

***The Great Gatsby* by F. Scott Fitzgerald**



Suggested Tasks & Activities – Chapter-by-chapter

Chapter One

- Work in pairs to select, prepare and rehearse readings of short extracts from the novel's opening. Focus on Nick Carraway's **self-conscious narrative style** as a **writer**, the **contradictions** revealed by his narration and, aspects of his **character**.
- Look carefully at the section from Nick's entrance: 'The only completely stationary object ...' to Tom and Jordan's exit: '... strolled back into the library ...'. Work in groups of four to break this down into a number of smaller sections. To help decide on the smaller sections, focus on **tensions**, and **exits and entrances** within the group. Once agreed, decide on a **title** for each small section. Then, prepare a series of still images for each of the titled sections. Focus on **characterisation** and **character relationships**, as well as **mood and atmosphere**. Select a quote from the text to support each still image.
- Work in pairs. Prepare a list of twenty questions for use in determining if other people have read the chapter carefully. Include some "thought" questions - "How?", "Why". Test another pair.
- Work in groups of three to prepare a collage of the **settings** that are described in the first chapter. Focus on Nick's house, and Gatsby's and the Buchanans' mansions. Support your presentations with quotes from the text.

Chapter Two

- Imagine that you were one of the characters who attended the party in New York. Using your mobile phone or a Dictaphone, record a spoken diary of the evening's events. Describe what happened and your feelings about the evening. Swap recordings with a partner and compare the feelings and attitudes described. With your partner, rewrite the party sequence using the feelings and attitudes that you recorded. How is your new version different? Which do you think is most interesting and effective?

- Look again at the description of The Valley of the Ashes on page 26. Annotate the description trying to identify words and phrases that Fitzgerald uses to create a sense of atmosphere. Using the Internet or your school library, find a copy of *The Wasteland* by TS Eliot, a poem written in 1922, the same year in which the novel is set. Looking closely at *The Wasteland*, identify a passage that is concerned with landscape and annotate it trying to identify the ways that Eliot creates atmosphere. Critics have suggested a link between bleak landscape of *The Wasteland* and The Valley of the Ashes. Why do you think Fitzgerald might have wanted to establish such a link?

- Look back at the description of Dr Eckelburg's advertising hoarding. Using Photoshop, and from the description in the novel, create your own interpretation of what you think it looks like. Annotate your version explaining what you have done to make it an effective advert. What do you think the advert symbolises about America in 1920s?

Chapter Three

- Work in pairs. Identify all of the examples of different rumours that are circulating about Gatsby's past life. Write the different rumours on to pieces of card and with a friend look for evidence from the novel thus far to identify which are most likely to be accurate.

- Imagine you are showbiz reporter for a major newspaper. Write a report for your editor about the party at Gatsby's mansion. Include:
 - who was present at the party;
 - the general mood and atmosphere;
 - what the party tells us about the state of American high society;
 - some of the rumours that are circulating about Gatsby.

- Nick tells us that Gatsby signed the invitation to the party in a 'majestic hand'; identify other examples of language that could be used by Fitzgerald to emphasise the grandeur of Gatsby's party.

- Work in small groups. Imagine you work as Party Planners. Research the conventions of 1920s American high society parties and create a party plan for Gatsby. Write a commentary on your plans using textual evidence to explain the choices and decisions that you have made.

- Research the Ford Motor Company on the Internet or in your school library. What is the significance of the Ford Motor Company - in symbolic terms - at this point in America history? What do you think is important about Gatsby's choice of Ford?

Chapter Four

- Look again at the names on Gatsby's guest list; put some of the names into Google. What connections are there between each name and the results from your Internet search? Why do you think Fitzgerald has done this? Using both the novel and the results from your research above, to compile a guest list identifying:
 - who attended;
 - their social, economic and professional backgrounds.What does the guest list tell you about the social hierarchy that operates in American high society?
- Gatsby introduces Nick to Meyer Wolfsheim - who allegedly fixed the Baseball World Series in 1919. Use the Internet to collect some examples and images of baseball cards and complete cards for all of the characters that Gatsby introduces Nick to in this chapter.
- Much of this chapter is concerned with the reconstruction of past events. Choose two of these events and rewrite them from the perspectives of different characters to show how they try to construct the events differently. Why do you think these differences exist? Are they solely concerned with memory or do the characters have different agendas?
- Look again at the passage where the south-eastern Europeans are attending the funeral. Identify all of the different racial and ethnic groups present. On a map of the world identify which nationalities and ethnic groups are identified.
- Now look at the objects with which they are associated and, using symbols to represent the objects, match these up with the different nationalities. Look at the United States on your map. What does the relationship between the people and the objects outside of the US tell you about the state of America at the time? What does this imply about Gatsby's fate?

Chapter Five

- As Gatsby and Daisy are reacquainted in this chapter, Nick remarks that he is 'aware of the loud beating of my own heart'. Write a short soliloquy that recounts the thoughts and feelings that are running through Nick's head as he witnesses the meeting between Gatsby and Daisy.
- Look closely at the meeting of Nick and Daisy in this chapter paying particular attention to the mood and tone of the passage. Now re-write the passage from the perspective of a stranger looking in on the two people, unaware of who they are, but conveying the meaning of the conversation by describing their body language and facial expressions.
- Look closely at the description of Gatsby's mansion, paying specific attention to the descriptions of the objects and decoration of the place. How would you describe the mansion? Imagine that Gatsby's mansion has been turned into a tourist attraction some years later. Write and record the audio guide for tourists walking round the mansion explaining the style of the place.
- On page 86 Nick remarks that 'Americans while willing, even eager, to be Serfs have always been obstinate about peasantry' and that Gatsby's mansion has a 'feudal silhouette'. Define what each of these statements might mean.
- Research the historical emigration to the United States from Europe. Thinking about what you know about why people moved from Europe to America, what do you think that Fitzgerald is trying to say about the European legacy that prevails in American high society?

Chapter Six

- Look again at the passage where we learn more about Gatsby's past life. Identify the key differences between James Gatz and Jay Gatsby.
- Look again at page 96 where Nick recounts Gatsby's relationship with Dan Cody. How does this relationship provide a catalyst for the later events of the novel? Using the notes you have made, complete the essay task below.

'The great skill of Fitzgerald is to create a character which is as much a figment of his own imagination as he is the reader's.' How far do you think this reflects the author's presentation of Jay Gatsby.

- Work in pairs. Look at the passages where Nick describes how Gatsby 'constructed' his persona and highlight examples of the way that language suggests the 'building' of a character. Within your pairs, each person takes an aspect of Gatsby's character to focus upon. Present to the rest of the group how Fitzgerald uses language to show the 'creation' of Gatsby's character from James Gatz to Jay Gatsby.
- Throughout this chapter there are a number of extra-textual references:
 - Platonic Conception;
 - 'he must be about his Father's business';
 - Madame de Maintenon.

Research these references and determine how they enhance the meaning of the passages.

Chapter Seven

- Look again at page 123, Tom Buchanan accuses Gatsby of being a 'Mr Nobody from Nowhere'. What, do you think, are the implications of this phrase?
- The idea of people living 'rootless' lives is central to the novel. For each of the main characters complete a map – based on quotations from the text – to show **where** they have come from. Label the map with your quotations.
- Fitzgerald uses the 'Scenic Method' to present the events of the narrative; one of the best examples of this is the party in the Plaza Hotel in this chapter. Look again at this passage. Work in small groups to write your own version of this sequence in **screenplay format** - film script. You should use the same dialogue but focus on how you would present the sequence visually. Film and edit a short sequence from your screenplay.
- Write a comparison of Fitzgerald's written version and the moving sequence that you have created. Focus on why you think Fitzgerald has used the scenic method throughout the novel.
- In a previous chapter, we explored the importance of Gatsby's car and its symbolism. However, in this chapter cars are important in terms of Myrtle's death. Reread the passage on page 131 where Myrtle's body is discovered. How do you think the image of the car has been inverted from the earlier chapters here? What point about contemporary American society is Fitzgerald attempting to make with this incident?

Chapter Eight

- Look again at the oblique description of Gatsby's death. How far do you think that it is a 'fitting' end for the character? Why do you think that Fitzgerald illustrated Gatsby's death with the Butler hearing a 'few shots'? Rewrite Gatsby's death passage so that we actually witness the killing.
- Now compare both versions thinking about which is most effective. Why do you think Fitzgerald opted for his means of portraying the death?
- Look again at the following quotation from the novel:

'Gatsby was overwhelmingly aware of the youth and mystery that wealth imprisons and preserves, of the freshness of many clothes, and of Daisy, gleaming like silver, safe and proud above the hot struggles of the poor'.

- What do you think this quotation has to say about the tension between wealth and poverty in the novel? One reading of the quotation might suggest a tension between a desire for wealth and a pragmatic realisation of its frailties. Find examples from the text where this statement might be true.
- As a class you are going to have a debate. The topic for the debate is:

'The death of Jay Gatsby confirms what we already secretly knew: that the American Dream is nothing but the hope that sustains the hopeless.'

Each member of the group will speak for a maximum of **three minutes** either in favour of or against the statement.

Chapter Nine

- Look again at the passage that tells of Gatsby's funeral. Imagine that his funeral had been attended by some of those who, in the text, refuse to attend. Choose one of the characters and write the oration that they would deliver in memory of Gatsby. In writing your oration, try to make it represent what that character felt about Gatsby and base it on evidence from the text. Deliver your oration to the rest of the class.
- Reread from 'Gatsby's house was still empty when I left' to 'borne back ceaselessly into the past'. Annotate the passage focussing on how Fitzgerald uses language to mark the sense of the closing of an era.
- Complete the essay task below:

'Fitzgerald's description of Gatsby's house at the end of the novel is as much a description of where wealth and materialism led a country as it is the remnants of a fictional character's life.' Discuss the validity of this view by referring to this extract and ranging more widely across the novel.