



# The Great Gatsby by F. Scott Fitzgerald

## Book Discussion Questions

### Nick

1. Nick believes he is an honest, nonjudgmental narrator. Discuss the reliability of Nick Carraway as the narrator of *The Great Gatsby*.
2. The novel's action occurs in 1922 between June and September. How does Nick's non-chronological narration shape your response to the events surrounding the mystery of Jay Gatsby?
3. What is Nick Carraway's role in the novel? Consider Nick's father's advice in chapter one: "Whenever you feel like criticizing anyone, just remember that all the people in this world haven't had the advantages that you've had." Does telling the story from Nick's point of view make it more believable?
4. Why did Nick become involved with Jordan, and why did he break off the relationship?
5. Whom do you think the characters in *The Great Gatsby* represent? Do they seem like real people? Which characters seem the most real to you? Who, if any, do you find most sympathetic? Most important, in what way do the events of the novel affect Nick Carraway? How, or to what degree, does he change?

# Gatsby

1. How is the character of Jay Gatsby presented to the reader?
2. What part of his past is Gatsby trying to recapture? Is he successful? Is there a person, feeling, or event in your past that you'd want to revisit? Gatsby believes that the past can be repeated. Is he right?
3. What do you think the sad thing that happened to Gatsby might be?
4. Is Jay Gatsby great? What is the meaning of the title? In what way is Gatsby great? In other words, is Fitzgerald's title sincere...or ironic?
5. Do you agree with Nick's final assertion that Gatsby is "worth the whole damn bunch put together"? Why or why not?

# Daisy

1. What are the implications of Gatsby's observation that Daisy's voice is 'full of money'?
2. Why does Daisy sob into the "thick folds" of Gatsby's beautiful shirts?
3. When Nick tells us that Daisy speaks 'with an expression of unthoughtful sadness' it is by no means clear what response we should make. What exactly is 'unthoughtful sadness'? Is it good or bad?
4. Perhaps the novel's climax occurs when Gatsby confronts Tom in New York. Did Daisy's ultimate choice surprise you? Is it consistent with her character?

# Symbolism

1. What is the symbolism of the green light that appears throughout the novel (at the end of Daisy's pier, at intersections throughout the book)?
2. Fitzgerald returns several times to describe a decrepit optical products sign – the eyes of Doctor T. J. Eckleberg -- that hovers over "the valley of ashes." What does that sign represent? What do the faded eyes of Doctor T.J. Eckleburg symbolize? Is there a connection between this billboard and the green light at the end of Daisy's dock?
3. How does Fitzgerald foreshadow the tragedies at the end?

# Historical Context

1. Does the novel critique or uphold the values of the Jazz Age and the fears of the Lost Generation?
2. At the time *The Great Gatsby* appeared, the production and sale of alcoholic drinks were prohibited in America. What was the outcome of Prohibition? How did it impact upon the nation's moral standards?
3. The 1920s was the decade of 'the flapper', the young woman who exercised unprecedented freedom. Is Jordan Baker a 'flapper'? Why?
4. Do you think Jay Gatsby represents the American dream? What do you think Fitzgerald is saying about the American dream in the 1920s? What statement might Fitzgerald be making about the mores or ethos of American culture?

# Comparisons

1. In what ways does Fitzgerald present a tension between Modernism and Victorianism in *The Great Gatsby*?
2. Compare and contrast the districts of West Egg and East Egg. Discuss.
3. Think about the two worlds, the Midwest and the East, as Fitzgerald describes them, and what they represent for Nick and for Gatsby.
4. Compare and contrast Gatsby's social class with that of Tom and Daisy Buchanan. How does geography contribute to the definition of social class in *The Great Gatsby*?

# Fitzgerald and the novel

1. Fitzgerald wrote, "You don't write because you want to say something, you write because you have something to say." What did he have to say in *Gatsby*?
2. Fitzgerald scholar Matthew J. Bruccoli claims: "*The Great Gatsby* does not proclaim the nobility of the human spirit; it is not politically correct; it does not reveal how to solve the problems of life; it delivers no fashionable or comforting messages. It is just a masterpiece." Do you agree?
3. What makes *The Great Gatsby* a classic novel? Why has it maintained its place in American literature?

# Movie adaptations

1. Have you seen any of the movie adaptations of *The Great Gatsby*? How did seeing a film portrayal of *The Great Gatsby* change your thoughts about the characters, the setting, or the story?
2. Actors Robert Redford, Toby Stevens, Alan Ladd, and Leonardo DiCaprio have all portrayed Jay Gatsby in film interpretations of *The Great Gatsby*. How do they get it right? Who do you prefer in the role? How do you think Gatsby in the book is different from Gatsby on the big screen? How is the character of Jay Gatsby presented to the reader?
3. Actresses Carey Mulligan, Mia Farrow, Betty Field and Mira Sorvino have all portrayed Daisy Buchanan in film interpretations of *The Great Gatsby*. How did you imagine Daisy while reading the novel? Who would you cast in the role, if you could choose from any actress at any time?
4. In the 1974 movie adaptation, Mia Farrow as Daisy tells this story: “And when I was in the delivery room, waking up from the ether, I asked the nurse whether it was a boy or a girl. She said it was a girl - and I turned my head to the side and cried. And then I said, I hope she grows up to be a pretty little fool. That's about the best a girl can hope for these days, to be a pretty little fool.” How had the hopes for a baby girl changed between *The Great Gatsby*'s publication in 1925 and the filming of the 1974 movie? How have the hopes for a baby girl changed from 1925 to today?

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**Discussion questions adapted and compiled from Duluth Public Library, Lit Lovers, Kirkwood Public Library, Penguin and the NEA Big Read.**

