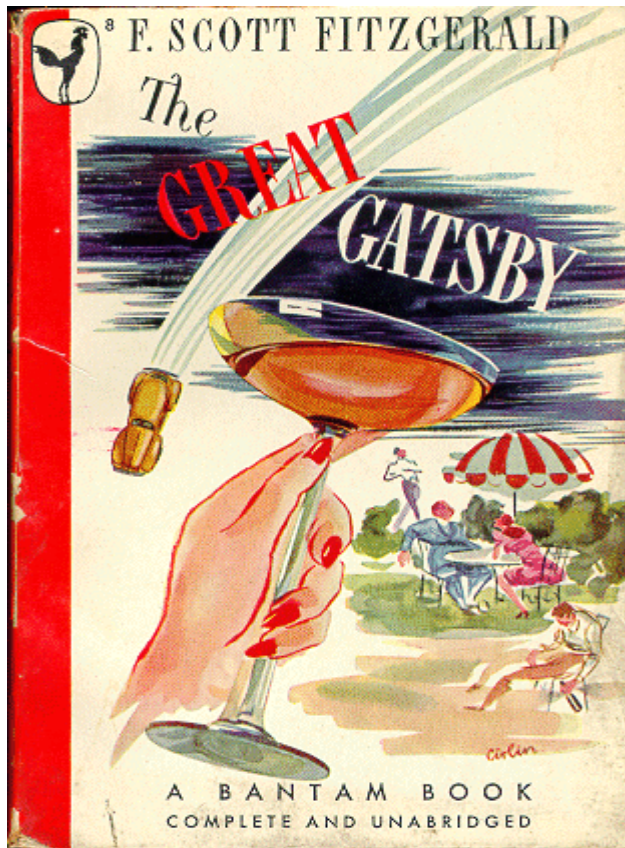
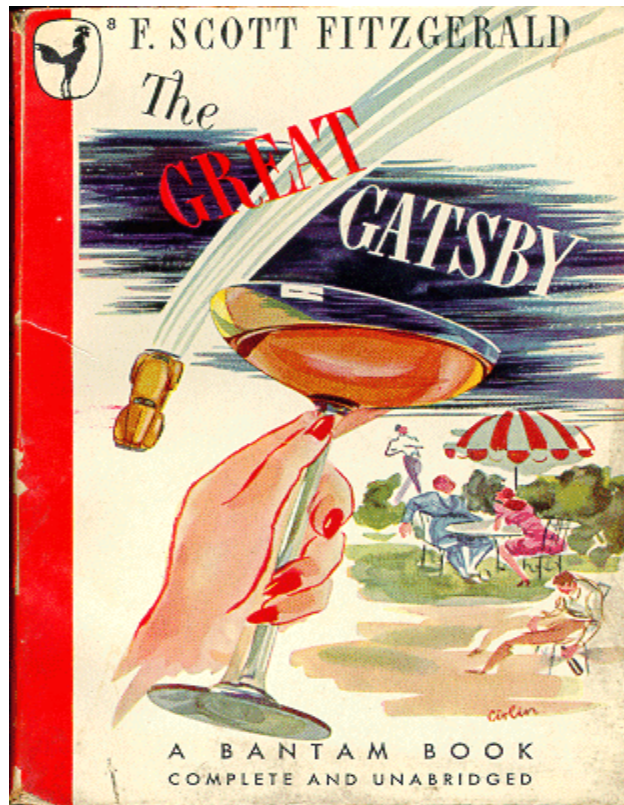


The Great Gatsby



by F. Scott Fitzgerald

Chapter One



Importance of chapter

Characterisation

Nick, Daisy, Tom, Gatsby

Setting

West Egg, East Egg, America

Theme

Code of Conduct
The Shallowness of the American Upper Classes

Structure / Narrative Technique

Importance of Chapter One

- Fitzgerald uses this chapter to set the scene of the novel.
- Made clear that the events in the novel have already taken place – the characters' fates are already decided.
- Most of the main characters are introduced.
- Nick refers to “Midas and Morgan and Maecenas” – all three renowned for their incredible wealth. Midas is a Greek myth. Fitzgerald hints that MYTH and REALITY will be mixed throughout the novel.

Characterisation - Nick

- Nick is initially portrayed as the perfect narrator – “inclined to reserve all judgements”
- He appears as tolerant, open minded, quiet and a good listener. Others tell him their secrets – “I was privy to the secret grief”, “Most of the confidences”, “intimate revelation”

Characterisation - Nick

- Discussion point –

Why do these qualities give Nick the potential to be a successful and effective narrator?

Characterisation - Nick

- Nick is clearly from a privileged background
 - “ Just remember that all the people in this world haven't had the advantages that you've had” and “My father snobbishly suggested and I snobbishly repeat”

Question: - Why does he need to be reminded of this? Is this a failing? Does this hint at a **COMPLEX CONTRADICTION WITHIN NICK'S CHARACTER?**

Characterisation – Nick

- However, there are clear contradictions apparent in Nick's character even from the very beginning of the novel -

“ And, after boasting this way of my tolerance, I came to the conclusion that it has a limit”

Characterisation - Nick

- Consider the following quotes describing Nick's reaction to Gatsby –

“ Only Gatsby, the man who gives his name to this book, was exempt from my reaction”

“ there was something gorgeous about him”

“ it was an extraordinary gift for hope, a romantic readiness such as I have never found in any other person”

Characterisation - Nick

- Discussion point –

Explain why these quotes might suggest that Nick is not going to be a reliable narrator after all.

Characterisation - Nick

- Clear hints that he can be intolerant and judgemental – he admits that he “**feigned sleep**” when people confided in him, he views Gatsby’s life with “**unaffected scorn**” and he’s “**disgusted**” by Tom and Daisy’s marriage.
- These comments make the reader less trusting of his narration because they suggest he is dishonest.

Characterisation - Nick

- Nick sometimes misreads situations which also makes his narration untrustworthy. He thinks Daisy has 'everything' she wants so he sees in her eyes the "absence of all desire" – but we later find out that she has had "a very bad time".

Characterisation – Nick

- At the beginning Nick is...
- Very traditional
- Highly moral
- Naïve
- Open-minded

Characterisation - Daisy



Characterisation - Daisy

- Think of the connotations of the name Daisy – a delicate white flower
- This image is continued later in the chapter with the description of Jordan and Daisy – “ they were both in white, and their dresses were rippling and fluttering”
- White has conventional connotations of purity and innocence

Characterisation - Daisy

- However, it is ironic given her name that Daisy's life is conducted in an entirely manufactured environment remote from the natural world

Characterisation - Daisy

- Discussion point –

By referring to the following quotes explain why Daisy's portrayal in the opening chapter is not particularly positive:

Characterisation - Daisy

- 'Do they miss me?' she cried ecstatically
- "Then she added irrelevantly: 'You ought to see the baby.'
- "She.....She....She....Her"
- 'All right,' said Daisy. 'What'll we plan?' She turned to me helplessly: 'What do people plan?'

Characterisation - Daisy

- There is also a clear suggestion that all is not well with her marriage -

“I know you didn’t mean to, but you did do it”

“That’s what I get for marrying a brute of a man, a great big hulking physical specimen of a -”

Characterisation - Daisy

- This is confirmed later in the chapter –

“Tom’s got some woman in New York....She might have the decency not to telephone him at dinner time. Don’t you think?”

- Daisy is clearly not a happy woman -

“Well, I’ve had a very bad time, Nick, and I’m pretty cynical about everything”

Characterisation - Daisy

- Discussion point –

Based on your reading of Chapter One
list the problems Daisy faces in her life

Characterisation - Daisy

- Given these problems and difficulties, Daisy's subsequent reluctance or inability to leave Tom is striking.
- This once again emphasises her passivity

Characterisation - Daisy

- Her defeatism is also strikingly apparent in the following quote -
“ All right,” I said, “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.”
- Daisy therefore clearly believes that society doesn’t value intelligence in women.
- Comment hints that although she ignores Tom’s affair she is upset by it – she believes she would be happier if she were a fool and didn’t realise he was cheating.

Characterisation - Tom



Characterisation - Tom

- Our initial impression of Tom is not positive.

Task

Read the following extract and list the negative aspects of Tom's character which emerge

Characterisation - Tom

“Now he was a sturdy straw-haired man of thirty, with a rather hard mouth and a supercilious manner. Two shining arrogant eyes had established dominance over his face and gave him the appearance of always leaning aggressively forward.....It was a body capable of enormous leverage – a cruel body”

Characterisation - Tom

- This negative impression is continued in the very next paragraph –

“....added to the impression of fractiousness he conveyed. There was a touch of paternal contempt in it, even towards people he liked – and there were men at New Haven who hated his guts”

Characterisation - Tom

- Discussion point –

Explain why the incident with Daisy's finger further contributes to our negative impression of Tom

Characterisation - Tom

- What does the following quote suggest about the character of Tom?

“Civilisation’s going to pieces,’ broke out Tom violently, Have you read *The Rise of the Coloured Empires*.... If we don’t look out the white race will be - will be utterly submerged. It’s all scientific stuff; it’s been proved”

Characterisation - Tom

- Descriptions of Tom focus on his physicality.
- His clothes can't hide his "cruel body", just as his sophistication and money can't hide his brutal nature.
- He silences any interruption by talking over people. In Chapter 1, he interrupts both Jordan and Daisy so he can make his point. Even though he is upper class and knows how to behave, he doesn't care.

Setting - East Egg



Setting - East Egg

Discussion point –

Analyse the following extract. What impression are we given of East Egg?
How does Fitzgerald achieve this?

“ Across the courtesy bay the white palaces of fashionable East Egg glittered along the water”

Setting - East Egg

- Why is the following a particularly successful example of descriptive writing in portraying the excesses of East Egg?

“Their house was even more elaborate than I expected, a cheerful red and white Georgian Colonial mansion, overlooking the bay. The lawn started at the beach and ran towards the front door for a quarter of a mile, jumping over sundials and brick walls and burning gardens - finally when it reached the house drifting up the side in bright vines as though from the momentum of its run. The front was broken by a line of french windows, glowing now with reflected gold”

Setting - East Egg

- What is suggested by the negative description of Tom that follows this elaborate description?

Setting - East Egg

- What is suggested by the following remark of Jordan's –

“You live in West Egg,” she remarked contemptuously.”

Setting – East Egg is...

- Conservative and aristocratic but not as refined as it appears e.g. Tom is “aggressive” and “hulking”, where typically we might expect the upper classes to be polite and well-mannered.
- Fashionable, but fake. Its appealing surface hides unattractive realities – the Buchanan marriage and Daisy’s looks and wealth mask a bored, cynical and empty interior.

Setting - West Egg



Setting - West Egg

Discussion point

What do the following quotes suggest about West Egg?

“the less fashionable of the two”

“the one on my right was a colossal affair”

“it was a factual imitation”

“spanking new under a thin beard of raw ivy”

Setting – West Egg is....

- Home to the nouveau riche who have made their own fortunes rather than inheriting money.
- Most of the residents don't have aristocratic breeding or wealthy family connections – Nick is an exception.
- Characterised by extravagant displays of wealth that are perceived to be in poor taste – e.g. Gatsby's mansion.

Setting - East Egg & West Egg

- East Egg and West Egg are both homes to great wealth
- They are, however, opposites in terms of values:-

East Egg – sees itself as a place of breeding, taste, aristocracy and leisure

West Egg - viewed by East Egg as ostentatious, garish and home to the flashy

manners of the new rich

Setting - America

- It is clear from the divisions between East Egg and West Egg as well as Tom's racist remarks that Gatsby's 1920s America is in reality a society divided by race, class and gender

Theme - Appearance versus Reality

- Briefly list examples from the opening chapter.

Theme – The Shallowness of the American Upper Classes

- “Do they miss me?’ she cried ecstatically. “The whole town is desolate. All the cars have the left rear wheel painted black as a mourning wreath, and there’s a persistent wail all night along the north shore.’
- “She....She...She....Her”

Theme - The Shallowness of the American Upper Classes

- “We ought to plan something”, yawned Miss Baker, sitting down at the table as if she were getting into bed.”
- “All right,’ said Daisy. ‘What’ll we plan?’ She turned to me helplessly: ‘What do people plan?’
- Both examples suggest that the lives of rich Americans are lacking in purpose and direction
- **Task** - Circle the phrases which reflect this

Theme - The Shallowness of the American Upper Classes

- “their impersonal eyes” - does this suggest that their eyes are deadened by wealth?
- “the absence of all desire” - there is a clear suggestion that they have all they need and everything that they could possibly want

Theme - The Shallowness of the American Upper Classes

- Beneath the surface, everyone is bored because they have no purpose – Daisy seems to realise this when she asks what they should do “this afternoon... and the day after that, and the next thirty years”.

Theme - The Shallowness of The American Upper Classes

Discussion

Think about the characters we have met in this chapter. Why is it clear from characterisation alone that Fitzgerald disapproves of the Upper classes?

Theme - The Shallowness of the American Upper Classes

- In what way does the following description of Jordan contribute to this impression?

“ Its pleasing contemptuous expression had looked out at me I had heard some story of her too, a critical unpleasant story, but what it was I had forgotten long ago.”

Structure

Discussion

In what way does the opening chapter create an air of mystery around the character of Gatsby?

Structure / Major incident of chapter

- **Task**

Carefully reread the final paragraph of Chapter One. How does Fitzgerald again create an aura of mystery around Gatsby?

Structure / Major Incident of Chapter

- Chapter One ends with Nick's first sighting of Gatsby – a lonely figure reaching out towards a “single green light”. Nick doesn't know what the light represents to Gatsby which creates mystery.
- Gatsby's obsessive focus is striking. He is so desperate with longing that he is “trembling”.

Structure / Major Incident of Chapter

- Why important?
- The first thing we learn about Gatsby is his powerful desire for a mysterious aim. This suggests this is the most important aspect of his character.
- In contrast, the residents of East egg have an obvious lack of motivation or drive.

Symbolism

- Green Light

- Symbol of hope.
- Green light is a sign of Daisy's presence.
- Actual – it is a visible object bear where Daisy lives.
- Significance – Gatsby hasn't seen Daisy in a number of years and this is the closest he can get to her.
- He doesn't think she is like a green light, but he lets the green light represent Daisy.
GREEN LIGHT THEREFORE BECOMES A
SYMBOL FOR DAISY.

Symbolism – Colour White

- White traditionally associated with purity and virginity.
- Within the novel, the meaning of the colour white changes throughout the novel, eventually suggesting that white is used to cover up characters' darker traits.

Symbolism – Colour White

- Nick's first arrival at the Buchanans' house is characterised by the whiteness of the surroundings.
- Ceiling – “frosted wedding cake”
- Daisy and Jordan are dressed in white.
- Nick imagines that they've just taken a “short flight round the room” which makes them sound like angels.
- White seems to be used as a whitewash to hide things people don't want society to see (LINK IN WITH APPEARANCE VERSUS REALITY).