

Novel Study Sheet for: The Great Gatsby by F. Scott Fitzgerald

Significance of Title:

The Great Gatsby, the title of the novel, portrays a feeling of irony that sets up the rest of the novel. In a sense Gatsby is great considering what he has accomplished and his material wealth, but at the same time by the end of the novel he loses almost everything and it turns out that nothing is really “real”. He has created a life for himself that he so desperately wanted to be reality, but in the end it just wasn’t, and the title through an ironic reading sets up the premise of this for the rest of the novel.

What’s Important About Author:

Fitzgerald, much like Nick, is obviously a writer and he lived in the same world that Gatsby did. He was a firsthand witness to similar events and people that were present in the 1920’s. The book may have in a sense been written to portray his point of view of the American East, how it was changing and the possible effects of that as both an insider and an outsider at the same time.

Plot:

The plot of the Great Gatsby includes the main character Nick Carraway moving to West Egg, after attending Yale University, and growing up in Minnesota, which at this point in time may still have been considered the west. It follows his journey in the East as he explores the world of those who have amassed great wealth and the way they live their lives, whether it be through his cousin Daisy and her husband Tom, or his wealthy neighbor Jay Gatsby. He becomes involved in the scandal that follows those with exuberant wealth as Gatsby pines for Daisy in an effort to win her back after being gone for 5 years. At the same time Tom is having an affair, with a woman from the Valley of Ashes named Myrtle. By the end of the novel it becomes utterly clear that people at this point in time only looked out for their own self-interest as eventually Daisy accidentally kills Myrtle in a car accident, in Gatsby’s car, so her husband George out for revenge is led to Gatsby’s door and kills him in his own pool, even though he was innocent. No one ends up showing up to Gatsby’s funeral even though he had been a tremendous host to them at all of his infamous parties held in his mansion in West Egg. At the same time that all of this is happening Nick is dating a young professional golfer named Jordan Baker, who happens to be friends with Daisy. He also encounters various types of people such as Myrtle’s sister Catherine and the Meyer Wolfsheim, a professional gambler/bootlegger in which Gatsby is involved in business with.

Theme:

- The American Dream
 - At this point in time during the 1920’s materialism was becoming extremely prominent as more and more people were amassing large amounts of wealth. This wealth started to form feelings of disillusionment with the American Dream, people could no longer be happy because they constantly wanted more and more, and this is portrayed in the novel through primarily Gatsby, but at the same time with almost all of the major and minor characters.
- Old Vs. New Money
 - The novel also created a theme of Old Vs. New Money as there is always a strict contrast created between the two. The contrasts of West and East Egg along with the contrasts of the New York and the Valley of Ashes come together to provide the view that new money is reckless while old money is primarily elitist creating a great contrast between them.

- Isolation
 - In the novel isolation is a major theme if not a motif, since at some point every character felt isolated or alone and they try to find a way to deal with it, primarily the narrator Nick.
- Mortality
 - Death is prevalent in the novel as both Myrtle and Gatsby die, it almost sets up the idea that people will get rid of whoever is in their way just to favor their own self-interest.
- Gender and Gender Roles
 - Gender and gender roles are dealt with in the novel as it challenges previous conceptions and hypocrisies that surround the ideals present at the time. Daisy is judged and hurt for having an affair with Gatsby, but Tom after doing the same thing with Myrtle is almost praised for it and cannot receive even close to the same level of punishment.
- Forgiveness
 - Forgiveness is a main theme in the novel as it is present between almost all of the characters, once again specifically Nick. Nick by the end of the novel has become so angry with everyone and what they had done but still finds it within himself to “forgive” Tom and Gatsby for their reactions, even though he greatly disagrees with what happened.
- Society and Class
 - A major aspect of the novel is the theme of society and class, the novel challenges previous conceptions as well as bringing to light important aspects of life in 1920’s America. It challenges views of race and gender equality as well as wealth in society and how that affects one’s life whether it be in a positive or negative way.
- Role of the past in terms of the future
 - Lastly the book also reviews how past mistakes and decisions have come to affect a person’s future and whether anything can be done to change so. This is mostly in relation to Gatsby as he strives to change his future and not let his past affect what he has now.
- Morality
 - Morality and what is considered to be right or wrong is a major part of the novel as almost everything is challenged by this perspective from the main character Nick.

Symbol:

- Geography
- The Green Light
 - The American Dream
- The Pink Cloud
 - Hope
- The Clock
 - The passage of time
- The Interior of Gatsby’s Car
 - Could represent envy
 - Or the colors of his car combined could represent money
- West Egg
 - New money

- East Egg
 - Old money
- The Eyes of TJ Eckleburg
 - They are supposed to represent an all knowing and seeing God, from the words of George Wilson
- The Valley of Ashes
 - Despair, solitude, loneliness, or most prominently could be feelings of lost hope
- Gatsby's Parties
 - The extravagance of the wealthy, especially those with new money
 - Greed and the waste of money
 - The yearning desire to fit in or to be someone that you are not

Motif:

- Geography
- Weather
- Parties
- Cars
- Time
- Extravagant Wealth
- Cheating

Tone:

- Desperate
- Cynical
- Contradictory

These are some of the main tones portrayed in the novel. Throughout the novel Nick Carraway, the main character and the narrator, portrays a contradictory tone. He constantly contradicts the things that he says, for example he talks about how much he hates everything Gatsby stands for, but adores Gatsby. This in itself sets up the rest of the novel and the views of not only Nick, but of other characters as well. Cynical is another main tone that is being portrayed as Nick has never really "believed" in the East or the people living there. He has always looked down on the area and believed that the people living there were held to a lower moral standard and from the beginning this affected his views on the events that took place and the people that he was around, including both Jordan and Gatsby.

Point(s) of View:

The novel is written from the first person point of view of Nick Carraway. Nick is narrating the entire story of Gatsby and his summer in East Egg years after it happened, he is doing so in order to retell the tale of the East and how the people there act and what their values consist of. Throughout the novel we only know what Nick does, and everything that occurs when he is not present is a mystery unless it is told to him by someone else.

Three Important Specific Scenes with detailed description of each that you can offer as evidence on the test:

1. The first time the readers are introduced to Tom and Daisy, we quickly are able to find out almost everything about their nature. They live in a white Georgian mansion much like those in the south, which quickly portrays Tom as a slave owner and the first time the reader is introduced to Daisy she says "I'm p-p-p-paralyzed with happiness." Automatically this gives us an insight into them, their relationship, and the nature of their values or actions. It provides us with a contrast to old and new money, a common theme

- and motif in the novel. We at this point realize that the people in the novel, especially the obscenely wealthy are only concerned with their own well-being. Daisy also may feel as though she is stuck in the relationship or being controlled, by Tom who is a slave owner. She also decides to unlight the candles during the dinner scene, almost showcasing that she wants to remain oblivious to everything that is going on in her marriage in order to remain with the comforts it has provided her. Another important aspect of this scene is that later on we learn that Daisy is not really oblivious to what is going on, and she wishes that her daughter not be as smart as her so that she can actually be happy later on.
2. In the novel, Nick invites Daisy for tea at his house in West Egg, but this is all just a ploy secretly run by Gatsby so that they can run into each other once again. We find out at this point that Gatsby and Daisy have not seen each other for 5 years next November, and that Gatsby wishes that he could turn back time emphasized when he accidentally breaks the clock. During this scene Gatsby is wearing an off-white suit and Daisy is wearing lavender, which could be construed as the color of royalty. This is also when Gatsby eventually takes Nick and Daisy to his house and Daisy cries over the beautiful shirts, but in reality she is really crying about the last 5 years and how they have been wasted. By the end of this scene it becomes apparent that Gatsby and Daisy have once again started their affair, and this scene provides the rising action for the novel.
 3. Another important scene in the novel is Gatsby's funeral which takes place in chapter nine of the novel. Although the media is interested in what is taking place surrounding Gatsby's death no one else seems to be interested. Gatsby's father returns at this point in the novel and we learn more about Gatsby's past and how he worked hard to get to where he was. Eventually Nick calls various people asking them to come to the funeral but they all decline such as Wolfsheim and Klipspringer who was more interested in getting his shoes returned. The reader comes to find out once again that people only have their self-interest in mind and will only do something when it is beneficial to them. They were all indifferent to Gatsby's death even though he had hosted all of those parties which they had all attended. By the end when the funeral takes place on Nick, Gatsby's Father, Owl-eyes, the servants, and the priest. At this point Nick is outraged by the lack of values that he finds in the East and yearns to go back to the West.

Three Important Passages/Quotations you can memorize and quote on test:

1. "I wouldn't ask too much of her," I ventured. "You can't repeat the past." "Can't repeat the past?" he cried incredulously. "Why of course you can!" He looked around him wildly, as if the past were lurking here in the shadow of his house, just out of reach of his hand.' - Both Nick Carraway and Jay Gatsby
2. "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." - Nick Carraway
3. "That's my Middle West . . . the street lamps and sleigh bells in the frosty dark... I see now that this has been a story of the West, after all—Tom and Gatsby, Daisy and Jordan and I, were all Westerners, and perhaps we possessed some deficiency in common which made us subtly unadaptable to Eastern life."- Nick Carraway