**The Great Gatsby Essential Questions**

*Use these questions to guide your analysis of F. Scott’s Fitzgerald’s The Great Gatsby.*

*Note: page numbers refer to Wordsworth Classics - ISBN: 9781853260414*

**A: Setting**

1. How does Fitzgerald set up the 1920’s in the beginning of the text?
2. What contradictions do you see arising in the 1920s? Identify contradictions present in 1920s society and evaluate how these contradictions are revealed in the opening chapter of the novel.
3. What specific settings are mentioned in chapters 1 and 2? What diction is used to describe them? What does this choice of diction convey about each?
4. What is the valley of ashes? How is it described? What might it represent? Who lives there?
5. What evidence of the socio-historical context do you see in chapter 4? How do these references help to develop theme?
6. How is the impact of WWI explored in this novel?
7. How is the Jazz Age reflected throughout the novel?

**B: Text Analysis & Key Quotations**

1. What do you think the significance is of Daisy’s question: “Gatsby? Demanded Daisy. ‘What Gatsby?” (pg. 9)
2. Nick states: “I am one of the few honest people that I have ever known” (p. 39 ).” Discuss the significance of this statement in light of his role as the narrator.
3. Who does Gatsby call, “old sport?” (pg. 46)
4. Examine the scene where Daisy admires Gatsby’s shirts from England and begin to cry. Why is this significant? What does it suggest about Daisy’s relationship with Gatsby?
5. Consider the use of ellipses on page 60. Is this phone call significant?
6. Daisy describes Gatsby as “the advertisement of the man” (pg. 76). Why is this significant? What does it suggest about Daisy’s relationship with Gatsby?
7. Discuss the inclusion of the schedule on page 110.
8. Gatsby describes Daisy by stating: “Her voice is full of money” (p. 76). What does he mean by this?
9. Tom calls Gatsby - “Mr Nobody from Nowhere” (p. 83). Discuss the significance of this quote. Consider their characterization, sense of identity, and class relations in 1920’s America.
10. Discuss the author’s use of foreshadowing to develop the tension in chapters 8 & 9.
11. How far do you agree with this statement: ‘A weakness of the novel is that there are no truly likeable characters’? Discuss your view with evidence from the text.
12. Identify three significant words or phrases that are repeated throughout the novel. Describe how their meaning alters throughout the text.
13. What is the significance of the title, *The Great Gatsby*?
14. Discuss the significance of phone calls throughout the novel. How does Fitzgerald use phone calls to add to the text?

**C: Symbols & Motifs**

1. What is Fitzgerald communicating through his use of cars throughout chapter 3?
2. Analyze how Fitzgerald develops the symbolic meaning of cars in the novel.
   1. Resource: <https://blog.consumerguide.com/the-cars-of-the-great-gatsby/>
3. What does the green light symbolize? Explain.
   1. Resource: <https://www.nytimes.com/2008/02/17/education/17gatsby.html>
4. Discuss the symbol of ‘America West’. How can we connect Gatsby as dreamer to this idea of the romance of the American West? What is ironic about Gatsby’s adventure in the West?
5. What symbols does Fitzgerald employ in these final chapters and to what effect?
6. What is the significance of ‘new beginnings’ in the novel?
7. To what extent does Jay Gatsby represent America?
8. Discuss the use of light throughout the novel.
9. What role does photography/film play in the novel?
10. Discuss the significance of ‘newness’, particularly of new money and new identity, throughout the novel.

**D: Characters**

1. What words are used to describe the key characters? Fill in the table below. Write a brief response comparing and contrasting how Nick, Daisy, Tom, and Jordan are characterized versus how Gatsby is characterized.

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| Daisy | Tom | Jordan |
|  |  |  |
| Nick | Gatsby | Pick a Character: |
|  |  |  |

1. Are there details from the reading that support/challenge Nick’s role as a narrator? As one who judges? Continue to track evidence of his reliability as a narrator and of the limitations of a first-person narrator.

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| Reliability | Limitations of first-person narrator |
|  |  |

1. Is Nick justified in making the judgments that he does about the people around him?
2. Explain Fitzgerald’s use of contradictions to develop Gatsby’s character in the first two chapters. Be sure to include both how and why he does so.
3. Nick begins by saying that Gatsby possessed “an extraordinary gift for hope.” (p. 3) Where do you see evidence of this “gift for hope” in the descriptions of Gatsby in chapter 3?
4. Is Nick’s positive characterization of Gatsby as one in a million accurate? What are the many possible negative interpretations of Gatsby based on what you read in the text?
5. What does the story that Jordan Baker relates to Nick tell us about Gatsby, Daisy, and Tom?
6. Discuss the diction used to describe the meeting of Gatsby and Daisy in Chapter 5 & 6. What does it suggest about their characters? Their relationship?
7. How does Fitzgerald describe Dan Cody? How do Fitzgerald’s descriptions reflect the “romanticizing” of the American West?
8. Keeping in mind Fitzgerald’s decision to depict Gatsby as an extraordinarily hopeful character, go back to chapter 5. How do you see this characteristic play out in *The Great Gatsby* during the meeting with Daisy at Nick’s house?
9. Throughout the novel, Gatsby’s character has been described as contradictory: a man with an “extraordinary gift for hope” or a man about whom the rumors are true. We see two sides of Gatsby in Chapter 7. Discuss the crucial points of the chapter that show these sides.
10. As we leave Gatsby standing outside the Buchanan house, do you see him as Nick does, as a figure of romantic hope, or as most of society does, as a shady character? Explain your thinking with precise evidence.
11. What does chapter 7 reveal about Gatsby, Daisy, and the supporting characters? In particular, what does the accident outside the Wilsons’ garage reveal about each of the characters?

**E: Key Themes**

1. Wealth and Social Class: How far can one go to break boundaries that separate the classes? How far should one go to break boundaries that separate the classes?
2. Memory and the Past: Is “the past” a boundary we cannot overcome (as Nick rationally argues, “you can’t repeat the past” on page ) or is the future a boundary we cannot overcome (as Nick notes, we are “ceaselessly born back into the past” as the “future recedes before us”)?
3. Human Nature: What is Fitzgerald suggesting about human nature through The Great Gatsby? About America in the 1920s?
4. Love through the Ages: Does Fitzgerald intend for us to believe that Gatsby truly loves Daisy?
5. What is Fitzgerald’s message in the final paragraph of the chapter? Is it ultimately hopeful or hopeless?
6. How do Nick and Gatsby personify the tension between reality and illusion? Is Gatsby ultimately punished for his outlook on life?