

# Jay Gatsby

Jay Gatsby is a complex character: that is, he is defined by a range of conflicting characteristics which combine to make the whole of his personality.

1. Look at the list of descriptions below and complete spider charts for each one giving textual references and chapter numbers to show which passages you might refer to in order to prove the idea.

- Gatsby as 'outsider'
- Gatsby as 'lonely'
- Gatsby as 'cynic'
- Gatsby as 'idealist'
- Gatsby as 'liar'
- Gatsby as 'intelligent'
- Gatsby as 'sensitive'
- Gatsby as 'hypocrite'
- Gatsby as 'child'
- Gatsby as 'suicidal'
- Gatsby as 'optimist'
- Gatsby as 'nihilist' – one who rejects the value and meaning of life & people
- Gatsby as 'fatalist' – one who sees life as predetermined and themselves powerless
- Gatsby as 'redeemed' – saved from his own weakness

# Gatsby's interactions

(Enlarge to A3)

1. Consider all of the interaction that Gatsby has with other characters. For each character, complete the table below:

<b>Gatsby's Interactions</b>	
Character's name	
Relationship to Gatsby	
Gatsby's attitude to them	
What does the character symbolise / represent in the narrative?	
What does this interaction show us about Gatsby in the wider novel?	

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## Characters and Gatsby's world

(Enlarge to A3)

Some critics have suggested that Fitzgerald uses the characters in the novel to 'represent' both **positive** and **negative** aspects of Gatsby's world.

2. Group the characters according to whether they are representations of 'positive' or 'negative' aspects of Gatsby's world, and then try to determine what they represent. Use the table below to structure your ideas:

Characters as Representations of Gatsby's World			
Character's name	Positive	Negative	What does the character represent?

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## Character continued

3. Now consider whether the characters that you have grouped can be as clearly defined as wholly 'positive' or 'negative'. Which ones are more complex and why is this? Think about Gatsby's own complexity.
4. Think about the novel as a whole. How do Gatsby's interactions throughout the novel reflect on Gatsby as a character?
5. What does Gatsby learn from his interactions with other characters in the novel?
6. Think about the characters we do not see in the novel.
  - Who are they?
  - What do they have in common?
  - Why does Fitzgerald choose not to give them a voice in the novel?
  - What function do these characters serve as opposed to the ones who appear in the novel?
7. Consider Gatsby's death. Is it a fitting end for a character of Gatsby's stature?

***Use textual detail to support your ideas.***

## Characters & oppositions

The characters in *The Great Gatsby* essentially work as opposites to one another. This is true when we consider the four principal characters. Indeed, the oppositions that define the characters can also be split along the lines of gender such that we see the characters representing opposites of one another. As the novel progresses, this becomes much more complex. In turn, we come to see that there is a duality of characterisation at work in the novel. The immediate dramatic purpose of the novel's characterisation is clear: Fitzgerald establishes these oppositions to enhance the novel's drama, and the final reversal as it concludes. Equally, they tell us something of the society in which the characters exist.

- Complete the table below for the four main characters in *The Great Gatsby* to identify their immediate oppositions. Provide textual evidence to support your ideas.

Jay Gatsby		Nick Carraway	
Characteristic	Evidence	Characteristic	Evidence
Tom Buchanan		Daisy Buchanan	
Characteristic	Evidence	Characteristic	Evidence

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## Character and society

(Enlarge to A3)

Many of the characters in the novel exhibit attitudes or behaviours that either conform to, defy, or affirm a particular perspective on American society during the Jazz Age. In a novel that is centrally concerned with propriety and its observance, or otherwise, it is inevitable that characters will come to embody elements of that society’s values, prejudices and virtues.

- For each of the major characters in the novel, complete a table like the one below to show how their dialogue and actions demonstrate **conformity** or **defiance** of social propriety.

Character and society	
Character’s name	
Dialogue / Behaviour	
Conformity? Defiance?	
Textual evidence	
Explanation	

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## Character and conflict

(Enlarge to A3)

Conflict is central to *The Great Gatsby*, and the conflicts between the characters essentially drive the plot of the novel. More significantly, it is conflict between the ideals, values and aspirations of the different characters that drive the central axis of the text.

- Complete the chart below to show which characters are in conflict at different points in the novel, and give an explanation of what the conflict is. It might be about something physical, ideological or moral, for example.

Character and conflict			
Character's name	In conflict with ...	Description of conflict	Textual evidence

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## Character and allegiances

(Enlarge to A3)

Conversely, loyalty is another central part of the narrative. In a novel that is arguably about codes of American high society, the allegiances that the different male characters make are important. Remember, however, that some of the allegiances that the different characters make, vary in their legitimacy.

- ➔ Complete the chart below to show which characters form allegiances. Give reasons for the allegiances and explain whether or not they are genuine.

Allegiances			
Allegiance	Purpose of allegiance	Genuine?	Textual evidence



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## Character and hierarchy

(Enlarge to A3)

In a society like 1920s New York - the period of the novel - the idea of hierarchy was an important tool for imposing order on society. In *The Great Gatsby* we see different types of hierarchy: financial, nepotistic, age, and gender. All of these things determine the levels of power and influence that each character possesses at different points, and in various exchanges, throughout the novel.

- For each of the different types of hierarchy that are at work in West Egg, complete a chart like the one below to show how power is distributed.

Hierarchy of _____ in <i>The Great Gatsby</i>		
<b>[Most powerful character(s)]</b>		
<b>[Subordinate characters]</b>	<b>[Subordinate characters]</b>	<b>[Subordinate characters]</b>


## Character and objectification

(Enlarge to A3)

One of the most interesting elements of *The Great Gatsby* is the way that characters are valued. Most obviously, this objectification is driven by the male characters. In turn, we can discern an important tension in the novel surrounding both who is objectified, and for what reasons.

➔ Complete the chart below to show who is objectified, and by whom, in the novel. Provide textual evidence to support your answer.

Objectification			
Objectified	By whom?	Reason?	Textual evidence

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