

The Great Gatsby Study Guide

Preface:

1. What is *The Great Gatsby* not?
2. What do many readers not realize about *The Great Gatsby*?
3. Describe F. Scott Fitzgerald and his life.
4. How is every reader's response to a work determined?
5. According to Fitzgerald, how should authors write?
6. What is *The Great Gatsby* and other great fiction according to Matthew J. Bruccoli (the author of the preface)?
7. What name did Fitzgerald give to the 1920s?
8. What did WWI trigger in America? How is the 1920s described?
9. What is Gatsby's profession?
10. What is an essential aspect of *The Great Gatsby* and American-ness?
11. What does Gatsby not understand about money?
12. What is the character of Gatsby like?
13. Describe the structure of the novel. How is the novel told? How is the reader involved?
14. What are the major themes of the novel? (3)
15. Analyze the quote at the beginning of the novel by Thomas Parke D'Invilliers:
"Then wear the gold hat, if that will move her; / If you can bounce high, bounce for her too, / Till she cry 'Love, gold-hatted, high-bouncing lover, / I must have you!'"

Chapter 1:

1. What advice does the narrator's father give him?
2. What does it mean that "reserving judgment is a matter of infinite hope?" (6).
3. Why is it snobbish to say that "a sense of the fundamental decencies is parceled out unequally at birth?" (6). What does this mean?
4. How does the narrator describe Gatsby?
5. What preyed on Gatsby? Does the narrator like or dislike Gatsby? Explain with evidence from the text.
6. Describe the narrator and his role in the novel.
7. Why does the narrator indicate his family history?
8. Why would life be more successful if "looked at from a single window?" (9).
9. Where does Gatsby live?
10. Compare and contrast East and West Egg.
11. Where do Tom and Daisy live?
12. How does Nick (narrator) know Tom and Daisy?
13. Describe Tom.
14. Describe Daisy.
15. Describe Jordan Baker.
16. What does Jordan tell Nick about Tom?

17. Analyze the quote on page 21 beginning with “It’ll show you...” and ending with “to which she and Tom belonged” on page 23.
18. What does Daisy want to do with Nick and Jordan (23)?
19. Tom states: “She’s a nice girl...They oughtn’t to let her run around the country this way.” What does he mean by this? What does this show about his character? Who are “they?”
20. How do Jordan and Daisy know each other?
21. What advice does Tom give Nick? What could this foreshadow?
22. How does Nick view Tom and Daisy?
23. Analyze the following quote: “Their interest rather touched me and made them less remotely rich—nevertheless, I was confused and a little disgusted as I drove away. It seemed to me that the thing for Daisy to do was to rush out of the house, child in arms—but apparently there were no such intentions in her head. As for Tom the fact that he ‘had some woman in New York’ was really less surprising than that he had been depressed by a book” (Narrator 24-5).
24. Analyze the middle of page 25 to the end of the chapter. How is Gatsby described? What is he looking at?

Chapter 2:

1. Describe the Valley of Ashes and the sign of Doctor T.J. Eckleberg.
2. What does Tom assume (28)? What does this suggest about Tom and his life?
3. Where does Tom’s mistress live? Describe her.
4. How does Tom describe Mr. Wilson? What does this show about Tom’s character?
5. How does Myrtle’s attitude change when she changes clothes (35)? How does Myrtle address the boy to get ice? What does this show about Myrtle’s character?
6. What lie does Tom tell Myrtle and her sister Catherine?
7. On page 40, Myrtle describes her reasoning for the affair as “You can’t live forever.” What does she mean? What could this foreshadow? What does this imply about the attitude of the 1920s?
8. Myrtle lists things she’s “got to get” and then says “I got to write down a list so I won’t forget all the things I got to do.” What does this show about her character and why she is with Tom? What does this show about the culture of the 1920s? Do you think Fitzgerald is scornful of this? Explain.
9. What does Tom do to Myrtle at the end of the chapter? Why?

Chapter 3:

1. Describe Gatsby’s house and parties.
2. On page 47 Lucille states: “‘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.’” What does this show about the attitudes during the ‘20s? What does this show about Gatsby?
3. What rumors are there about Gatsby?

4. Analyze the following quote: “It was testimony to the romantic speculation he inspired that there were whispers about him from those who had found little that it was necessary to whisper about in this world” (Narrator 48).
5. Analyze the following quote: “Instead of rambling this party had preserved a dignified homogeneity, and assumed to itself the function of representing the staid nobility of the countryside—East Egg condescending to West Egg, and carefully on guard against its spectroscopic gayety” (Narrator 49).
6. On page 50, a guest is surprised that the books in Gatsby’s library are real. Why might he think they would be fake? What does this suggest about Gatsby and how his guests view him?
7. Analyze the following quote: “He smiled understandingly—much more than understandingly. It was one of those rare smiles with a quality of eternal reassurance in it, that you may come across four or five times in life. It faced—or seemed to face—the whole external world for an instant, and then concentrate on *you* with an irresistible prejudice in your favor. It understood you just so far as you wanted to be understood, believed in you as you would like to believe in yourself and assured you that it had precisely the impression of you that, at your best, you hoped to convey” (Narrator 52-3).
8. Describe Gatsby.
9. Analyze the following quote: “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” (Narrator 54).
10. Nick describes a scene of a woman, intoxicated, singing and crying on pages 55-56. Why would this be included in the novel? What does this suggest about the people at the party?
11. Nick describes that “Most of the women were now having fights with men said to be their husbands.” What does the wording suggest about the women and the husbands?
12. There is a car accident outside of Gatsby’s house. Why do the men get in an accident?
13. On pages 61-62, How does Nick describe NYC?
14. What does Nick realize about Jordan? How does he feel about her?
15. Analyze the following: “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. Dishonesty in a woman is a thing you never blame deeply—I was casually sorry, and then I forgot” (Narrator 63).
16. Jordan and Nick discuss being careless, and Jordan states she likes Nick because he is not. Do you agree that Nick is not careless? What other characters in the novel could be described as careless? Explain.
17. At the end of chapter three, Nick states that he is “one of the few honest people I have ever known” (64). Do you agree that Nick is honest? Why would this be included?

Chapter 4:

1. What is Gatsby’s rumored profession?

2. Why does Nick recount who came to Gatsby's party? What are the people like? What do they have in common?
3. Analyze the following: "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" (Narrator 68).
4. What does Gatsby tell Nick about himself? Is it truthful? Explain.
5. Analyze the following: "'So I thought you ought to know something about me. I didn't want you to think I was just some nobody. You see I usually find myself among strangers because I drift here and there trying to forget the sad thing that happened to me'" (Gatsby 71-2).
6. What and how does Gatsby get out of on page 72-3?
7. Analyze the following: "...always the city seen for the first time, in its first wild promise of all the mystery and the beauty in the world" (Narrator 73).
8. Gatsby is friends and possible business partners with Wolfsheimer who fixed the 1919 World Series. What does this suggest about how Gatsby got his money?
9. When Nick talks with Tom, Gatsby mysteriously leaves. Why would Gatsby do this?
10. Describe Daisy and Gatsby's history as told by Jordan.
11. Why did Gatsby buy his house?
12. What is Gatsby's plan? Why?
13. Nick thinks of the quote: "There are only the pursued, the pursuing, the busy, and the tired" (85). Why would this phrase be in Nick's head at this scene of the novel? Do you agree with the phrase? Do the characters in the novel represent this phrase? Explain.

Chapter 5:

1. What is Gatsby's house compared to?
2. What does Gatsby offer Nick (88)?
3. How does Gatsby act at the meeting? How does Daisy act?
4. Why would Fitzgerald have Gatsby knock over a clock when Gatsby first meets with Daisy? What could this symbolize?
5. Analyze the following: "Americans, while occasionally willing to be serfs, have always been obstinate about being peasantry" (Narrator 93).
6. How has Gatsby changed (94)?
7. How does Gatsby respond to Nick's question of what business he is in?
8. Once Gatsby is at his house, how does he act? What does this show about his feelings toward Daisy?
9. Analyze the following: "'You always have a green light that burns all night at the end of your dock...' 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 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” (Gatsby and Narrator 98).

10. What is the significance of the song played by Klipspringer? “In the morning, / In the evening, / Ain’t we got fun— / One thing’s sure and nothing’s surer / The rich get richer and poor get—children. / In the meantime, / In between time” (100-01).
11. Analyze the following: “There must have been moments even that afternoon when Daisy tumbled short of his dreams—not through her own faults 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 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...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” (Narrator 101).

Chapter 6:

1. Who is the real Gatsby? Explain in detail.
2. On page 108 Nick thinks: “As though they cared!” Describe the situation surrounding this and what he mean.
3. Analyze the following: “...but I felt an unpleasantness in the air, a pervading harshness that hadn’t been there before. Or perhaps I had merely grown used to accept West Egg as a world complete in itself, with its own standards and its own great figures, second to nothing because it had no consciousness of being so, and now I was looking at it again, through Daisy’s eyes. It is invariable saddening to look through new eyes at things, upon which you have expended you own powers of adjustment” (Narrator 110-11).
4. Analyze the following: “He wanted nothing less of Daisy than that she should go to Tom and say: ‘I never loved you.’ After she had obliterated three 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... ‘I wouldn’t ask too much of her... You can’t repeat the past.’ ‘Can’t repeat the past?... Why of course you can!... I’m going to fix everything just the way it was before. She’ll see...’ He had 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...” (Narrator, Nick, Gatsby 116-17).

Chapter 7:

1. What happens to all of Gatsby’s servants? Why?
2. Daisy, Jordan, and Daisy’s daughter always wear white. What could this symbolize?

3. Who is at Tom and Daisy's house? How does the weather create the mood? What is the mood?
4. Analyze the following: "'She's got an indiscreet voice.' 'Her voice is full of money.' 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..." (Nick, *Gatsby*, Narrator 127).
5. How does Tom describe Gatsby's car?
6. What does Wilson tell Tom?
7. Analyze the following: "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" (Narrator 131).
8. Who is watching Tom, Jordan, and Nick? Who does the person think Jordan is?
9. Where do the five go?
10. Describe the scene at the Plaza Hotel in detail. How do the five characters act? What is said?
11. Analyze the following: "I was thirty. Before me stretched the portentous menacing road of a new decade...Thirty—the promise of a decade of loneliness, a thinning list of men to know, a thinning brief-case of enthusiasm, thinning hair." (Narrator 143).
12. What happened at the accident? Describe in detail.
13. Nick described Daisy and Tom at the table as "conspiring together" (135). What could they be conspiring?
14. Do you think Daisy really loves or loved Gatsby? Do you think Daisy really loves or loved Tom? Do you think Gatsby really loves/loved Daisy? Do you think Tom really loves/loved Daisy? EXPLAIN.

Chapter 8:

1. What happened to Gatsby when he watched Daisy's house?
2. Why does Nick go to Gatsby's house in the early morning?
3. What advice does Nick give to Gatsby? What is Gatsby's response?
4. What does Gatsby tell Nick about himself?
5. Why does Gatsby fall for Daisy?
6. Analyze the following: "...Gatsby was overwhelmingly aware of the youth and mystery that wealth imprisons and preserves, of the freshness of many clothes and of Daisy, gleaming like silver, safe and proud above the hot struggles of the poor" (Narrator 157).
7. Analyze the following: "He was worried now—there was a quality of nervous despair in Daisy's letters. She didn't see why he couldn't come. She was feeling the pressures of the world outside and she wanted to see him and feel his presence beside her and be reassured that she was doing the right thing after all...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 forces—of love, of money, of unquestionable practicality—that was close at hand" (Narrator 158-9).

8. Analyze the following: “‘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...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...” (Nick 162).
9. What happens between Nick and Jordan?
10. Why does Mr. Wilson think Myrtle died?
11. How does Wilson view the Dr. T.J. Eckleberg sign?
12. Analyze the following: “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” (Narrator 169).
13. What happens to Gatsby and Wilson at the end of the chapter?

Chapter 9:

1. How was Gatsby’s case settled?
2. What side and with who does Nick find himself? Why?
3. What is Gatsby’s real name? Where is he from?
4. How does Nick feel for Gatsby?
5. What does Mr. Gatz show Nick? What does this information show about Gatsby?
6. Analyze the following: “That’s my middlewest—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. 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. Even when the East excited me most, even when I was most keenly away of its superiority to the bored, sprawling swollen towns beyond the 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. I see it as a night scene by El Greco: a hundred houses, at once conventional and grotesque, crouching under a sullen overhanging sky and a lusterless moon. In the foreground four solemn men in dress suits are walking along the sidewalk with a stretched on which lies a drunken woman in a white evening dress. Her hand, which dangles over the side, sparkles cold with jewels. Gravely the men turn in at the house—the wrong house. But no one knows the woman’s name and no one care” (Narrator 184-5).
7. What does Jordan tell Nick? How does Nick feel?
8. Analyze the following: “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..." (Narrator 187-8).
9. Who told Wilson that Gatsby owned the yellow car? Why?
10. "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 eludes us then, but that's no matter—tomorrow 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" (Narrator 189).