



# The Great Gatsby

F. Scott Fitzgerald



## About the author

F. Scott Fitzgerald was a so-called 'Jazz Age' novelist and short-story writer who is considered to be one of the greatest American writers of the twentieth century. His most famous and respected novel, *The Great Gatsby* (1925), is one of the most penetrating descriptions of American life in the 1920s.

Born in St. Paul, Minnesota, on 24 September 1896, Francis Scott Key Fitzgerald was named after his ancestor Francis Scott Key, the writer of the American national anthem, *The Star-Spangled Banner*. Fitzgerald grew up in Minnesota and enrolled at Princeton University in 1913. Although he became a prominent figure in the literary life of the university, he struggled academically and never graduated. He joined the army in November 1917. While stationed in Montgomery, Alabama, he met and fell in love with Zelda Sayre, the daughter of an Alabama Supreme Court judge. Zelda agreed to marry him, but she broke off the engagement because of her overpowering desire for wealth and leisure. With the publication of *This Side of Paradise* (1920), Fitzgerald became a celebrity. He finally convinced Zelda to marry him. With his new wealth and fame, Fitzgerald fell into a lavish lifestyle of parties and decadence. At the same time, he was desperate to write something 'serious'. He moved to France with Zelda and their daughter Frances, in 1924, and he completed *The Great Gatsby*. In the 1930s, they tried to save their marriage unsuccessfully: Fitzgerald constantly had money worries and became alcoholic, and Zelda suffered a nervous breakdown. In 1937, however, he managed to acquire work as a script-writer in Hollywood. There he met and fell in love with Sheilah Graham, a Hollywood columnist. For the rest of his life, Fitzgerald lived quietly with Ms. Graham. Occasionally he went

East to visit Zelda and Frances. On December 21, 1940, Fitzgerald died of a heart attack at the age of forty-four, leaving his last novel *The Last Tycoon* unfinished.

Many of these events in the real life of Fitzgerald appear in *The Great Gatsby*, published in 1925. Like Fitzgerald, Nick Carraway is a thoughtful young man from Minnesota, educated at an Ivy League school, who moves to New York after the war. Also similar to Fitzgerald is Jay Gatsby, a sensitive young man who idolises wealth and luxury and who falls in love with the daughter of a wealthy family while stationed at a military camp in the South.

## Summary

The narrator, Nick Carraway, lives in the West Egg district of Long Island. His next-door neighbour is a mysterious man called Jay Gatsby. Nick is a young man from a prominent Midwestern family. In some sense, the novel is Nick's memoir, his unique view of the events of the summer of 1922.

**Chapter 1:** Soon after arriving in New York, Nick visits his relative, Daisy Buchanan, and her husband, Tom. The Buchanans live in the posh Long Island district of East Egg. Tom is obsessed with the preservation of class boundaries. At the Buchanans's, Nick meets Jordan Baker, a professional golf player. Hints are given about problems in Tom and Daisy's marriage: Tom has been having an affair. After visiting Tom and Daisy, Nick goes home to West Egg; there, he sees Gatsby gazing at a mysterious green light across the bay. Gatsby stretches his arms out towards the light, as though to catch and hold it.

**Chapter 2:** Tom Buchanan takes Nick into New York City, and on the way they stop at the garage owned by George Wilson. Wilson is the husband of Myrtle, with whom Tom has been having an affair. Tom tells Myrtle to join them later. In the city, they have a vulgar party in the flat that Tom keeps for the affair. The more she drinks, the more aggressive Myrtle becomes; she begins to taunt Tom about Daisy, and Tom strikes her and breaks her nose.

**Chapter 3:** Nick is invited to a party at Gatsby's mansion, where he runs into Jordan Baker. At the party, few people know Gatsby; even fewer are formally invited. During the party, Nick finally meets Gatsby: he has a remarkable smile, and uses 'old sport' as a term of endearment. Later, Gatsby speaks to Jordan Baker alone, and afterwards she tells Nick that she has learned something amazing. She cannot yet share it with him, however. Nick and Jordan become romantically involved.



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**Chapter 4:** Gatsby takes Nick to lunch. On the way Gatsby tells Nick that his parents died and left him a lot of money and that he went to war and later attended Oxford University. Nick is sceptical of the story. At lunch, Gatsby introduces Nick to his business associate, Meyer Wolfsheim. Later, Jordan Baker tells Nick the story of Gatsby: he had been in love with Daisy when they met in Louisville before the war. Gatsby's extravagant lifestyle and wild parties are simply an attempt to impress Daisy. Gatsby bought the house to be close to Daisy. This is where Nick fits in. Gatsby wants Nick to arrange a meeting between himself and Daisy.

**Chapter 5:** Nick invites Daisy to tea and tells her not to bring Tom. Gatsby comes over to inspect everything to make sure that the tea goes perfectly. After an initially awkward reunion, Gatsby and Daisy re-establish their connection. Gatsby has meticulously planned their meeting: he gives Daisy a carefully rehearsed tour of his mansion, and is desperate to exhibit his wealth and possessions. The love between Gatsby and Daisy is revived.

**Chapter 6:** Nick learns the true story of Gatsby's past. He was born James Gatz in North Dakota, but changed his name at the age of seventeen. The gold baron, Dan Cody, served as Gatsby's mentor until his death. Although Gatsby inherited nothing of Cody's fortune, Gatsby had created a persona and found something that he wanted to achieve at all costs. Gatsby has become wealthy through illegal activities with the sole intention of winning back Daisy. He believes that she is the key to perfect happiness.

While out horseback riding, Tom Buchanan happens upon Gatsby's mansion. There he meets both Nick and Gatsby. Tom looks down on the new rich like Gatsby as he is from an established upper class family. Despite this, Tom and Daisy come to the next party at Gatsby's. There, he is extremely rude and condescending towards Gatsby. Daisy also seems to be unhappy at the party which frightens Gatsby. He tells Nick that he will make things right with her and they will be able to go back to how they once were.

**Chapter 7:** Gatsby stops throwing his lavish parties. The only reason he threw such parties was the chance that Daisy (or someone who knew her) might attend. On a hot summer's day Daisy invites Gatsby, Nick and Jordan to lunch at her house. Tom figures out what is going on between Gatsby and Daisy and becomes very upset. They decided to drive into the city: there, at the Plaza

Hotel, Tom and Gatsby have a bitter confrontation. Tom denounces Gatsby for his low birth, and reveals to Daisy that Gatsby's fortune has been made through being a bootlegger (illegally selling alcohol during Prohibition). When Gatsby asks her to say that she never loved Tom, she can't say it. Tom scornfully sends her back to East Egg with Gatsby.

**Chapter 8:** When Nick, Jordan, and Tom drive through the valley of ashes, however, they discover that Gatsby's car has hit and killed Myrtle, Tom's lover. They rush back to Tom's house in East Egg, where Nick learns from Gatsby that Daisy was driving the car when it struck Myrtle, but that Gatsby intends to take the blame. Nick asks Gatsby to go back with him but Gatsby wants to wait outside the house to make sure that nothing happens to Daisy.

**Chapter 9:** Early the next morning Nick goes over to check up on Gatsby. He has been at Daisy's all night just watching to see if she was safe. He and Nick stay up talking about Gatsby's past. Nick has to leave Gatsby to get to work. After Nick leaves, Gatsby decides to go use his pool and relax. George Wilson was looking for Gatsby. Someone had told him that Gatsby was involved. George has leapt to the conclusion that the driver of the car that killed Myrtle must have been her lover. George, believing Gatsby to be at fault, decides to avenge her death. He finds Gatsby in the pool and shoots him dead. He then kills himself as well.

**Chapter 10:** After the murder, Daisy and Tom leave town without leaving any means of being contacted. Nick is left to organise Gatsby's funeral, but few people attend the funeral. Nick ends his relationship with Jordan and decides to move back to the Midwest. He has figured out that Tom was the one who told Wilson that it was Gatsby who ran over Myrtle. Nick thinks of Gatsby, and the role of the past in dreams of the future.

### Background and themes

**The Jazz Age (the Roaring Twenties):** The Jazz Age began soon after World War I and ended with the stock market crash of 1929. Prohibition, the ban on the sale and consumption of alcohol, made millionaires out of bootleggers. The period saw the beginning 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



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which held that anyone could succeed if they strove to improve themselves and anyone could get wealthy through hard work and perseverance.

**The American Dream:** The American Dream was originally about discovery and the pursuit of happiness. The 1920s, however, was an era of decayed social and moral values, when prosperity and material excess have corrupted this dream, especially on the East Coast. The unrestrained desire for money and pleasure surpassed more noble goals. In the novel, Nick thinks of the disintegration of the American Dream as Gatsby's dream crumbles.

**Class:** During the Roaring Twenties anyone from any social background could make a fortune, but there was a class structure. Fitzgerald uses a geographical motif. West Egg represents the newly self-made millionaires, East Egg the American aristocracy, i.e. families with old wealth. The East Egg crowd scorned the new rich in West Egg. Tom's attitude towards Gatsby is typical of this class. Ultimately this wide class gulf is the reason why Daisy chooses to stay with her husband, who is from the same class as she is.

**Irresponsibility:** Fitzgerald portrays how people could use their position to look down on others and live their lives not caring about other people. Tom and Daisy exemplify this stereotype. Tom cheats on Daisy, Daisy often goes over to Gatsby's, and they run away from the scene of Myrtle's death. Despite their respectable social status, their actions are, selfish and inconsiderate. They live their irresponsible lives thinking only of themselves because they think they are in a class above other people. They can use their wealth and position to escape whatever they choose.

## Discussion activities

### Chapter 1

#### Before reading

- Discuss:** Talk about the title.  
Start a whole-class discussion by asking the following questions: *Why do you think the novel is called The Great Gatsby? In what ways can a person be great?*
- Guess:** Have students look through the book at the titles of the chapters. Put students into pairs to guess and discuss what kind of story they think this will be.

#### After reading

- Role play:** Ask students to work in pairs. They role play the telephone conversation between Tom and Myrtle while Nick is having dinner at the Buchanans' house.

- Discuss:** Have students re-read page 8 where Daisy tells Nick what she said when her daughter was born. Ask them the following question: *Daisy says, 'I'm glad it's a girl. And I hope she'll be a fool – that's the best thing a girl can be in this world, a beautiful little fool.'* Why do you think she says that? Students could discuss in pairs or small groups. Ask them to share their opinions with the class later on.

### Chapter 2

#### Before reading

- Discuss:** Talk about the characters.  
Put students into small groups. Ask them to list the names of the characters from Chapter 1. Have them remind each other what each character is like. Later, ask some students to report to the class.

#### After reading

- Discuss:** Put students into small groups to discuss why Fitzgerald brings in the following points:
  - the piles of ash
  - the eyes of Dr Eckleburg

### Chapter 3

#### Before reading

- Discuss:** Talk about Gatsby.  
Have a whole class discussion on Gatsby: *In this chapter, Nick finally meets Mr. Gatsby. What kind of information on him have you got so far?*

#### After reading

- Discuss:** Talk about Gatsby.  
Ask students to work in pairs. They make two lists:
  - facts they know about Gatsby
  - 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 (activity 20).
- Discuss:** Put students into pairs or small groups. Elicit the answers to the following question: *Gatsby finally appears in a speaking role in this chapter. Why do you think Fitzgerald delays Gatsby's appearance?*
- Discuss:** Talk about Nick and Jordan.  
Remind students of a conversation between Nick and Jordan about driving a car. Have students work in pairs or small groups to discuss the following questions:
  - Why did they start this conversation?
  - Do you think Jordan is safe as long as she doesn't meet another bad driver?
  - What changed their relationship?
  - What is Nick going to do?



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## Chapter 4

### Before reading

- 11 **Guess:** Remind students that Gatsby spoke to Jordan alone at the party and that Jordan said, 'I've just heard the strangest thing.' Put students into small groups and have them guess what Gatsby told Jordan.

### After reading

- 12 **Check:** Put students back into the same group as before (activity 11). Ask students to recount what Jordan told Nick about Gatsby and Daisy. Have them check if they guessed anything correctly, and if they didn't, have them discuss how differently they guessed.
- 13 **Discuss:** Talk about Oxford.  
Put students into small groups. Prompt them as follows so that they can exchange their opinions:  
*When Nick was having lunch with Gatsby and Wolfsheim, Wolfsheim says, 'He went to Oxford College in England.' There are colleges at Oxford University, such as Trinity College and Balliol College, but there's no Oxford College. So what can you tell from Wolfsheim's remark?*

## Chapter 5

### Before reading

- 14 **Discuss:** Talk about the green light.  
Put students into small groups. First, have them recount the story about Gatsby and Daisy that we learned through Jordan. Then remind students of Nick's first sight of Gatsby. Have them discuss the following question: *What does the green light symbolize for Gatsby?*

### After reading

- 15 **Discuss:** Have students work in pairs to discuss the following questions: *It's the day that Daisy comes to tea. If you are in Gatsby's place, what would you say? What would you do? You've been waiting for this day for five years. How would you feel?*
- 16 **Role play project:** Put students into groups and have them act out the tea party at Nick's. Each group needs a project manager, script writers and actors. Have students discuss what they need to do for their performance. Make sure that everyone contributes to the discussion on what the characters should say to each other. When students are ready, ask them to perform in front of the class. Encourage them to talk about each group's performance afterwards.

## Chapter 6

### Before reading

- 17 **Guess:** The heading of this chapter is 'Gatsby's Party'. Lead a whole class discussion by asking the following questions: *What do you think will happen at this party at Gatsby's? There have been some scenes at Gatsby's parties in the story before. How different will this party be, do you think?*

### After reading

- 18 **Discuss:** Put students into pairs and have them talk about the following questions:
- *At Gatsby's house Tom was not very nice. Why?*
  - *Who did Nick spend time with during Gatsby's party?*
- 19 **Role play:** Ask students to do the following role plays:
- The scene between Gatsby and Daisy at Nick's house after Gatsby comes back in to talk to her.
  - The first meeting between James Gatz and Dan Cody.
- 20 **Group work:** Ask students to find their lists of facts and rumours about Gatsby from activity 8. Put students into small groups to update their list with new information. Then ask students to work in bigger groups to compare their new lists.

## Chapter 7

### Before reading

- 21 **Predict:** Ask students to imagine what will happen to the relationships between Gatsby and Daisy, Tom and Daisy, Tom and Myrtle, and Nick and Jordan.

### After reading

- 22 **Describe:** 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.
- 23 **Discuss:** Talk about 'old sport'.  
On page 55, Tom asks Gatsby about his expression 'old sport', but there's no answer from Gatsby in the story. Have students work in small groups to discuss why Gatsby calls everyone 'old sport' and why Tom is annoyed about it.

## Chapter 8

### Before reading

- 24 **Guess:** Have students read the last sentence of Chapter 7: 'So we drove on through the falling darkness towards death.' Have students guess whose death it could be.

### After reading

- 25 **Role play:** Michaelis witnessed the accident. Ask students to role play the conversation between Michaelis and the first policeman on the scene.
- 26 **Discuss:** Talk about the accident.  
Put students into pairs or small groups and have them recap the accident. Then, ask the following questions:
- Why do you think Myrtle rushed out into the road?
  - Can you change the facts a little so that the accident couldn't happen? For example, there was a full tank of gas in Gatsby's car. Try to think of as many different situations as possible.
  - How do you think Tom was feeling or thinking after he learned about the accident?



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## Chapter 9

### Before reading

**27 Discuss:** Talk about Daisy.

Start a whole-class conversation by asking the following question: *Daisy was driving when the car hit Myrtle, but Gatsby is taking the blame. Now she is inside the house, sitting with Tom at the table with food, and Gatsby is standing in the garden just to make sure that Daisy is safe. Does she really deserve this kind of love?*

### After reading

**28 Role play:** 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.

**29 Discuss:** Start a whole class discussion by asking the following question: *In what ways are George Wilson and Jay Gatsby similar or dissimilar?* Encourage students to remember what their lives were like. Making a list of the facts may help them.

## Chapter 10

### Before reading

**30 Pair work:** Write the following on the board: *Gatsby's beautiful yellow car, the eyes of Dr Eckleburg, and the swimming pool.* Put students into pairs and have students say how these things are connected to the story.

### After reading

**31 Describe:** Divide the class into small groups. Give each group the list of the characters: Nick, Gatsby, Tom, Daisy, Jordan, Myrtle, George, Wolfsheim, Klipspringer and Henry Gatz. Have groups think of as many adjectives as they can to describe each character. If time is limited, you could assign a certain number of characters to each group. Each group tells the rest of the class their adjectives, and the class try to work out who the character is.

**32 Discuss:** Have students work in small groups to discuss the following: *Is Tom the most responsible for Gatsby's death? Or is it Daisy, Myrtle or Gatsby himself? Give reasons why or why not each character is connected to the murder.*

**33 Role play:** 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.

**34 Write:** Put students into pairs. Ask them to compare Gatsby and Tom. Have them discuss how different they are first, and then students write a short paragraph about each character. When they are ready, ask some students to read out their writing. You could put up their writing on the wall as a classroom display, so that students can read other students' comparison.

**35 Discuss:** Put students into groups. Have them go back to the last paragraph on page 78. Ask them to think what the real message is in this metaphoric language.

### Extra activities

**36 Discuss:** Put students into groups to discuss the following questions: *What makes Gatsby 'great'? Now that you have read the novel, do you think the title is ironic? Why/Why not?* Encourage students to think of at least one way in which Gatsby was great and one way in which the title could be ironic.

**37 Discuss:** Talk about the weather. Fitzgerald uses the weather effectively to match the tone of the story. Have students work in groups to find the examples of this technique.

**38 Research:** Put students into small groups. Ask students to find some facts about F. Scott Fitzgerald. Students could use reference books and the Internet. Prompt them with the following questions:

- Where was Fitzgerald born?
- What is his family background?
- 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 did he die?
- How many well-known novels did he write?
- What are his other well-known novels?

When they are ready, organise a presentation day. They could make a presentation with any format, e.g. poster, Web site or presentation software. After each group's presentation, give the class an opportunity to have a question and answer session.

**39 Discuss:** Put students into small groups. Ask them to discuss how similar the character Gatsby is to the author Fitzgerald. Later, ask them to share their opinions with the rest of the class.

**40 Write:** Ask students to look at the Contents page again and to write new headings for each chapter. Students could work in pairs or alone if they prefer. Then let them compare their headings and discuss the choices.

**41 Write and discuss:** Have students write down the most important feelings that the book gives them. Then, they walk around the classroom to find two other people who share the same feelings. Together, students explain what it is that makes them feel that way. Ask some students to share their feelings and explanations with the rest of the class.

### Vocabulary activities

For the Word List and vocabulary activities, go to [www.penguinreaders.com](http://www.penguinreaders.com).