

Year 13— The Great Gatsby

Plot Summary

Set in 1922 in America's Long Island, New York, the novel is narrated by the character Nick Carraway who has written an account in 1924 of his experiences a few years earlier. During that time period, Nick lived in West Egg village on Long Island next door to Jay Gatsby, who becomes the focal point of his story.

Nick visits his distant relative Daisy Buchanan who lives in East Egg village, across the water from where he lives. He also meets her rich husband Tom, an old university acquaintance. During his visit, Nick also encounters Daisy's friend and bridesmaid Jordan Baker, who is a famous golfer. Nick and Jordan begin a relationship, although the boundaries between friendship and romance are blurred.

Nick finds out secret information from Jordan, for example she tells him that Daisy and Gatsby used to be in love. However, when Gatsby was sent overseas to work in Europe as a soldier during the First World War (like Nick), Daisy met and married Tom, and they also had a daughter together called Pammy. Their marriage is unsettled and unhappy; Tom has affairs with other women, including the working-class Myrtle, wife of George Wilson the garage owner in the Valley of Ashes.

Gatsby remains in love with Daisy and is obsessed with winning her back; his lavish parties, glamorous mansion and fancy life are all part of his orchestrated plans to win her attention.

Nick is introduced to one of Gatsby's friends over lunch, Meyer Wolfsheim, where he learns that rumours about Gatsby being involved in crime are true. Wolfsheim is a rich criminal who fixed the outcome of the 1919 World Series baseball match. Nick soon learns that Gatsby became rich with Wolfsheim's help through bootlegging (selling alcohol, which was banned during the 1920s by laws called 'Prohibition').

After a party at the famous Plaza Hotel in New York, Daisy and Gatsby drive his car back to Long Island together whilst Tom and Nick follow separately in Tom's car. However, there is a fatal accident and Myrtle Wilson is killed by Daisy when she runs out into the road to wave the car down...she mistakenly thought Tom was driving the car. Daisy drives off, however there are witnesses to the accident and people recognise Gatsby's car. Gatsby decides to take the blame for Daisy.

George Wilson, mad with grief and anger over his wife's death, sneaks into Gatsby's garden whilst he's relaxing in his swimming pool and shoots him dead. George then kills himself. Nick arranges Gatsby's funeral but hardly anyone attends, other than Gatsby's father Henry C. Gatz who is proud yet lacks awareness of how his son might have acquired such wealth.

Nick returns to the Midwest, (the heart of America) where he's from originally and writes this story of 'The Great Gatsby'. He randomly bumps into Tom who admits that he was the one who told George Wilson that Gatsby was driving the car that hit Myrtle. At the end of the novel, Nick reflects on Gatsby's life, his mansion and his dream that ultimately led to his destruction and downfall.

Characters

Nick Carraway: Narrator, Gatsby's next-door neighbour, Daisy's distant relative and Tom's acquaintance from university. It's important to evaluate what type of a narrator he is – can we trust him? We need to remember that everything we are told is told from Nick's perspective.

Daisy Buchanan: Married to Tom, has a daughter called Pammy, used to be in a relationship with Gatsby many years ago and Gatsby is still in love with her. She is rich, privileged and lacks purpose in life; she's portrayed as simple-minded and vacuous.

Jay Gatsby: Protagonist, mysterious character, obsessed with Daisy, changed his name from James Gatz to reinvent himself, lots of rumours circulating regarding the origin of his wealth and status.

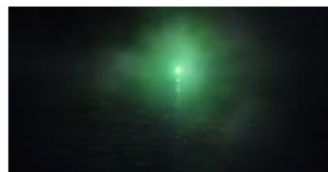
Tom Buchanan: Married to Daisy, wealthy through inheritance and therefore classed as 'old money' (versus Gatsby who is self-made and therefore 'new money'), has an affair with Myrtle, was acquaintances with Nick at university. Went to Yale University and excelled at American football. Tom holds racist and sexist beliefs and comes across as aggressive and intimidating at times.

Jordan Baker: Daisy's best friend and bridesmaid, famous golfer alleged to have cheated in a major golf tournament, strikes up a friendship/romantic connection with Nick.

Myrtle Wilson: Married to George Wilson who runs a garage, she is also Tom's mistress, aspires for a better life and is easily impressed by wealth and materialistic objects. She is killed by Gatsby's car driven by Daisy.

George Wilson: Married to Myrtle, runs a car garage in the bleak Valley of Ashes, portrayed as spiritless and worn-out by his dreary existence. He shoots dead Gatsby after being told that Gatsby was the driver of the car that hit and killed his wife Myrtle. He then kills himself.

Meyer Wolfsheim: Gatsby's friend and wealthy criminal associate, fixed the 1919 baseball World Series. Wolfsheim's character is based on the real-life gangster Arnold Rothstein.



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Themes	Context
<p>Locations/ Geography: East Egg vs West Egg, the Old World vs the New World (eg. Europe vs America) and the tensions and social rivalry symbolised by key locations throughout the novel. The Valley of Ashes: the connotations of death from the barren wasteland and lack of vitality emphasises the stark difference between the working-class Wilsons and upper-class Buchanans, and the subsequent lack of social mobility in 1920s America.</p> <p>Colour: Fitzgerald uses an array of colours throughout the novel, for example green symbolises hope, freshness, the New World of America, dreams and nature. The green light over the water is symbolic of Gatsby's love for Daisy however, it can also represent envy and superficial desire. Yellow/gold = car, gold, wealth as well as being the colour synonymous with the glitz and glam of the Jazz Age.</p> <p>The American Dream: The belief that America was a land of opportunity where anything is possible with hard work. This idea has been interpreted in various ways such as reinvention and self-improvement, as well as getting rich quickly. Gatsby buys into this materialistic version of the American Dream, as do other characters such as Myrtle.</p> <p>Commercialism and Advertisements: Doctor T.J. Eckleburg's advertising hoarding/ billboard: the omniscient god-like presence of advertising watching over everyone in the novel reflects the power of advertising in 1920s America. Furthermore, advertising can be interpreted as a form of self-marketing to create a certain version of oneself, such as projecting a certain image as Gatsby does in the novel ('the Gatsby Brand').</p> <p>Love and Relationships: Desire plays a big part in relationships and they are also presented as interchangeable and fickle. Relationships are also fractured and broken throughout the novel.</p> <p>Death: Both Gatsby and Myrtle are violently killed, Gatsby by Myrtle's husband and Myrtle by Tom's wife. Significantly, both had dreams of Daisy and Tom leaving each other, thus the author is using death to show how dreams are unrealistic and destructive.</p> <p>Vision: Vision is used symbolically throughout the novel such as the flawed vision of Gatsby who only sees the fantasy not the reality through his single vision focus on winning Daisy back. The image of Doctor T.J. Eckleburg is an advert for spectacles, as well as appearing to 'watch' over the land. Nick's vision/perception of events within the whole novel is how we as readers see all of the characters. The party-goer Owl Eyes, whom Nick meets in the library at Gatsby's party, also wears spectacles and is easily won over by the visual aesthetic appeal of Gatsby's mansion.</p>	<p>1920s America:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> The Jazz Age is classed as the decade following the First World War in America, when jazz music became popular with young people who wanted to enjoy themselves by dancing at parties. The term was created by Fitzgerald himself. The time period was also known as the Golden Twenties and the Roaring Twenties, which summed up the post-war desire for pleasure seeking and indulgence. The National Prohibition Act was passed in 1919 until 1933 in America and restricted the production and supply of alcohol. This inevitably led to a 'black-market' where people would illegally sell alcohol for inflated prices. Advertising and brand names were prominent in 1920s America – Fitzgerald presents America as a place where consumerism and materialism have taken the place of moral and spiritual values in the novel. Celebrity culture and Hollywood became a new focus during the 1920s – this is reflected in the novel through popular culture references such as movie magazines read by Myrtle. <p>Modernity and Technology: Technological developments such as electric lighting, telephones and cars were relatively new innovations in the 1920s. Consumerism grew rapidly in America in response to mass society demands, with an expansion of people living in cities and a growing population. This was due to immigration from Europe and the movement of African Americans from the South where families had been held in slavery until the Civil War. Billboards, advertising, commercialism, cars and the car garage in the novel are all symbols of how technology and modernity impacted on 1920s society. For example, Gatsby owns a Rolls-Royce, an elite British car brand whilst Ford also pioneered car manufacture in the US and were cheaply produced for the mass-market to enable most Americans to afford one.</p> <p>The Old World vs The New World: America's Declaration of Independence on July 4th, 1776 marks the breakaway from British Empire rule. The novel highlights the tensions between the new America and the traditions of Europe/ England; the references to English clothes, cars and universities show how the Old World is still held in high regard as a symbol of status and superiority. Gatsby's language, phrases and house décor also reflect the desire for an aristocratic air. There is a recurrent theme of the New World 'borrowing' from the Old World in various ways throughout the novel.</p> <p>The First World War: America joined WW1 in 1917 on the side of Great Britain, France and their allies against Germany and its allies. Many American soldiers were sent to Europe, and in the novel Nick and Gatsby were sent to fight in France. The army is used for social mobility by Gatsby, but it also shows the impact of war on soldiers' lives as Gatsby lost his chance with Daisy initially as a consequence of having to go away to war.</p>



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Key Vocabulary

Roaring Twenties/ The Jazz Age/ The Golden Age: Refers to the pleasure-seeking lifestyle of 1920s America after the tough times of the First World War. Jazz music provided a soundtrack to this new way of life, whilst many advancements in travel, communication, media and electric lighting also created a faster paced and more exciting world after the war.

The American Dream: The idea that individuals can achieve success/ what they want in life if they work hard enough, thus providing inspiration and hope for the future.

Prohibition: Between 1920-1933, the manufacture, transportation and sale of alcohol in America was prohibited by law. It wasn't illegal to drink alcohol, but the law made it difficult for people to access it.

The Lost Generation: The concept that the First World War had produced a 'Lost Generation' in society where individuals wander aimlessly and emotionally empty, with a sense of exhaustion and pointlessness.

Conspicuous Consumption: A term created by American sociologist Thorstein Veblen to describe how the rich outwardly display their wealth through possessions.

Foreshadowing: A hint or indication of what might happen later in the narrative.

Archetype: A character, action, situation or pattern that seems to represent a universal aspect or quality of human life.

The Old World and the New World: Competition between the new America and the traditions of Europe/ England, linking back to America's Declaration of Independence on July 4th, 1776 which marked the breakaway from British Empire rule. European clothes, cars and universities show how the Old World is still held in high regard as a symbol of status and superiority.

Self-marketing/ self-improvement: An idea closely linked to the American Dream whereby individuals can reinvent themselves by undertaking practical actions to present yourself how to wish to be perceived/ to enable upward social mobility.

Modernity: New advancements in society at the time and how these topics/ ideas were reflected in literature.

Frame narratives: A narrative technique where there is a 'story within a story' - ie. The main storyline is framed by shorter narratives to give depth to characters and plot.