

Teacher's notes

The Great Gatsby

by F Scott Fitzgerald



SUMMARY

The novel is set in and around New York in the 1920s. Jay Gatsby was born James Gatz, the son of a poor farmer, although we do not find this out until half way through the novel. Five years before the novel opens, in 1922, he and Daisy Fay – the daughter of a wealthy family – were in love but they had to part. Since then, Daisy has married Tom Buchanan, a hard-drinking wealthy man who has had a string of affairs since his marriage. At the start of the novel, his current mistress is Myrtle Wilson, wife of George Wilson who owns the local gas station. Gatsby has become wealthy through shady business dealings with the sole intention of winning back Daisy. He believes that she is the key to perfect happiness. He moves to Long Island to be near Daisy and when they are eventually alone together he is faced with the possibility that his dream may be shattered. As Oscar Wilde said; 'There is only one thing worse than not getting what you want and that is getting what you want.' One day, Tom, Daisy, Gatsby, Nick Carraway – the narrator of the story – and Jordan Baker, a childhood friend of Daisy's, decide to drive to New York City. During the outing, Gatsby forces a confrontation with Tom and demands that Daisy returns to Long Island with him. Daisy agrees to drive Gatsby's car and, on the way home, accidentally runs over Myrtle outside the gas station. Tom tells Myrtle's husband George that Gatsby's car was involved in the accident, not realising that his wife was driving. George Wilson goes to Gatsby's house and kills Gatsby, although Gatsby is already dead inside, the dream of perfect happiness shattered.

ABOUT F. SCOTT FITZGERALD

Many of the events in the real life of F. Scott Fitzgerald parallel events in the fictional life of his creation, Gatsby. He was born in the mid-West of the USA but moved to the east. He served in the army during the First World War. He fell in love with a beautiful daughter of a wealthy family. He became very wealthy from his writing, although, unlike Gatsby, he constantly had money worries. Also unlike

Gatsby, he was a heavy drinker and died more prosaically than Gatsby, at the age of 44 of a heart attack perhaps brought on by his alcoholism.

BACKGROUND AND THEMES

It has often been said by critics that *The Great Gatsby* epitomised the age in which it was set – the 1920s in America, which is sometimes called 'The Jazz Age'. Indeed, it is said that Fitzgerald named the age himself. The period saw the beginnings of a new style of music which combined ragtime and blues. It was an exciting time, but its basis was money and the extravagances that money could buy. This emptiness was in sharp contrast to the purity of The American Dream which held that anyone could succeed if they strove to improve themselves and anyone could get wealthy through hard work and perseverance. Gatsby's father, at the end of the novel, reveals that the young Jimmy Gatz had written a schedule for self improvement, but by now the reader knows that he acquired his wealth by 'bootlegging' – the illegal sale of alcohol. For, despite the hard drinking which is the backdrop of the novel, the period Fitzgerald is writing about is also the era of Prohibition when, following the 18th Amendment to the Constitution which was passed on December 22, 1917, 'the manufacture, sale, or transportation of intoxicating liquors' was banned. Despite the prohibition, the trade in alcohol continued but fell into the hands of gangsters and people like Gatsby, who appeared respectable on the surface but were, in fact, criminals. This double standard of outward respectability and inward spiritual vacuum runs through the book.

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Communicative activities

The following teacher-led activities cover the same sections of text as the exercises at the back of the Reader and supplement those exercises. For supplementary exercises covering shorter sections of the book, see the photocopyable Student's Activities pages of this Factsheet. These are primarily for use with class readers but, with the exception of the discussion and pair/groupwork activities, can also be used by students working alone in a self-access centre.

ACTIVITIES BEFORE READING THE BOOK

Put students into groups to discuss this point:

Why do you think the novel is called *The Great Gatsby*? In what ways can a person be great? Think of at least 5 ways.

ACTIVITIES AFTER READING A SECTION

Chapters 1–2

- 1 Ask students to work in pairs. They role-play the telephone conversation between Tom and Myrtle while Nick is having dinner at the Buchanan's house.
- 2 Put students into small groups to discuss why Fitzgerald brings in the following points:
 - (a) the ash piles
 - (b) the eyes of Dr Eckleburg
- 3 Myrtle is poor and not very attractive. Put students into pairs. What attracts Tom to Myrtle?

Chapters 3–4

Ask students to work in pairs. They make two lists:

- 1 facts they know about Gatsby
 - 2 rumours about Gatsby
- Then ask students to work in bigger groups to compare their lists. Tell students to complete their final lists of facts and rumours because they will need them later.

Chapters 5–6

- 1 Ask students to find their lists of facts and rumours about Gatsby. Put students into pairs to update their list with new information from this section of the book. Then ask students to work in bigger groups to compare their new lists.
- 2 Ask students to do the following role plays:
 - (a) the scene between Gatsby and Daisy at Nick's house after Nick Gatsby to go back in and talk to her
 - (b) the first meeting between James Gatz and Dan Cody

Chapters 7–8

- 1 Myrtle watches the arrival of Tom, Nick and Jordan at the garage in Gatsby's car. Put students into pairs to describe this incident from Myrtle's point of view.
- 2 Michaelis witnessed the accident. Ask students to role-play the conversation between Michaelis and the first policeman on the scene.

Chapter 9–10

- 1 Wilson probably shot Gatsby without ever speaking to him. But ask students to imagine that Wilson and Gatsby had a conversation before the murder. Ask them to role-play the conversation.
- 2 Nick doesn't manage to get in touch with Daisy after Gatsby's murder. But ask students to imagine that he did. Ask them to role-play the telephone conversation.

ACTIVITIES AFTER READING THE BOOK

Put students into groups to discuss this point:

Now that you have read the novel, do you think the title is ironic? Why/Why not?

Think of at least one way in which Gatsby was great and one way in which the title could be ironic.

Glossary

It will be useful for your students to know the following new words. They are practised in the 'Before You Read' sections at the back of the book. (Definitions are based on those in the Longman Active Study Dictionary)

Chapters 1–2

bay (n) a place where a curve in the coast partly surrounds an area of sea
bond (n) an official document promising that a government or company will pay back money that it has borrowed, often with interest
butler (n) the most important male servant in a big house
civilized (adj) behaving politely and sensibly
divorced (adj) no longer married to someone
drugstore (n) a shop where you buy medicines or beauty products
engaged (adj) having agreed to get married
golf (n) a game in which you try to hit a small white ball into holes in the ground with a club
insist (v) to demand that something should be done
lawn (n) area of grass that is kept cut short
polo (n) a game played between two teams riding horses who hit a small ball with long wooden mallets
porch (n) an area on the front of a house where people can sit
scorn (v) to show that you think a person or idea is stupid or not worth considering

Chapters 3–4

astonished (adj) very surprised
champagne (n) a French white wine that has a lot of bubbles and is often drunk on special occasions
scandal (n) something that happens that people think is immoral or shocking

Chapter 5–6

bootlegger (n) a person who makes or sells illegal products



Student's activities

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Students can do these exercises alone or with one or more other students. Pair/group-only activities are marked.

Activities before reading the book

- Look through the book at the titles of the chapters. What kind of story do you think this will be?
- Read the Introduction. Answer these questions:
 - Where was Fitzgerald born?
 - What did he do in 1917?
 - When did he meet Zelda Sayre?
 - What was Zelda's background?
 - Why did Zelda break the engagement and why did she agree to marry Fitzgerald later?
 - How did the Fitzgeralds live?
 - What happened to Fitzgerald in the last years of his life?
 - How many well-known novels did he write?
 - Why is *The Great Gatsby* probably the most famous?
 - What was shocking to some Americans about the book?
- Read the summary of the story. Who are the main characters in the story? Discuss in pairs.

Activities while reading the book

CHAPTERS 1-2

Chapter 1

Explain these sentences from the chapter.

- So I decided to go East and learn the bond business.* What does Nick mean by East?
- I intended to find rooms in New York City.* What does the word *intended* tell you about this plan?
- I was lonely no longer.* Why?
- I had ... the comforting nearness of wealthy people.* Why *comforting*?
- This time they were going to stay...but I didn't believe it.* Why not?
- All the cars have one wheel painted black.* Is this true? Why does Nick say it?
- You will hear of them.* Why does Nick say this?
- I'm in training.* What is Miss Baker in training for?
- You make me feel uncivilized, Daisy.* In what way does Nick feel uncivilized?
- Civilization is breaking down!* Why does Tom believe this?
- Don't talk.* I want to hear what happens. What is Daisy talking about?
- I hope she'll be a fool.* Why does Daisy want her daughter to be a fool?
- She looked at me with a smile of satisfaction...* Why did Daisy smile in this way?
- Oh - you're Jordan Baker.* Why did Nick emphasise Miss Baker's first name?
- It seemed to me that the thing for Daisy to do in this situation was to rush out of the house.* Why should she do this?

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- Tom ... had been upset by a book.* Which book? How had he been upset?

Chapter 2

Who ...?

- looks down on the road from a big board?
- owns the garage?
- is Tom's mistress?
- buys a dog?
- goes to New York City?
- does Mrs Wilson invite to the apartment?
- doesn't drink at the party?
- tells Nick about her first meeting with Tom?
- has an argument about using Daisy's name?
- hits Myrtle

CHAPTERS 3-4

Chapter 3

These statements are true but how do you know? The information is not given directly in the story.

- Gatsby's parties made a lot of mess.
- The food for the parties was not prepared in Gatsby's house.
- Some of the guests didn't even know the house belonged to Gatsby.
- Single men often stood by the drinks table at Gatsby's parties.
- The two girls recognised Jordan.
- Jordan recognised one of the girls.
- Many rich people at the time had shelves with fake books on them.
- Nick fought in France during the Great War. Nick didn't recognise Gatsby.
- Nobody at the party knew the truth about Gatsby's past.
- Nick was impressed by fame.
- Nick has a poor opinion of women.
- Jordan was a bad driver.

Chapter 4

Find evidence in this chapter which suggests:

- Gatsby may be telling the truth about his past.
- Gatsby has powerful friends.
- Meyer Wolfsheim is a criminal.
- Gatsby didn't want to know Tom Buchanan.
- Daisy didn't get on with her parents.
- Daisy got over the soldier quite quickly or, perhaps, didn't get over him at all!
- Tom Buchanan's family were very rich.
- Daisy didn't want to get married.
- Gatsby could see Daisy's house from his.
- Gatsby is afraid to speak to Daisy directly.

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Student's activities

CHAPTERS 5-6

Chapter 5

Find the response to each sentence from this chapter.

- (a) Suppose we have a swim in the pool, old sport?
- (b) What day would suit you?
- (c) How about the day after tomorrow. at four o'clock?
- (d) You don't make much money, do you?
- (e) You're selling bonds aren't you. old sport?
- (f) You might pick up a nice bit of money.
- (g) Nobody's coming to tea. It's too late.
- (h) Why did I have to come alone?
- (i) We've met before.
- (j) This is a terrible mistake.
- (k) It took me just three years to earn the money that bought it.
- (l) Who's that?
- (m) I'm all out of practice.
- (i) Don't be silly; it's just two minutes to four.
- (ii) Don't talk so much, old sport. Play!.
- (iii) I thought you were left your money by your father.
- (iv) I want to get the grass cut.
- (v) It's too late.
- (vi) I've got my hands full.
- (vii) Not very much.
- (viii) That? That's Dan Cody, old sport.
- (ix) That's a secret.
- (x) Trying to.
- (xi) We haven't met for many years.
- (xii) What day would suit you?
- (xiii) You're just embarrassed, that's all.

Chapter 6

- 1 Put in order these events relating to Gatsby's relationship with Dan Cody.
 - (a) Cody asked Gatsby some questions.
 - (b) Cody gave Gatsby a job on his boat.
 - (c) Cody left Gatsby \$25,000 when he died.
 - (d) Dan Cody died.
 - (e) Ella Kay managed to take all the money, including Gatsby's.
 - (f) Ella Kaye came on board the boat in Boston.
 - (g) Gatsby sailed three times around America with Cody.
 - (h) He borrowed a rowboat and rowed out to Dan Cody's boat.
 - (i) He saw Dan Cody's boat on Lake Superior.
 - (j) He told Dan Cody that a wind might catch his boat and break it up.
 - (k) He told Dan Cody that his name was Jay Gatsby.
- 2 At Gatsby's house Tom was polite at first, then became angry. Why?
- 3 Who did Nick spend time with during Gatsby's party?

CHAPTERS 7-8

Chapter 7

Who says each of these things? Who do they say it about?

- (a) I hadn't seen him around and I was rather worried.
- (b) He's not really speaking into the telephone.
- (c) My little sweetheart!
- (d) I'm right across from you.

- (e) You look so cool.
- (f) Her voice is full of money.
- (g) I've found out some things about this man.
- (h) You sounded well enough on the phone.
- (i) I just found out something funny is going on.
- (j) Forget about the heat. You make it ten times worse by complaining about it.
- (k) That's a great expression of yours.
- (l) What kind of trouble are you trying to cause in my house?

Chapter 8

Complete these sentences with one suitable word in each space.

- (a) The main ... to the accident was Michaelis.
- (b) He said that Mrs. Wilson ... into the road.
- (c) The car that hit her slowed for a moment then ... around the next bend.
- (d) Tom stopped his car when he realised there had been a ...
- (e) He pushed through the ... and saw Myrtle's body on the worktable of the garage.
- (f) Tom found out that Myrtle had been ... by a big yellow car.
- (g) Tom told Wilson that he wasn't ... the yellow car.
- (h) Nick met Gatsby in Tom's ...
- (i) Gatsby asked Nick about the accident but didn't seem to care about the ... of the woman.
- (j) He told Nick that Daisy was driving the ...

CHAPTERS 9-10

Chapter 9

This chapter moves around a lot in time and place. Put these section headings in the correct order.

- (a) Afternoon - Gatsby's house
- (b) Daisy's marriage
- (c) Early evening: Gatsby's house.
- (d) Gatsby's war
- (e) How Gatsby met Daisy
- (f) 4 a.m. - Gatsby's house
- (g) Lunchtime - New York City
- (h) Morning - Gatsby's house
- (i) Night time in Wilson's garage
- (j) Wilson's movements.

Chapter 10

Why...?

- (a) didn't the story of Myrtle's affair come out.
- (b) did Nick become responsible for handling enquiries about Gatsby.
- (c) didn't Wolfsheim come down.
- (d) didn't Nick contact Gatsby's father.
- (e) did Gatsby's father feel a sense of pride in the house.
- (f) did Nick feel uncomfortable about Mr. Gatz's hopes for his son.
- (g) did Nick hang up on Klipspringer in disgust.

Activities after reading the book

Novels are often autobiographical or partly autobiographical. Look back at the notes you made on Fitzgerald's life before you read the book. Find at least five ways in which the character Gatsby is similar to the author Fitzgerald.

