to pay his last respects. His final comments show his compassion, albeit in somewhat abrasive form, for Gatsby's sparsely attended funeral.

*On the last night, with my trunk packed and my car sold to the grocer, I went over and looked at that huge incoherent failure of a house once more. On the white steps an obscene word, scrawled by some boy with a piece of brick, stood out clearly in the moonlight, and I erased it, drawing my shoe raspily along the stone. Then I wandered down to the beach and sprawled out on the sand. (9.147)*

Thought: Nick's compassion even extends to the house that stood for everything he despised about Gatsby. He tries to keep it clean, since the house meant much to Gatsby, and he would have wanted it that way.

## Religion Quotes

*"Have you got a church you go to sometimes, George? Maybe even if you haven't been there for a long time? Maybe I could call up the church and get a priest to come over and he could talk to you, see?" "Don't belong to any."*

*"You ought to have a church, George, for times like this. You must have gone to church once. Didn't you get married in a church? Listen, George, listen to me. Didn't you get married in a church?"*

*"That was a long time ago." (8.74-76)*

Thought: Even the most religious character in the text, George, has little use for institutionalized religion.

*"I spoke to her," he muttered, after a long silence. "I told her she might fool me but she couldn't fool God. I took her to the window" – with an effort he got up and walked to the rear window and leaned with his face pressed against it – "and I said 'God knows what you've been doing, everything you've been doing. You may fool me, but you can't fool God!'"*

*Standing behind him, Michaelis saw with a shock that he was looking at the eyes of Doctor T. J. Eckleburg, which had just emerged, pale and enormous, from the dissolving night.*

*"God sees everything," repeated Wilson.*

*"That's an advertisement," Michaelis assured him. Something made him turn away from the window and look back into the room. But Wilson stood there a long time, his face close to the window pane, nodding into the twilight. (8.103-106)*

Thought: Wilson believes that the one being that has the right to judge is God – even while he judges his own wife. This is an interesting notion to compare to Nick's opening lines: that one should not criticize (another form of judging). Seen in this light, Nick's father's advice takes on a religious tone.

*"You see," cried Catherine triumphantly. She lowered her voice again. "It's really his wife that's keeping them apart. She's a Catholic, and they don't believe in divorce." Daisy was not a Catholic, and I was a little shocked at the elaborateness of the lie.*

*"When they do get married," continued Catherine, "they're going West to live for a while until it blows over." (2.97-99)*

Thought: When we read this, it hit us that religion is pretty much absent from all the characters' lives. Here it only serves as an excuse for Tom's not marrying Myrtle.

*But above the gray land and the spasms of bleak dust which drift endlessly over it, you perceive, after a moment, the eyes of Doctor T. J. Eckleburg.*

*The eyes of Doctor T. J. Eckleburg are blue and gigantic – their irises are one yard high. They look out of no face, but, instead, from a pair of enormous yellow spectacles which pass over a nonexistent nose. Evidently some wild wag of an oculist set them there to fatten his practice in the borough of Queens, and then sank down himself into eternal blindness, or forgot them and moved away. But his eyes, dimmed a little by many paintless days, under sun and rain, brood on over the solemn dumping ground. (2.2)*

Thought: The T. J. Eckleburg billboard certainly stands out. Later in the novel, Wilson remarks that his wife's wrongdoings can't escape the eyes of God, then looks at the two gigantic eyes on the billboard outside. Eckleburg's constant gaze is definitely ominous, since so much immoral activity is constantly going on – especially in the Valley of Ashes. For more on Eckelburg, check out "[Symbols, Imagery, Allegory](#)."

*We waited for her down the road and out of sight.*

*It was a few days before the Fourth of July, and a gray, scrawny Italian child was setting torpedoes in a row along the railroad track.*

"Terrible place, isn't it," said Tom, exchanging a frown with Doctor Eckleburg.

"Awful."

"It does her good to get away."

"Doesn't her husband object?"

"Wilson? He thinks she goes to see her sister in New York. He's so dumb he doesn't know he's alive."

So Tom Buchanan and his girl and I went up together to New York – or not quite together, for Mrs. Wilson sat discreetly in another car. Tom deferred that much to the sensibilities of those East Eggers who might be on the train. (2.22-28)

Thought: We think it's interesting that Tom and Eckelburg exchange frowns. It's like Tom is staring defiantly at a disapproving God, angry that anybody would dare judge him. You could interpret that as Tom being condescending even to God. Also, if that's how you want to interpret those frowns, isn't it ironic that Myrtle and Tom don't share the same train to New York to avoid judgment of other East Eggers? It seems almost as if the judgments of other people are more important to them God's.

## Plot Analysis

### Classic Plot Analysis

#### Initial Situation

*Nick Carraway sets up the scene, visits his second cousin, and describes the parties thrown by Jay Gatsby next door.*

The narrator, Nick Carraway, recently returned from World War I, finds a job in New York City and rents a small house in West Egg, a small town on Long Island. His cousin Daisy and her husband Tom live nearby in East Egg, and Nick is a frequent visitor to their house. Jay Gatsby, Nick's next door neighbor, is a wealthy newcomer who throws large parties weekly, during which his guests discuss the latest rumors about who Gatsby is, how he achieved his wealth, and what crimes he might have committed.

#### Conflict

*Tom has a mistress. Daisy meets Gatsby and they begin to have an affair.*

Despite their wealth, their child, and the front they put on for society, Tom and Daisy's marriage

is a sham. Everybody knows that Tom "has a woman," who even calls him at home. Sure enough, before long, Tom introduces Nick to his mistress, a married woman named Myrtle Wilson whose husband, George, runs an auto garage. Nick learns that Myrtle believes Tom wants to leave Daisy but can't. This is clearly a lie. Tension rises as we recognize the potentially explosive nature of this situation – especially with a man like Tom around. Our fears are confirmed when Tom is physically abusive to his mistress. The second piece of the conflict emerges later, but it's a doozy: About halfway through the novel, Jordan Baker reveals that Jay Gatsby fell in love with Daisy some years before. He'd like Nick to invite Daisy to tea so he can see her. Nick helps reunite the two former lovers. Now we've got the conflict of Tom's violence, conflict with Daisy and Gatsby's love, and some potential conflict between Nick and Jordan (because they're starting a relationship and that just never goes well in this book).

### **Complication**

*We learn that Jay Gatsby is actually from a poor family; Tom smells something fishy regarding Gatsby's story and begins to investigate.*

Jay Gatsby is not who he says he is. He's James Gatz, from a poor background, and his wealth is "ill-gotten gain," the proceeds of organized crime (gambling, bootlegging liquor). Tom Buchanan takes an instant disliking to Gatsby, even before he knows about the affair. His investigation complicates matters considerably.

### **Climax**

*Tom confronts his wife and Gatsby about their love affair. Myrtle is struck and killed.*

The sustained climax begins when Tom realizes he is losing control of his mistress – whose husband plans to take her "West" – and his wife, who is in love with Gatsby. He confronts the two of them in a public social situation. Gatsby tries to force Daisy to say that she never loved Tom – and she can't do it. She can't lie and Tom knows he has won: Gatsby's "presumptuous little flirtation" is over. With magnanimity, Tom sends his wife off with Gatsby to return home. He now knows he's back in control and there is no danger of continued infidelity. However, when the others, following in Tom's car, reach the gas station where Myrtle and George Wilson live, they discover that Myrtle was killed by a speeding yellow car that failed to stop. All three know it was Gatsby's car. It is fitting that this physical climax (death) comes hand-in-hand with the emotional climax that went down at the Plaza.

### **Suspense**

*What will Daisy and Tom do? What will Wilson do?*

Leaving Tom and Daisy's house, Nick runs into Gatsby, who is watching the house to make sure Daisy is all right. He's worried that Tom will do something to her now that her infidelity has been revealed. The suspense comes in as we wonder what will happen with the love triangle. Wilson is yet another loose cannon, as we are unsure of what he'll do in the midst of his grief.

### **Denouement**

*George Wilson seeks his revenge. He kills Gatsby and himself.*

We've got a few matters to tie up here. The first is Nick's opinion of Gatsby, which ends on the

note of: "They're a rotten crowd!" and "You're worth the whole damn bunch put together." The evening before, Nick had made the decision to leave the Buchanans' house, to leave Jordan, and he now transitions into his judgment of the entire group. This is the major character shift for the narrator. For Gatsby, the end is near, though he doesn't know it yet. George Wilson finds him and kills both Gatsby and himself.

### **Conclusion**

*Gatsby's funeral, Nick and Jordan's conversation, and Nick's running into Tom.*

The novel concludes with Gatsby's dismal funeral. The only mourners are Nick, Gatsby's father, and the owl-eyed man who once marveled at all of Gatsby's books. Daisy and Tom have fled, Nick and Jordan have broken up, and Gatsby is dead. Nick points out that the future is always ahead of us – we never reach it. Instead, "we beat on, boats against the current, borne back ceaselessly into the past."

## **Booker's Seven Basic Plots Analysis: Tragedy**

### **Anticipation Stage**

*Gatsby dreams of being reunited with Daisy.*

This is the mother of all anticipation stages. Although in the text this might last half the novel, we find out that it's been going on for FIVE long years – beginning well before the summer of 1922. The desire for Daisy has driven all of Gatsby's actions to date: acquiring wealth, buying the house across the bay, throwing his lavish parties, and befriending Nick.

### **Dream Stage**

*Nick gets Daisy and Gatsby in the same room together.*

When Nick reunites Daisy with Gatsby, they fall back in love. For a few weeks, the pair gets together in the afternoons and spends time dreaming about being together again, permanently. During this time, it must seem to Gatsby that he is close to realizing his life's desires.

### **Frustration Stage**

*Although Gatsby technically knew that Daisy was married and had a child, it is not until he spends time with both at the Buchanan's house that the reality really sets in.*

Gatsby's problem is that he has focused all his attention on an illusion, a dream, rather than a real person. The reality, of course, fails to live up to his expectations. During this stage, Tom also begins to wonder aloud how Gatsby actually earned his money and whether he's telling the truth about his past. Something about the man's story seems fishy to him and he decides to investigate.

### **Nightmare Stage**

*Gatsby fights with Tom over Daisy – and loses. Not only does he lose Daisy the person, but his idealized conception of her also begins to crumble.*

Gatsby is forced to realize that Daisy is more than a dream: she is a flesh-and-blood person

with a real past that cannot be wiped out by a wish. When Tom realizes that Daisy loves Gatsby, he challenges Gatsby's claim on his wife's affections. Gatsby seizes the opportunity to claim that Daisy had never loved Tom and asks her to admit it. Unfortunately, she can't admit it. It turns out that on this one point, at least, Daisy is honest. This is the moment when Gatsby's dream starts to slip irretrievably away. He loses Daisy to Tom – in more ways than one.

### **Destruction or Death Wish Stage**

*Myrtle is killed by Gatsby's car; Mr. Wilson finds and kills Jay Gatsby and himself.*

In a classically tragic ending, a lot of people die. Right. The thing to keep in mind here is that there are more "deaths" than just Gatsby, Wilson, and Myrtle all kicking the bucket. The image of Daisy that Gatsby built up is now completely dead in the mind of the reader (because she leaves Gatsby behind), and the image of Gatsby that had been created by James Gatz is put to death with the arrival of his father, who dispels any remaining myths.

## **Three Act Plot Analysis**

### **Act I**

Nick meets his elusive next-door neighbor, the immensely wealthy Jay Gatsby. Nick sets up a meeting between Gatsby and his cousin, Daisy.

### **Act II**

Daisy and Gatsby resume their love affair from long ago, until confronted by Tom. Nick grows increasingly disgusted with his peers.

### **Act III**

Daisy returns to Tom, despite Gatsby's belief that she truly loves only him. Wilson, the husband of Tom's mistress Myrtle, murders Gatsby after Daisy hits and kills Myrtle with Gatsby's car. Nick stays behind to pick up the pieces.

## **Study Questions**

1. What is the meaning of the epigraph by Thomas Parke D'Invilliers? How does it relate to the major themes of this book?
2. In the very last line of Chapter Three, Nick Carraway claims: "I am one of the few honest people that I have ever known." By the end of the book, Jordan Baker decides that this statement itself a lie. Is Nick Carraway honest or dishonest?
3. Is Nick Carraway a necessary character in this story? If we were not given the story mediated through his perspective, what would we gain? What would we lose?
4. According to the novel, what is it about the past that draws us both forward and leaves us



stuck where we are? How are we to be set free from this constant revision of the past, which clouds the future?

5. Religion is notoriously absent until the very end, when Myrtle Wilson's husband claims that he told his wife that she couldn't fool God. Why is this the first mention of God? How does this sudden invoking of religious morals function within the rest of the story and why?
6. Could this story have taken place in other parts of the United States – for example, Chicago – or were Long Island and New York City the necessary setting?
7. Are Nick and Gatsby more similar than Nick would like to admit?
8. What might be the "something" that Nick is reminded of, yet cannot recall, at the end of Chapter Six?
9. What is the effect of us getting the information out of order? We don't know the truth about Gatsby until Chapter Six, and we don't know the rest of the truth until Chapter Eight. We get even more information when Jay's father shows up; what's the deal?
10. Is Gatsby great? In what way? How might he not be great? Does his greatness evolve over the course of the novel? What is the difference, in this text, between perceived greatness and actual greatness?
11. How does the character of Nick (inside the story, not the voice telling it) change over the course of the novel? What about the narrative voice? Although the entire story is told in retrospect, does the act of telling it create changes in his narrative style? Could it be that both character-Nick and narrator-Nick are changed?
12. Who really was driving when Myrtle was struck and killed? Can Nick be sure? Can we? If Nick insists that a person shouldn't criticize others, then why does it matter who killed her?
13. Take a look at Nick's opening lines. If this advice is the lens through which we read *The Great Gatsby*, how does it affect our view of the events that transpire? Does refraining from criticism promote compassion, or amorality?

## Characters

### All Characters

### Nick Carraway Character Analysis

While the title *The Great Gatsby* might suggest that the central puzzle of this novel is "The Great Gatsby," we disagree. Gatsby himself is, after all, almost shockingly simple once you can put his character together from the various pieces picked up along the way. On the other hand, Nick – seemingly plain, straightforward, "honest" Nick – ends up being the ultimate mystery at the end. Nick changes profoundly over the course of the novel, and his transformation is just as intriguing as Gatsby's dramatic story.

### **Who is Nick Carraway (at the beginning)?**

We know very little about Nick. The facts he chooses to present are few: he grew up in a respectable Chicago family and went to Yale, he likes literature and considers himself one of those "limited" specialists known as a "well-rounded man," and he works in the bond business (that is to say, in finances) in New York City. He's *connected* to wealthy and important people, like his cousin Daisy and Tom, a college acquaintance, but he is by no means one of them. Unlike the people who surround him, Nick Carraway isn't drowning in wealth. His perch on the outside of these lofty social circles gives him a good view of what goes on inside; he has a particularly sharp and sometimes quite judgmental eye for character, and isn't afraid to use it.

While Nick is fundamentally a pretty honest guy when first we meet him, it doesn't mean that he's always a very nice one. He's skilled in the art of getting along with everyone in public and rather sassily analyzing them in private (that is, to us, his readers). Nick may be polite and easy to get along with on the outside, but he's not afraid to tell it like it is. Nick still seems to see himself as a good Midwestern boy with high standards for everyone he meets, including himself, and prides himself on maintaining his standards, even in the corrupt, fast-moving world of East coast high society.

Because Nick is tangentially a part of Daisy and Gatsby's intersecting worlds of wealth and fabulousness, but not entirely immersed in them, he makes a perfect narrator – not quite outside, not quite inside. During the course of the novel, Nick gradually gets sucked into the world he's observing, both through his friendships (if you can call them that) with Tom, Daisy, and Gatsby, and through his romantic relationship with Jordan. The deeper he is drawn into these relationships, the less honest he becomes – until at the end, Jordan rebukes him for being just as dishonest and careless as the rest of them.

### **Who is Nick Carraway (at the end)?**

So what happens to our narrator? At the end, Nick has come to realize that he's changed and will never be the same. It seems his character dilemma is never fully resolved. We do not know where he will go ("West" is pretty vague), or what he will do, only that he is leaving the house he's resided in for the course of the book. His observation that all the players in this story were "Westerners" is an apt one – it sums up one of the novel's main themes, the idea that we might be defined by where we're from, or the kinds of worlds we grow up in.

Nick ultimately realizes that he has no place in West Egg or in New York, in the callous, judgmental, and fast-moving East; unfortunately, we have to wonder if he can really go back home again, after seeing what he has seen. Though he used to believe that you couldn't turn back the clock and return to the past, Nick's perspective has changed: his neighbor Gatsby is gone. Tom and Daisy are gone. Jordan Baker is gone. Nick's greatest fear – that he will be alone – has come true.

The final lines of the text suggest the inevitability of what will overcome Nick: inclinations

towards Gatsby's nostalgia and an inability to separate the dreams of the past with the reality of the present. And if you want further evidence for that one, consider the fact that Nick is telling us this story at all, after it has all unfolded – he's still dwelling in the past.

## Nick Carraway Timeline and Summary

- Nick moves to Long Island and begins a job in New York City. He seeks out his second cousin, Daisy, and meets Jordan.
- Nick goes into the city with Tom and meets his mistress, Myrtle Wilson. He gets extraordinarily drunk that day.
- Nick and Jordan attend a party at Gatsby's house, meet Gatsby, and waits while Gatsby has a private tête-à-tête with Jordan.
- This is the same party at which he meets the owl-eyed man.
- Nick and Jordan have their conversation about "careful drivers."
- Nick and Gatsby have lunch with Gatsby's business associate, Meyer Wolfsheim.
- They run into Tom. Gatsby, surprisingly, disappears when Nick tries to introduce him to Tom.
- Nick learns the Daisy/Gatsby story from Jordan, who asks him if he'll arrange a meeting. Nick agrees to do it.
- Nick arranges the meeting but disappears while Daisy and Gatsby reconnect. When Gatsby takes Daisy to his house to show her where and how he lives, Nick accompanies them.
- Nick describes Gatsby's life before and after meeting Daisy.
- Nick observes the initial meeting between Tom and Gatsby.
- He is present for the party attended by Tom and his wife. He observes their interactions with each another and concludes that Daisy doesn't approve of the lavish extravagance.
- Nick goes to East Egg for drinks with Daisy, Tom, and Jordan.
- He goes in Gatsby's car but with Tom and Jordan, not Gatsby, as they all drive to the city.
- He observes Tom's interaction with Wilson on the way to the city.
- Nick is present for big showdown in the Plaza suite.
- Nick is with Tom and Jordan when they all happen upon the "after" scene, when Myrtle Wilson is already dead.
- Nick and Gatsby talk outside the Buchanan house and Nick sees Daisy and Tom conspiring together, in a scene of marital intimacy.
- Nick warns Gatsby to leave town, but Gatsby refuses.
- Nick has a phone conversation with Jordan in which they kinda-sorta break-up.
- Along with Gatsby's servants, Nick sees the bodies of Gatsby and Wilson.
- After Gatsby is dead, Nick takes care of his affairs – contacting his friends, business partners, and family members, and making the funeral arrangements.
- He finds out more about Gatsby from the man's father.
- He discusses with the owl-eyed man how horrible it is that everyone came to Gatsby's

parties, but no one came to his funeral.

- Nick more officially breaks up with Jordan over the phone. Jordan tells Nick that he, too, is a "bad driver."
- Nick stands on Gatsby's lawn and ruminates on the man and his life, the present and the future, and, of course, the past.

## Jay Gatsby Character Analysis

### **Origins: Jimmy Gatz**

Long before Gatsby was "great," he was a small town kid with big dreams. We learn Gatsby's real back story fairly late in the game, but when we finally do, it adds infinitely to the real human tragedy of his life and death. It turns out that the pre-West Egg Gatsby wasn't in fact the "young rajah" he pretended to be; instead, he was just a boy from North Dakota without connections, money, or education. We might see the original James Gatz and his alter-ego as opposite sides of a kind of magic mirror – on one side, we have Gatz, the everyday real person, and on the other, Gatsby, a fabulously embellished, impossibly perfect reflection of a poor boy's dreams and fantasies.

So who was the real James Gatz (Jimmy to his dad), and how did he become Jay Gatsby? Apparently, even before he had the means, Jimmy Gatz had a plan – his desire to escape his circumstances and make a name for himself. This early motivation demonstrated the same determination and passion we see in his later incarnation, Gatsby. His father's pride in young Jimmy's motivation, even years later, is heartbreaking and telling; from a young age, Jimmy knew that he was capable of great things, perhaps even destined for them. As far as we can tell, he spent his whole youth training for his big break, and when it drifted into the harbor in the form of Dan Cody's yacht, he was ready for it.

### **The Man: Jay Gatsby**

Jimmy Gatz died the moment he rowed up to Cody's boat, and a new man was born – Jay Gatsby. This self-invented character is too much to believe, and, like Nick, we're skeptical of him at first. When we meet him, Jay Gatsby is a man with a lot of money, a lot of acquaintances, and very few friends; the rumors that circulate around him make him out to be some kind of mysterious superhero or supervillain. The tale of an adventurous boyhood and wartime heroics that he himself tells is simply too ridiculous to be true, but he backs it up with enough evidence to please Nick, so we kind of believe him, too. The self-propagated myth of Gatsby is enticingly thrilling – we *want* to believe that someone as incredible as Jay Gatsby can exist in the world, even if we're sure he can't.

Glamorous Jay Gatsby seems like he couldn't be further from the young country boy he once

was, but the similarities between Gatsby and his younger self emerge throughout the novel. By the end of the book, once all the puzzle pieces scattered through time are reassembled, we have a full portrait of one man, spread over two images. The complete Gatsby shows a spectacular kind of determination and singleness of purpose that's really quite mind-boggling – whether his goal is getting out of North Dakota or reclaiming Daisy, Gatsby accomplishes them with amazing tenacity. We get the feeling that he never forgets anything, and that his vision of the past is perhaps even more clear than his vision of the present (and certainly of the future).

This ties into his incredible sense of loyalty unequalled by anyone else we meet in the dishonest, tricky world of Fitzgerald's novel; Gatsby is unfailingly loyal to everyone he loves, from his father to Dan Cody to Daisy. The problem is, he doesn't always get the same measure of loyalty in return. Even though Gatsby seems to be a worldly, perhaps unsavory, somewhat corrupt bootlegger, on the inside, he's incredibly innocent – and it's this trace of innocence that makes him so compelling, and ultimately, so tragic.

### **The Legend: The Great Gatsby**

So here's the million dollar question: what makes the Great Gatsby great? On the surface, Gatsby/Gatz is a guy whose sickening wealth, sketchy business dealings, and questionable background make him both fascinating and repulsive – the people at his parties are glad to partake of his riches, but they're all sure that there's *something* not quite right about him. This sense of mystery is a large part of the public persona of the Great Gatsby; people are intrigued by him, but very few actually find out what's at the core of this enigma.

Nick is one of these few – perhaps the only person who really comes to understand Gatsby in the end. What makes Gatsby “great” to Nick is not just the extravagance of his lifestyle and the fascinating enigma of his wealth, but his true personality; Nick slowly realizes that Gatsby, in his heart of hearts, doesn't care about wealth, or social status, or any of the other petty things that plague everyone else in his shallow world. Instead, Gatsby is motivated by the finest and most foolish of emotions – *love*.

From this point of view, Gatsby's love for Daisy is what drives him to reinvent himself, rather than greed or true ambition, and at the end of the day, this unsullied, heartfelt goal puts Gatsby ahead of the rest of the madding crowd. Despite the fact that he attempted to fulfill his “incorruptible dream” through distasteful, sometimes dishonest means, we still emerge from this story profoundly sympathetic to him; he may have been a fool at times, but he's a fool for love. Even though he's a self-created image built out of nothing, Gatsby's emotional honesty, eternal optimism, and simplicity of heart ironically single him out as the only *real* person in a crowd of fakes – as Nick says, Gatsby is “better than the whole damn bunch put together.”

How do *you* feel about Gatsby? Do you agree with Nick?

## Jay Gatsby Timeline and Summary

- Gatsby throws fabulous parties all the time, but nobody seems to know much about him or who he is.
- Nick Carraway meets Gatsby at a party but does not at first know who he is. Later, Gatsby asks to speak privately with Jordan.
- Gatsby and Nick spend some time in New York together, but when Nick tries to introduce him to Tom Buchanan, Gatsby literally disappears.
- Nick learns that Gatsby is in love with Daisy Buchanan and is hoping Nick will arrange for the two of them to meet under the pretext of tea.
- Jordan fills in the background of how Gatsby and Daisy met.
- Nick arranges the tea as requested.
- Although the meeting goes well, it's clear to Nick that Gatsby's idealized dream of Daisy is more real to Gatsby than the real Daisy herself.
- Gatsby and Daisy begin an affair and Gatsby begins to dream of her leaving Tom.
- Gatsby meets Tom.
- Gatsby has a party attended by Daisy and Tom.
- Tom, suspicious, begins to "investigate" who Gatsby is and how he got his money.
- Gatsby, Tom, Daisy, Jordan and Nick spend time in the city together, and Tom realizes Gatsby loves Daisy. He confronts him about it.
- During the confrontation, Gatsby tries to get Daisy to say she never loved Tom, but she is unwilling to say it.
- Gatsby and Daisy ride back to Long Island together. Daisy drives, supposedly.
- On the way (according to Gatsby's later story), Daisy hits Myrtle Wilson and kills her – but she keeps driving.
- Gatsby hangs around outside the Buchanan home, making sure Daisy is safe after Tom comes home.
- George Wilson comes after Gatsby and kills him and then himself.
- Only three people attend Gatsby's funeral: Gatsby's father, Nick, and the owl-eyed man who once admired the books in Gatsby's library.

## Daisy Buchanan Character Analysis

Gatsby's entire fortune, and his entire life, really, are built upon the hope that someday he might rekindle his old love with Daisy. This, we have to admit, is an amazing, perhaps unbelievable, premise. The question that emerges from it is a simple but fundamentally important one: what kind of girl could possibly inspire such heights of devotion? In other words, what's so great about this Daisy, anyway?

The answer isn't simple – it's as much about Gatsby himself as it is about Daisy. But there's



certainly something about Daisy that makes her special; she's not like any of the other women in the novel, and we get the feeling that, in the eyes of both Gatsby and Nick, she's not quite like any other girl in the world. What is it about her that's so different, so thrilling, so intriguing? Sure, she's beautiful – in her hometown of Louisville, Kentucky, she was always the belle of the ball (which we learn from Jordan's account of their girlhood). She's also fun-loving and something of a flirt; her conversation is charmingly sassy and delightfully frivolous. Even Nick, her cousin, can't help but be taken in by Daisy's many charms. But simply being charming isn't enough to make Daisy stand out from the crowd. What, then, is the deciding factor? Let's examine the different aspects of Daisy's character and see what we find.

### **The Siren**

Daisy's beautiful, mysterious, flirtatious, intriguing, delightful, thrilling, sensuous, famously "full of money" voice is one of the central images in this novel; characters from Nick to Jordan to Gatsby all comment upon the magic of this remarkable instrument. Daisy's voice is full, not just of money, but of promises – there's something about it that tells the listener that wonderful things are on the horizon. Daisy's voice is irresistibly seductive, and all the other characters are drawn to her because of it.

This brings to mind the image of the Siren. In Greek mythology, the island-dwelling Sirens sang to passing sailors, and their song was so seductive that the sailors would throw themselves into the sea and drown trying to get to them. Daisy is kind of a modern Siren; when Gatsby stretches his arms out to the green light across the water, we can almost imagine him throwing himself into the Sound to reach her. Her voice speaks of everything Gatsby desires – Daisy herself, wealth, social status, true happiness – and its call is irresistible.

### **The Dreamer**

Daisy, like Gatsby, is something of a dreamer. One of the things they share is their idealized image of their relationship the first time around – and this rose-colored view makes everything in the present seem dull and flat in comparison. Daisy's view of the past is both wistful and cynical at the same time. While Daisy recognizes that society's pressures are forces to be reckoned with, she also longs for the innocent period of her "white girlhood," before she was forced/forced herself into her marriage to Tom. Though the Daisy of the present has come to realize that more often than not, dreams don't come true, she still clings to the hope that they sometimes can.

### **The Real Girl**

The real problem is that Daisy *isn't* really some mythical, divine creature, nor is she entirely an idealistic dreamer like Gatsby. She's ultimately a real, living, breathing woman, who's flawed, just like the rest of us. Daisy is used to her life being a certain way – she follows certain rules, she expects certain rewards – and when Gatsby challenges her to break free of these restraints, she's understandably frightened. Ultimately, Daisy returns to Tom because he's what she knows; the prospect of giving up her whole life to run off with Gatsby is just too overwhelming, no matter how unhappy she is. At her core, Daisy is also incredibly selfish, just like everyone

else (Tom, Jordan, perhaps even Nick) – everyone except Gatsby, that is. The real Daisy is not the magical thing she's made out to be: in the end, she's simply too human to meet Gatsby's expectations.

## Daisy Buchanan Timeline and Summary

- Nick Carraway goes to visit his second cousin Daisy and her husband Tom.
- We learn of Daisy's history from Jordan.
- Potentially, Daisy never wanted to marry Tom. Either that or she just had some intense wedding jitters.
- Nick arranges for Daisy and Gatsby to meet.
- Daisy is overwhelmed by Gatsby's devotion to her and they begin a love affair.
- Daisy attends one of Gatsby's parties with her husband.
- Daisy hangs out with Tom, Gatsby, Jordan, and her husband on the hottest day ever.
- They all go into the city.
- Daisy finds herself in the middle of a fight between her husband, Tom and Gatsby. She cannot bring herself to say she never loved Tom.
- Daisy is driving Jay Gatsby's car (according to Gatsby) when she hits Myrtle Wilson, Tom's mistress, killing her instantly. The accident occurs in front of George Wilson's gas station and the home he shares with his wife Myrtle.
- It seems that Daisy and Tom conspire together to make Gatsby the guilty party for the accident.
- Daisy and Tom disappear.

## Tom Buchanan Character Analysis

Tom Buchanan is Daisy's husband, an extremely wealthy man, a brute, and an athlete. He's selfish and does what he needs to get what he wants. Most of all, he seeks control of his life and control of others. When Tom figures out that Daisy loves Gatsby, he forces a confrontation. He is then able to use Daisy's momentary hesitation to regain control of his wife. Master of the situation once more, Tom dismisses Gatsby – and his wife – giving him permission to drive his wife home. "He won't annoy you," he tells her. "I think he realizes that his presumptuous little flirtation is over." With that note of condescension, it is clear to all that Tom has the upper hand. Although Gatsby maintains hope beyond this scene, we all know it's over.

But the quality of Tom that's most likely to stick with you is the fact that he's abusive. While we never see him get violent with his wife, there are hints of his unbridled physicality when Daisy reveals a bruise on her finger that, although accidental, was caused by Tom (or the "brute," as she calls him). Although he might not be physically abusive to his wife, Tom certainly causes

her some emotional damage. There is, of course, his series of affairs, but he hurts Daisy in other ways, too. When Daisy tells us about her daughter being born, she casually adds that "Tom was God knows where." He is neither attentive nor sensitive towards his wife – especially in contrast to Gatsby. But, of course, Tom's violent streak really comes across when we see him break Myrtle's nose with the "short, deft movement" of his open hand. The curt language Fitzgerald uses here makes it clear that such violence means little to Tom.

## Tom Buchanan Timeline and Summary

- We meet Tom in Chapter One, and learn through the narration that he went to Yale with Nick and they graduated in 1915.
- Tom introduces Nick to his mistress, Myrtle Wilson, and the three of them spend a day together in New York.
- Tom gets angry at Myrtle and hits her in the face, breaking her nose.
- It is revealed through Jordan's story that Tom has a history of cheating on his wife, even as early as weeks after their honeymoon.
- When Tom meets Gatsby, he takes an immediate disliking to the man.
- Tom attends Gatsby's party with his wife; he becomes suspicious and starts sniffing around trying to find out how Gatsby made all his money.
- Tom finally figures out that Gatsby and his wife are having an affair. He confronts them and challenges Gatsby's claim on his wife.
- Tom gets Daisy to confess that she loved him, and he sends her off with Gatsby in contempt. He's won *that* little battle.
- Driving home from the city after his confrontation with Gatsby, Tom and Nick and Jordan come upon the accident that killed Tom's mistress, Myrtle Wilson. Tom assumes that Gatsby is guilty.
- At home, Tom and Daisy conspire together to make sure Gatsby is the one who pays for the accident.
- When George Wilson comes around the day after his wife's death to find out who was driving the car that killed her, Tom lets it slip (intentionally) that the car belongs to Gatsby.
- Tom and Daisy disappear.

## Jordan Baker Character Analysis

Nick might end up "halfway in love" with Jordan, but he consistently describes her as cynical, having seen too much and heard too much to be fooled by anybody. And perhaps because of her dishonesty, she is aware more than anybody else in the book that appearances are deceiving.

Jordan is possibly the least important of all the major characters in the book, yet she provides an important contrast to Daisy Buchanan. She appears first in the Buchanan's home, a young woman with too much time on her hands. In some ways, she epitomizes the concept of "ennui" – she is bored to tears, except for her active sports career in golf. Cynical and hard, she cheated to win her first golf tournament. This in itself is evidence of her practicality. Ultimately, she and Nick end up "together" (in a fashion) and Nick mentions how grateful he is that she is not like Daisy. That is, she is not the kind of girl who holds onto the past, a girl "too wise ever to carry well-forgotten dreams from age to age."

But Daisy and Jordan aren't quite polar opposites after all, and it is Jordan's place in that "rotten crowd" that drives a wedge between her and Nick. Well, maybe. We offer a different explanation in Nick's analysis, so take your pick. But you can't really argue about the fact that Jordan is just as careless as Daisy. Daisy "smash[es] things up" and then "retreat[s] [...] into [...] vast carelessness." Does that last word look familiar? Nick tells Jordan she is "careless," and after a brief attempt at denying it, she pretty much gives him a "whatever" in return. She callously says that other people have to stay out of her way. This might be the reason Nick comes to dislike her, but the reason he is taken in at first is her following line: "I hate careless people." Looks like they have something in common, after all.

## Jordan Baker Timeline and Summary

- Nick meets Jordan when he goes to see his second cousin, Daisy, and her husband, Tom.
- Jordan and Nick start hanging out together, in the romantic sense of the word.
- She reveals that she likes Nick because he isn't careless.
- Jordan introduces Nick to Jay Gatsby at a party they attend at Gatsby's house.
- Gatsby takes Jordan aside at the party to tell her something.
- We find out that Jordan probably cheated in a golf tournament.
- Jordan admits to being a horrible driver and says she'll be fine as long as she doesn't meet another careless person. She's also a practical girl. And jaded.
- Nick really falls for Jordan.
- Jordan asks Nick if he'll arrange for Gatsby and Daisy to meet.
- Jordan goes to the city with Nick, Gatsby, Tom, and Daisy, and is present for the showdown between the two men.
- She rides back to Long Island with Nick and Tom and is present when they come upon the hit-and-run aftermath.
- She has an awkward phone conversation with Nick in which they seem to break up.
- Later, after Gatsby's death, they have a more explicit phone conversation. Jordan confesses that no one has ever broken up with her like that. She accuses Nick of being dishonest and of being a "careless driver."

## George Wilson Character Analysis

Poor George. He really gets the short end of the stick in this one. And, seeing as he's one of the few characters without staggering flaws, it seems he doesn't really deserve it. From what we can tell, Wilson is hard-working and not cheating on his spouse. He's in a marriage with a woman who not only seems to not love him, but also can't respect him – in large part because of his poverty. Despite all of this, Wilson still blames himself for his wife's death. The conversations between him and Michaelis (later revealed to us through Nick) are simply agonizing to hear; George is clearly in terrible emotional pain. Not only has his wife been killed, but he also found out just before her death that she'd been having an affair. George's repeated cries of "Oh, my God" could have to do with the fact that his wife has died, but they could also be his astonishment at her infidelity. Then again, they could be guilty cries as well; if Wilson hadn't called her out on the affair, she might not have run out into the street, and she might not have been killed. This "George feels guilty" theory gains some credibility when he commits suicide after shooting Gatsby.

The other thing to note about Wilson is that he's the only character who talks about God. He tells Myrtle that she "can't fool God," that "God sees everything." Again, he means for this to refer to her actions, but they implicitly comment on his own, and may speak once again to his reasons for committing suicide. His comments are also a reminder of notable *absence* of religion from the upper class, the class that "smash[es] up things and creatures" and is then able to retreat "back into [...] money."

## George Wilson Timeline and Summary

- George is introduced as the ignorant husband of Tom's mistress.
- When Nick and Tom fill up with gas on the way to the city, they chat with George and he asks Tom if he will sell his car to him so he can fix it up and sell it for more money.
- George realizes his wife is having an affair.
- Tom and Nick and Jordan stop by again on their way into the city one day (the day Tom confronts Daisy and Gatsby) and he looks like a sick, broken man.
- After Myrtle is hit and killed, George sinks into a severe depression and grief.
- He reveals to Michaelis that, before his wife died, he warned her that God was always watching.
- According to Michaelis, Wilson fixated on the eyes of T.J. Eckleburg for a long time after.
- George Wilson seeks the name and identity of the person driving the car that struck and killed his wife, thinking that it is also the man with whom she was having an affair.
- Finding his way to West Egg, he kills Gatsby and then himself.
- We find out later that it was Tom who gave Wilson Gatsby's name.

## Myrtle Wilson Character Analysis

We get the feeling that Myrtle Wilson is not an especially smart woman. Strung along by Tom, Myrtle is convinced that he loves her and would leave his wife for her if he could. The whole bit about Daisy being a Catholic and not believing in divorce is, as Nick points out, not remotely true.

Because she is unhappy in her marriage to George, Myrtle is drawn to Tom for certain specific reasons. George is passive, but Tom is controlling and authoritative. Myrtle puts up with Tom's physical abuse because she equates it with masculinity – a quality that in her mind is lacking in her husband. She even yells at George, "throw me and down and beat me, you dirty little coward!"

Myrtle also adds to the novel's themes of class and wealth. She insists that she married below her caste, that she believed certain things about George until they got married and it was too late (he borrowed a suit for the wedding, for example). Since Myrtle is quite obviously below the Buchanan's class (yet another reason she goes for Tom), Fitzgerald ridicules her for insisting that she is above her husband.

## Myrtle Wilson Timeline and Summary

- Myrtle spends a day in the city with Tom and Nick.
- She and Tom have an argument about whether she has the right to talk about Daisy. Tom hits her and breaks her nose.
- Myrtle watches Tom from the window, thinking that Jordan is his wife.
- Myrtle comes running out to meet Gatsby's car, thinking Tom is driving it. She is struck and killed.

## Meyer Wolfsheim Character Analysis

We don't know a lot about Meyer Wolfsheim – and we're not supposed to. Beyond the fact that he's a business associate and a friend of Gatsby's, and that he's interestingly both sentimental and hard-boiled, we know very little. Wolfsheim is an inhabitant of New York's seedy underworld, and though he himself is something of a mystery, we end up learning quite a lot about other characters through him. First of all, his business "goneggtions" with Gatsby shine a rather dubious light upon the latter's dealings – even though Gatsby wants everyone to believe that he's the real deal, we begin to wonder how Gatsby *really* earned that fortune.



Wolfsheim also reveals some rather unfortunate things about one of our other main characters, Nick. Our narrator's innately judgmental nature emerges in his description of Wolfsheim; while Nick is clearly intrigued by the guy, he is also full of disdain for his shady dealings. Nick's distaste for Wolfsheim also betrays the bias against the foreign "Other" (Wolfsheim is Jewish) prevalent in so-called "respectable" society of the time; the way in which Nick describes Wolfsheim demonstrates his own prejudice.

## Owl Eyes and Klipspringer Character Analysis

These two odd characters sum up two extremes of the kinds of ludicrous, hilarious, bizarre people that populate Gatsby's parties, drinking his liquor and gossiping about him. On one hand, you have Owl Eyes, who shows a genuine interest (or something akin to it) in Gatsby; Owl Eyes simply cannot believe that Gatsby has real books in his library, and he seems to have a real fascination with the guy. Klipspringer, on the other hand, lives at Gatsby's house and totally takes advantage of his generosity, but doesn't appear to have any real feelings for him. These two attitudes towards Gatsby diverge after his death – Klipspringer rudely calls up Nick, not because he wants to give his last respects to a former friend, but simply because he wants to pick up a pair of tennis shoes, while Owl Eyes wistfully shows up at the house, and, unlike all of Gatsby's fair-weather friends, shows some real sympathy towards him.

## Character Roles

### Protagonist

#### *Jay Gatsby*

Jay Gatsby is the main focus of the work, and it is his story that follows the classic tragedy plot. When we first meet Jay Gatsby, we know only that he is a fabulously wealthy man who throws enormous parties. Mystery and intrigue surround him. Who is he? What does he do for a living? Has he done some terrible thing, like kill a man? Because of these unknowns, we're not sure at first how comfortable we are with Gatsby as the protagonist. The title certainly helps – we expect the man to be great, after all, so we look to him to fulfill our common expectations of what a protagonist should be. We expect him to be someone with whom we sympathize, someone we want to succeed. And indeed, we do feel for Gatsby. We, the reader, want him to get Daisy. Fitzgerald has created in Gatsby such a heartfelt character, and in Tom such a villain, that we don't even judge Gatsby for trying to steal someone else's wife. As far as we're concerned, Gatsby fits the protagonist bill.

### Antagonist

#### *Tom Buchanan*

Tom Buchanan prevents Jay Gatsby from "living happily ever after," both in Gatsby's head (for much of the story) and then literally (by denying him Daisy and then taking actions that lead to

Gatsby's death). Nick introduces Tom Buchanan as an excellent sportsman, but that's about the only thing he has going for him. Tom is wealthy, restless, and cruel – not a good combination. Fitzgerald gets us to dislike – if not flat out hate – Tom, so that we root for Gatsby. Tom's violent and abusive nature certainly contributes to our emotions.

But if you like your antagonists cut out in clear black-and-white, Tom is not the guy for you. Just when we feel safe about sticking Tom in the villain box and sealing the lid shut, we start to (gasp) feel sympathy for him. At the Plaza, for the first time we see a sensitive side to Tom. Or, as Nick says it, the man displays "a husky tenderness" towards his wife. He declares he loves her, that he's always loved her, mentions some tear-jerking scenes between them, and declares he's going to treat her better from now on. By the end of the novel, even Nick is won over – at least a little bit. He declares that he can't forgive Tom for what he's done, but that he certainly understands that, in Tom's mind, all his actions were justified. So there you have it: Tom Buchanan, the not-so-evil bad guy.

### **Antagonist**

#### *Gatsby's Dream*

Alternatively, Gatsby's antagonist could be seen as the "dream" he has to be with Daisy. This is the dream that has driven his actions, propelled him forward, and, ultimately, clouded his judgment in a way that led to his death. Gatsby can never come to grips with the reality of the present because he is stuck in his dreams of the past.

### **Guide/Mentor**

#### *Nick Carraway*

Well, we had to get him in here *somewhere*. Nick serves as a guide for a few different people. The first one, the easy one, is Gatsby. Nick helps Gatsby out by giving him advice – unfortunately, Gatsby never listens. Nick enables Gatsby's affair with Daisy, using action to help his friend. He later uses words, advising Gatsby that he "can't repeat the past." He is also the one to warn Gatsby that he ought to leave town after the Myrtle's death. Again, the man just doesn't listen. The interesting part comes in at the end of the novel, when Nick says that we are all "borne back ceaselessly into the past." Because this stands in contrast to what Nick told Gatsby earlier, and because it in fact mirrors Gatsby's prior sentiments, you could argue that Gatsby in return acts as a guide for Nick. We definitely didn't see that one coming.

### **Guide/Mentor**

#### *Dan Cody*

Dan Cody serves as Gatsby's friend and mentor. He not only gives Gatsby a taste of "elite" life, but he also provides him with the only education he receives – a by-the-seat-of-your-pants education that gives Gatsby the skills and experience to head off in pursuit of wealth and class.

### **Foil**

#### *Jordan Baker and Daisy*

Jordan Baker can be viewed in opposition to Daisy. While Daisy wishes to be admired and

adored, while she carries the dreams of the past into the present, Jordan is far more practical. Tom and Gatsby see Daisy as an angel, something to be protected and put on a pedestal; Jordan Baker would be damned before she'd let anybody do that to her.

### **Foil**

#### *Tom Buchanan and George Wilson*

Tom is in many ways the opposite of Wilson. While George is weak and passive, Tom is physically strong and controlling. This is clearly the reason for Myrtle's attraction to him; she feels he has a certain masculinity that her husband lacks. There is also the issue of social caste, as Tom is a wealthy member of the upper echelon and Wilson is working class. Myrtle likes this about Tom, as well, declaring that she married George not knowing of his poverty and status. You could even argue that Myrtle is attracted to Tom's violent nature, since she later berates her husband for being a "coward" and begs him, "Beat me!"

## Character Clues

### **Social Status or Societal Position**

We're guessing you saw this one coming. Because social status is considered a defining quality by the characters in the book, it naturally becomes a means by which we, the reader, come to define the characters. That Gatsby isn't *socially* in the upper class (even if he is economically) becomes the dividing line between him and Daisy, and arguably the blockade on the way to realizing his dreams. Tom is in part defined by his money (along with the abusive nature and that whole "The Hulk" thing). And Daisy? Well, we think Gatsby sums it up best when he simply says, "Her voice is full of money."

### **Location**

Gatsby lives in West Egg, but Daisy resides in East Egg. Having been told that East Egg is the wealthier of the two, this difference in location highlights the differences between Jay and Daisy's societal rank. It's also worth noting that Jordan, Nick, and Daisy are all in East Egg together, while Nick and Gatsby reside together in West Egg. This division makes sense toward the end of the novel, when Nick takes Gatsby's side against the others – the "rotten crowd."

### **Occupation**

Gatsby ends up largely defined by his occupation – bootlegging. It is because of the stigma carried by this profession that he tries so hard to conceal it. The illegal nature of his job is a constant reminder that Gatsby got to where he is unnaturally; that he doesn't really belong in New York's high society. Nick, on the other hand, is "a bond man," a job that, like Nick, is straightforward and clean. Additionally, at one of his lavish parties, Gatsby insists on introducing Tom as "the [polo](#) player;" because Jay defines Tom by his physicality, Jay expresses his impression of the man by suggesting that Tom's work is of a physical nature.

### **Speech and Dialogue**

### *Gatsby's effort to sound well-educated*

For the most part, characters in *The Great Gatsby* are well-educated. Their speech and dialogue reflect this education, which in turn reflects their wealth and social status. The narrator takes note, however, of Gatsby's affected speech, speech of "elaborate formalities" that borders on "absurd." It is clear to him that Gatsby must *practice* to sound educated and wealthy – he must practice at being a part of Daisy's world. The fact that Nick isn't fooled would suggest that others, too, are not so taken in by Jay's efforts. His transformation to a man of high society is incomplete at best, and failed at worst.

### *Mr. Wolfsheim's lower-class diction*

Mr. Wolfsheim speaks in a dialect that indicates his lack of education, lack of class, and general lack of what wealthy, snobby people in the 1920s might have called "good breeding." Oxford becomes "Oggsford;" "Connection" becomes "gonnection." The use of different dialects works to reveal the differences between the working class and the upper class. By contrasting Wolfsheim's and Gatsby's diction with that of people like Nick Carraway, Fitzgerald suggests that those involved in organized crime are necessarily working class – no matter how wealthy and powerful they appear to be.

## Literary Devices

### Symbols, Imagery, Allegory

#### Gatsby's "books"

An owl-eyed man at a Gatsby party sits in awe in the library, murmuring with amazement that all the books on Gatsby's shelves are "real books." But does Gatsby even read them? The image works to suggest that much of what Gatsby presents to the world is a façade; for example, he wants people to believe that he's a well-educated man, an Oxford man, but in fact he only spent a short time there after the war. The books may represent the fact that Gatsby is a fraud – that he has built up an image of himself that is not consistent with the facts of his life. But, you could also argue that the unopened, unread books represent Gatsby himself: though there are many rumors about who he is and how he earned his money, the facts remain unexamined, unopened.

#### The Owl-Eyed Man

Speaking of those books, what's up with that guy in the library? We almost listed the owl-eyed man as a character, but then we realized we know absolutely nothing about him. Even Nick reduces him from a man to a pair of eyes. So we're thinking he's really more of a symbol than a full blown character. Feel free to disagree.

And, yes, we are getting to the point. First, there's the owl bit; owls are a symbol of wisdom, but can also be an omen of death (we don't know how that came about, either, but we're thinking

someone got their signals crossed). Then there's the glasses bit; a man with large eyes and spectacles would be expected to be more perceptive than those around him.

So does the owl-eyed man fit the bill? Being perceptive and all, the bespectacled man is right to be suspicious of Gatsby. He is the only guest who, in doubting Gatsby, is also *wise* enough to investigate further. Moving right along to the portent of death part, did you notice that it was the owl-eyed man who had the car accident outside of Gatsby's house? And that, shortly after he got out of the car, he revealed that someone else was driving? Does any of this sound familiar?

If you're really interested in the owl-eyed man (as we so clearly are), you should check out the scene at the end where he's the only former guest to come to Gatsby's funeral. Why would that be? Exactly.

### **The Eyes of Dr. T.J. Eckleburg and the Valley of Ashes Below Them**

The first time we see the eyes of T.J. Eckleburg, the image is intertwined with Nick's description of the valley of ashes. The ashes are, as ashes tend to be, "desolate" and "grotesque." Nick and the others have to pass through this "bleak" land any time they travel between the Eggs and the city. Think of the valley of ashes as one big, grey reality check. Compare Gatsby's lavish parties of fresh fruit and live music and champagne to this land of smokestacks and ash-men; it seems that not all the world is as privileged as our cast of characters.

But the valley of ashes can also be seen as more commentary on the American Dream. (THAT again?! Yes.) The America of *The Great Gatsby* is ashen, decaying, and barren. It is also, based on the action that goes down in the valley of the ashes, devoid of morality and compassion. Myrtle Wilson lives by the ashheaps, and so there resides Tom's infidelity. George Wilson lives by the ash heaps, so we can place there both anger and envy. Myrtle is, of course, killed there, so we also come to identify death with the valley (in case Nick's initial description wasn't enough for you).

Which brings us to the eyes. T.J. Eckleburg's billboard is the second notable pair of eyes in the novel (Owl-eyes, remember?). But these ones are a little different from those of the party-going bibliophile. It's no accident that the first time you hear about the eyes, your initial reaction is: "WHAT?!" Nick goes on for three sentences about these weird, disembodied eyes before actually explaining that they're on a billboard. He gives your mind time to picture eerie images, to wonder what's going on, even to form other notions of what the eyes could be. Clearly, to us, the readers, the eyes are more than just a billboard.

Now that we've established that, we're sharp on the look out for more information. Nick notices the eyes again as the quartet heads into the city in Chapter Seven, shortly before the Tom vs. Gatsby showdown. He notes them keeping a "watchful vigil" – which sounds like a rather religious choice of words, at least in connotation. But we hit the jackpot in Chapter Eight, when George takes Myrtle to the window (from which, we know, the billboard is visible) and tells her

she can't fool God. Wilson then makes the very same connection we are; the eyes of T.J. Eckleburg are always watching, and so are the eyes of God.

There are a few directions you can take from here. The first is that, despite the absence of religion from the characters in this story, God is still there. He is all-seeing, ever present, and, as Nick points out, frowning. Things are not well in the valley of American ashes. The other shot you could take at this is to say that God has been replaced by capitalism. Instead of a truly religious representation, the best this world can do is manifest God in a billboard – an advertisement.

### **The Green Light**

The green light on Daisy's house that Gatsby gazes wistfully at from his own house across the water represents the "unattainable dream." But the green light also represents the hazy future, the future that is forever elusive, as Nick claims in the last page of the novel, "Gatsby believed in the green light, the orgastic future that year by year recedes before us. It eluded us then, but that's no matter – to-morrow we will run farther, stretch out our arms farther...." The interesting question is, if the green light is the future, how is it so tied up with Daisy and the dreams of the past?

### **Colors**

Sometimes we sound like art snobs when we talk about *The Great Gatsby* ("Look at the use of green! Such marvelous blues," and so forth). Honestly, it seems like there's a little too much color stuff going on here to be coincidental.

*Yellow and Gold: Money, Money, Money. Oh, and Death.*

First off, we've got yellows and golds, which we're thinking has something to do with...gold (in the cash money sense). Why gold and not green? Because we're talking about the real stuff, the authentic, traditional, "old money" – not these new-fangled dollar bills. So you've got your "yellow cocktail music" playing at Gatsby's party where the turkeys are "bewitched to dark gold" and Jordan and Nick sit with "two girls in yellow." It seems clear, then, that Gatsby is using these parties to try to fit in with the "old money" crowd. And it doesn't stop there; when Gatsby is finally going to see Daisy again at Nick's house, he wears a gold tie. Nick later mentions the "pale gold odor of kiss-me-at-the-gate," which may seem weird (since last we checked, colors didn't have a smell) until we remember Nick's description of New York as "a wish out of non-olfactory money." Odor then is associated with gold, and non-odor with money. The difference? Perhaps the same distinction as Daisy's upper class world and Gatsby's new-found wealth. While Gatsby buys a yellow car to further promote his facade, he's really not fooling anyone. Lastly, we've got Daisy, who is only called "the golden girl" once Gatsby realizes that her voice, her main feature, is "full of money." Yellow is not just the color of money, but also of destruction. Yellow is the color of the car that runs down Myrtle. The glasses of Eckleburg, looking over the wasteland of America, are yellow. This dual symbolism clearly associates money with destruction; the ash heaps are the filthy result of the decadent lifestyle led by the rich.



*White: Innocence and Femininity. Maybe.*

While we're looking at cars, notice that Daisy's car (back before she was married) was white. So are her clothes, the rooms of her house, and about half the adjectives used to describe her (her "white neck," "white girlhood," the king's daughter "high in a white palace"). Everyone likes to say that white in *The Great Gatsby* means innocence, probably because 1) that's easy to say and 2) everyone else is saying it. But come on – Daisy is hardly the picture of girlish innocence. At the end of the novel, she is described as selfish, careless, and destructive. Does this make the point that even the purest characters in *Gatsby* have been corrupted? Did Daisy start off all innocent and fall along the way, or was there no such purity to begin with? Or, in some way, does Daisy's decision to remain with Tom allow her to keep her innocence? We'll keep thinking about that one.

*Blue: This One's Up For Grabs*

Then there's the color blue, which we think represents Gatsby's illusions -- his deeply romantic dreams of unreality. We did notice that the color blue is present around Gatsby more so than any other character. His gardens are blue, his chauffeur wears blue, the water separating him from Daisy is his "blue lawn," mingled with the "blue smoke of brittle leaves" in his yard. His transformation into Jay Gatsby is sparked by Cody, who buys him, among other things, a "blue coat." Before you tie this up under one simple label, keep in mind that the eyes of T.J. Eckleburg are also blue, and so is Tom's car. If blue represents illusions and alternatives to reality, God may be seen as a non-existent dream. As for Tom's car...well, you can field that one.

*Grey and a General Lack of Color: Lifelessness (no surprise there)*

Then there is the lack of color presented in the grey ash heaps. If the ash heaps are associated with lifelessness and barrenness, and grey is associated with the ash heaps, anyone described as grey is going to be connected to barren lifelessness. Our main contender is Wilson: "When anyone spoke to him he invariably laughed in an agreeable colorless way." Wilson's face is "ashen." His eyes are described as "pale" and "glazed." It is then no coincidence that Wilson is the bearer of lifelessness, killing Gatsby among yellow leaved trees, which we already decided had something to do with destruction.

*Green: Life, Vitality, The Future, Exploration*

Last one. We're thinking green = plants and trees and stuff, so life and springtime and other happy things. Do we see this in *The Great Gatsby*? The most noticeable image is that green light we seem to see over and over. You know, the green light of the "orgastic future" that we stretch our hands towards, etc. etc. We can definitely see green as being hopeful, as being the future, as being vitality and freshness. Right before these famous last lines, Nick also describes the "fresh, green breast of the new world," the new world being this land as Nick imagines it existed hundreds of years before. The new world might be green, but when Nick imagines Gatsby's future without Daisy, he sees "a new world, material without being real, where poor ghosts, breathing dreams like air, drifted fortuitously about...like that ashen fantastic figure

gliding toward him through the amorphous trees." Nick struggles to define what the future really means, especially as he faces the new decade before him (the dreaded thirties). Is he driving on toward grey, ashen death through the twilight, or reaching out for a bright, fresh green future across the water?

## Setting

### **Long Island and New York City in the early 1920s**

The story is set in [New York City](#) and on [Long Island](#), in two areas known as "[West Egg](#)" and "[East Egg](#)." The story is set in the early 1920s, just after [World War I](#), during Prohibition, a time period that outlawed the manufacture, sale, or consumption of alcoholic beverages. This is significant not only because Gatsby's ill-gotten wealth is apparently due to bootlegging, but also because alcohol is conspicuously available, despite being illegal, throughout the book. Indeed, the characters are seen drinking expensive champagne – suggesting that the wealthy are not at all affected by these laws.

The social setting is among wealthy, educated people, those with a good deal of leisure time and little concern about people who are not in their social milieu. Nobody's concerned about politics or spiritual matters – but everybody cares about how they are perceived socially. The social climate demands respectability; it asks people to conform to certain standards. This is one reason why Tom's flaunting of his mistress is an issue. Organized crime enters the picture through the backdoor with Jay Gatsby. Everybody suspects him, but everybody is willing to partake in his lavish parties anyway.

The life of ease and luxury is contrasted sharply with the stranglehold of poverty containing Myrtle and George Wilson or the life from which Jay Gatsby emerged. It is also interesting to note that George Wilson is the only one who mentions God in the text: religion is notoriously absent from the upper crust's sensibilities.

There are two more important contrasts to keep in mind if you want to talk about the geographical setting in Great Gatsby. The first is the whole East Egg/West Egg thing. Nick tells us right off the bat that East Egg is the wealthier, more elite of the two. Despite all his money, Gatsby lives in West Egg, suggesting that he has not been able to complete his transformation into a member of the social elite. The distance that separates him from Daisy lies across the span of water between their houses – the very distance between West Egg and East Egg. The barrier between them, then, is one of class distinctions.

The second contrast is between the city scenes and the suburban ones. Like Nick Carraway, Tom Buchanan and Jay Gatsby commute into the city for their respective lines of work. The women are left behind. This geographical divide is also a gender borderline. But the city is important in other ways, too; Tom only interacts with his mistress in the city, and Gatsby only

sees Meyer Wolfsheim there. They both use the city to hide their goings-on from the people they value on Long Island.

## Narrator Point of View

### **First Person (Peripheral Narrator): Nick Carraway**

The story is told in the first person, through the eyes of Nick Carraway. The primary and most visible story is about Jay Gatsby and his devotion to his dream. Other stories, also told through Carraway's eyes, include Tom's reconciliation with his wife Daisy, Nick's own relationship with Jordan, and Nick's evolving friendship with Gatsby. Nick is only able to tell these stories through his limited omniscience. At times, he is able to narrate scenes despite not being present – but he rarely takes advantage of this fact. Although the story is told in the first person, Nick Carraway is able to easily become part of the wallpaper. His major character trait – reserving judgment – allows him to be almost an "invisible" narrator, similar to a traditional third-person omniscient point of view. Ultimately, however, if we lost Nick's point-of-view, we would never understand the evolution of his character. He is the invisible man until the end of the book, when suddenly, he has opinions about everybody.

## Genre

### **Literary Fiction, Modernism**

Almost anything on the Shmoop module list would probably fit under the category of "literary fiction": it's an umbrella term for a story or novel that focuses more on character development and style than on page-turning plots. And it's this kind of fiction that you usually read for school: books that provoke discussion over what it all *means* (Life, the Universe, and Everything).

*The Great Gatsby* is definitely no exception. Fitzgerald is much more interested in plumbing the depths of Gatsby's heart and in experimenting with symbolic language (the green light, anyone?) than he is in working through the latest forensic evidence to give us clues for who hit Myrtle with his (or her) car. This novel is definitely not *CSI: West Egg*.

And the way Nick's narration jumps around, shifting from dialogue to personal meditation to foreshadowing and back again, tips us off that *The Great Gatsby* is also a Modernist work (like a lot of other books to come in the wake of [World War I](#) – check out any of our Shmoop guides on Ernest Hemingway or James Joyce novels for examples). It's fragmented and non-linear, but the writing style also tries to get at difficult truths that a more realistic book might not capture.

## Tone

### Cynical, Ironic

Nick is one cynical little cookie. Even though Nick reserves explicit judgment on the characters, Fitzgerald still manages to implicitly criticize through his narrator's tone. (Think about how ludicrous Myrtle seems when, although she isn't upper class, she still tries to look down on her husband.) The characters are sometimes slighted by the ironic tone, and we the readers are forced to read with the same cynicism that Fitzgerald writes.

Let's take a look at two passages. This first one is from Chapter 1, when Nick is hanging out with the Buchanans and Jordan for the first time:

*"I love to see you at my table, Nick. You remind me of a – of a rose, an absolute rose. Doesn't he?" She turned to Miss Baker for confirmation: "An absolute rose?"*

*This was untrue. I am not even faintly like a rose. She was only extemporizing, but a stirring warmth flowed from her, as if her heart was trying to come out to you concealed in one of those breathless, thrilling words. Then suddenly she threw her napkin on the table and excused herself and went into the house.*

We see here that Nick is all too aware of the ridiculousness of certain social circumstances; he's also aware of the seductive quality of the upper class, even though he feels it's somewhat empty. He narrates this scene as though his personal recollection is the objectively true version, Isn't there is room for alternate interpretations? While reading, we took Nick's account of the story as the truth, but there probably is a way of viewing the story's events without his cynical assumptions.

Nick also has a good grip on what he thinks is righteous or reproachable, and he hands that to his audience as the absolute true judgment of a person or an act. For instance, take a look at this excerpt from the last few pages of the novel, when Nick has become disillusioned with his former acquaintances:

*I couldn't forgive [Tom] or like him, but I saw that what he had done was, to him, entirely justified. It was all very careless and confused. They were careless people, Tom and Daisy – they smashed up things and creatures and then retreated back into their money or their vast carelessness, or whatever it was that kept them together, and let other people clean up the mess they had made....*

*I shook hands with him; it seemed silly not to, for I felt suddenly as though I were talking to a child.*

How would you feel about Tom and Daisy if Nick's tone were less cynical – if his version of the

story was completely objective? Would it be possible to empathize with them?

## Writing Style

### **Soldierly, Confessional, A herd of galloping horses**

Hold on to your hats, Shmoopsters, because once you ride the Fitzgerald train, there's no stopping. You will be hurdling through this plot faster than you can say "T.J. Eckleburg." It seems to us that F. Scott Fitzgerald loves winding, garden-path sentences. He likes to begin a sentence with one idea, person, or location and end in a completely different universe. Because of this, he draws amazing connections. In this example, watch how he begins with personality and ends with earthquakes:

*If personality is an unbroken series of successful gestures, then there was something gorgeous about him, some heightened sensitivity to the promises of life, as if he were related to one of those intricate machines that register earthquakes ten thousand miles away. (1.4)* How's that for some plate tectonics? Our speaker talks about the "unbroken series of successful gestures" that characterizes personality, but we can't help but think of the series of successful words that live in this very sentence. Unlike a personality, these words are broken up by three commas. We can't get enough of the commas and semi-colons that live in *The Great Gatsby*; they are everywhere, and they make for some juicy, action-packed sentences. Sometimes, we have to read sentences over and over again just to make sure we understand them, just to make sure we actually did read the phrases "whole caravansary" and "card house" in the same sentence (8.15).

Fitzgerald seems to love the chaos of a ramble, but he also loves to enforce order. He creates beautifully ornate sentences that gallop like wild horses in all directions, and he also simultaneously lassoes these sentences and pulls the reins. Get out your chaps, find your spurs, and giddy on up.

## What's Up With the Title?

For such a short title, *The Great Gatsby* can be interpreted in a couple different ways. Is Gatsby great? Or is Fitzgerald being ironic? Let's break it down.

The way we see it, there are three ways to read the title. First, there's the surface level of Gatsby's persona. He's one of the wealthiest people on Long Island, and definitely one of the wealthiest in West Egg. He's got a mansion loaded with the nicest, most expensive stuff and a great car. And his parties... oh the parties. Each would be qualify as a legendary event in itself, and he hosts at least one every weekend. He gives all of his guests first-class treatment, even though he doesn't really know any of them.

Gatsby is a local celebrity, and everyone has a theory about how he's gotten to be so wealthy. In short, everyone seems to know his name and is endlessly interested in his life. So in that way, he's, well, "great." Great in that he seems to live a dream-like existence. He briefly even wins back the girl of his dreams – and therefore achieves his ultimate goal – even if Daisy only sticks around short time.

Then there's the second way of looking at Gatsby: his dream-like life is a sham. He rises to the top of society in a dishonest way; he's earned his fortune through illegal activities. The "old money" folks see right through his appearance. He's not upper class to them – he's a phony. When everyone figures out the truth behind his rise to "greatness," their adoration of him crumbles. All those friends of his turn out to simply be people who take advantage of his generosity and riches. None of them even bothers to show up for his funeral, except for the owl-eyed man. In this way, Fitzgerald's title seems more ironic than literal.

But then there's a third way of looking at that adjective. Although Nick is disgusted with the means Gatsby has used to achieve his dream, Nick sees that he's truly driven by a noble emotion: love. In that way, Gatsby's willingness to do whatever necessary to win back Daisy seems honorably romantic. Also, Nick believes that Gatsby is truly a good person; the man is generous, loyal, and sincere. In this way, Gatsby is great. Nick sees Gatsby as a victim of Tom and Daisy's selfish, shallow addiction to their wealth and lifestyle. Nick empathizes with Gatsby's inability to break down class barriers and earn the respect of the upper class. In the end, Nick sides with Gatsby and is infuriated with the way he was treated.

All things considered, do you think that Gatsby is great? Check out [Gatsby's "Character Analysis"](#) for more of our thoughts on him and his "greatness."

## What's Up With the Epigraph?

*"Then wear the gold hat, if that will move her; If you can bounce high, bounce for her too, Till she cry "Lover, gold-hatted, high-bouncing lover, I must have you!" – Thomas Parke D'Invilliers*

First of all, who is this Thomas Parke D'Invilliers? What, you've never heard of him? Well, that's because Fitzgerald made him up. This is breaking the normalcy – if not the flat out rules – of epigraphs, which usually use someone *else's* words and not the author's. On top of that, this fictional Thomas guy made an appearance in another one of Fitzgerald's novels as a typical college intellectual in *This Side of Paradise*. So basically, we get an idea of Fitzgerald's trickiness and perhaps literary hubris before the story even begins.

Now onto what the epigraph actually says. These words seem to indicate somebody using material deception in order to win a girl. In other words, bling yourself out so that a woman who would otherwise not notice you (perhaps because she's in Natalie Portman's league) will sit up and pay attention. This is precisely what Gatsby does – he wears a "gold hat" (not literally, but figuratively) to win Daisy.



## Did You Know?

### Trivia

- Fitzgerald messed around with a few different titles. In case you thought the epigraph wasn't important, you should know that two potential titles were "Gold-Hatted Gatsby" and "High-Bouncing Lover." And in case you thought that business about the ash heaps wasn't important, you'll want in on the fact that another possible title was "Among Ashheaps and Millionaires." ([Source](#))
- Some critics believe that Fitzgerald's description of the Valley of Ashes and the Eyes of T.J. Eckleburg were inspired by Francis Cugat's haunting cover for the book. ([Source](#))
- The F. Scott stands for Francis Scott – which means that, yes, Fitzgerald was named after Francis Scott Key, the man who wrote the words to "The Star-Spangled Banner." This is only slightly ironic, given the portrayal of the American Dream in *The Great Gatsby*. ([Source](#))
- Calvin Klein used a commercial called "The Great Gatsby" to advertise their Obsession fragrance. ([Source](#))
- There is a rock band called "Gatsby's American Dream." But we cannot attest to their level of skill. ([Source](#))

### Steaminess Rating

#### **PG-13 for adult content**

People are cheating on each other all over the place in *The Great Gatsby*. Tom Buchanan, in addition to that incident with the maid shortly after his honeymoon, not to mention his obvious pursuit of other women at Gatsby's party, has a semi-permanent mistress. Oh, and she's married. Right. Daisy also has an affair with Gatsby. So, basically, although there are no sex scenes, it's rather safe to assume that sex is happening all the time, all over the place, between all kinds of people: the married ones, the not-married ones, and the sort-of-engaged ones. We're thinking the constant boozing might have something to do with the sex. Then again, it might just be that everyone is dissatisfied with marriage. Who knows?

## Allusions and Cultural References

### Literature, Philosophy, and Mythology

- [T.S. Eliot](#)
- [King Midas](#), from the Greek myth (1.12)

### Historical Figures

- [Maecenas](#), a patron of the arts and a political advisor to Caesar [Augustus](#) (1.12)
- [J.P. Morgan](#), an American financial banker, one of America's first billionaires (1.12)

### Other

- John Lawson Stoddard: [Stoddard's Lectures](#) (3.48)
- Henry Clay: [Economics: An Introduction for the General Reader](#)(5.42)

## Best of the Web

### Movie or TV Productions

#### [2002 Movie](#)

<http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0291928/>

In the movie *G*, Gatsby meets Hip-Hop and the Hamptons.

#### [1974 Movie](#)

<http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0071577/>

A film with Robert Redford as Gatsby.

### Videos

#### [A Gatsby Party Scene](#)

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TW4WJ6tpZeA>

They sure don't throw parties like *this* anymore.

### [Calvin Klein and F. Scott Fitzgerald](#)

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NdBk3cnhtP4&mode=related&search>

A commercial for Calvin Klein "Obsession."

## Images

### [Classic Book Cover](#)

<http://imagecache2.allposters.com/images/pic/BOOK/BD021~The-Great-Gatsby-by-F-Scott-Fitzgerald-Posters.jpg>

Here's the big, famous cover everyone keeps talking about.

### [Gatsby and Daisy](#)

<http://employees.oneonta.edu/angellkg/slide65.jpg>

Robert Redford as Jay Gatsby and Mia Farrow as Daisy.

## Documents

### [Great Gatsby Graphic Novel](#)

<http://www.nickigreenberg.com/gatsby.shtml>

Writer and illustrator Nicki Greenberg retells The Great Gatsby in her 2008 graphic novel – but instead of using human figures for the characters in Gatsby, she turns them into sea-alien creatures.

### [Free e-book](#)

[http://etext.library.adelaide.edu.au/f/fitzgerald/f\\_scott/gatsby/](http://etext.library.adelaide.edu.au/f/fitzgerald/f_scott/gatsby/)

Download the book to keep on your computer. You know, for those late-night Fitzgerald cravings.

## Resources on the 1920s

### [Dance Craze](#)

[http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yNAOHtmy4j0&feature=player\\_embedded#](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yNAOHtmy4j0&feature=player_embedded#)

A YouTube clip on the Charleston dance.

### [Music](#)

[http://www.pbs.org/jazz/time/time\\_roaring.htm](http://www.pbs.org/jazz/time/time_roaring.htm)

The Roaring 20s and Jazz.

### [Clara Bow](#)

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XAgVeTW7hNA&feature=related>

A YouTube compilation of actress Clara Bow, the ultimate 1920s "Jazz Baby."

### [Makeup](#)

<http://return2style.de/swingstyle/makeup/20amimup.html>

A website introducing the makeup of the 1920s.



[Fashion](#)

<http://www.1920s-fashion-and-music.com/1920s-fashion.html>

A website devoted to the fashion of the 1920s.