

The Great Gatsby: Discussion Questions

Directions: Read the novel closely and analyze its characters and the ideas suggested by the text. What do you think Fitzgerald wants his readers to understand and feel about this time in America, about social class and character, and about the American Dream?

Use your annotations and cite specific evidence from the text to support your conclusions. Take notes during your discussion: you can use your notes to write your essay.

Questions About the Characters

1. What kind of person is **Nick Carraway**? Is he different from the others? What is his background, and what social class is he from? Is he careless also? Is he honest? Why does he admire Jay Gatsby? What does he feel for Jordan Baker? In the beginning of the story, he claims that he is not judgmental—is he? Of what? What does he think of Daisy, and of Tom?
2. What kind of person is **Daisy Buchanan**? What is her background, and what social class is she from? Is she as careless as her husband? Is she heroic in any way? Is she admirable? Is she a victim and/or a victimizer? Does she love Tom? Why did she marry him? Does she love Gatsby? Why does she cry at the sight of Gatsby's shirts? What does she think of Gatsby's parties, and why?
3. What kind of person is **Tom Buchanan**? What is his background, and what social class is he from? In what way is he a "brute"? Does he love Daisy? Why did he marry her—did he love her once? Does he love Myrtle, or is it something else? How does he compare to Jay Gatsby?
4. What kind of person is **Jay Gatsby**? What is his background, and what social class is he from? How does his social class mark his personality? How did he become wealthy? How has wealth changed him?

Is he essentially honest? Is he heroic in any way? Is he admirable? Why does Nick say that Gatsby is better than the whole bunch of them—and who is he better than and why? Why does Nick say that Gatsby "turned out all right in the end"—how so?

What is the history of his relationship with Daisy? Does he love Daisy—or is it something else?

Nick reveals that James Gatz created Jay Gatsby "from the Platonic conception of himself." What was it that dissatisfied James such that he had to create a new persona? Did this new persona solve his problems—why or why not?

5. What kind of person is **Jordan Baker**? What is her background, and what social class is she from? What does she feel toward Nick, and why? What motivates her? Is she more like Nick or Daisy—or even Tom?

6. What kind of person is **Myrtle Wilson**? What is her background and social class? What does she feel toward her husband, and why? Does she love Tom? What does her behavior show about her? What kind of American experience might she represent—and is that similar to what Jay Gatsby represents?

Questions About Visions of America

1. Does Gatsby achieve the American Dream? If yes, when exactly can he say that he reaches it? If no, what prevents him from truly achieving it?
2. What criticisms of American culture during the Jazz Age does Fitzgerald seem to be making, and how?

Questions About Wealth

1. In *The Great Gatsby*, what role does wealth play in people's life expectations? Could Gatsby have achieved his life-altering childhood goals without wealth? That is, did he really want wealth, or did he want what he thought wealth could get him?
2. Does money bring happiness in *The Great Gatsby*, destroy happiness, or have no effect?
3. What does Gatsby mean when he says that Daisy's voice is "full of money?" Does he mean this negatively? Why does Nick agree with him? Does this comment say more about Daisy or Gatsby?

Questions About Memory and The Past

1. Nick tells Gatsby that "you can't repeat the past," yet chapters later he insists we are constantly "borne back" into it. Did he change his mind, or are these two different ways of saying the same thing?
2. Is the past remembered realistically? Jay Gatsby and Daisy Buchanan think nostalgically about the past, but are they ever able to confront reality?
3. Is Gatsby driven by his memory of the past or his dream for the future? Is there a difference?
4. What are Nick's visions of his own future?
5. Are people governed by choice or by fate in *The Great Gatsby*?

Questions About the Novel's Significance

1. The novel has a reputation as "the quintessential American novel." Why do you think this is--in what way? Do you agree with this, and why or why not?
2. The novel also is praised for Fitzgerald's narrative, for the beauty of its language. What are some of your favorite passages, and why are they so rich and expressive? What sense and /or feeling do they convey?