

BOOK CLUB To Go!

The Great Gatsby

By F. Scott Fitzgerald

Introduction

The narrator, Nick Carraway, is a young Princeton man who works as a bond broker in Manhattan. His neighbor at West Egg, Long Island, is Jay Gatsby, a Midwesterner of considerable self-made wealth whose mysterious origin turns out to be bootlegging. For many years Gatsby has been in love with Nick's cousin Daisy, who is married to the wealthy but coarse Tom Buchanan. Daisy and Gatsby begin an affair. Tom's own mistress, Myrtle, is the wife of a garbage-man. When a distraught Myrtle is hit and killed by Daisy's car on the highway, Daisy drives away from the scene. The jealous Tom tells Myrtle's husband that it was Gatsby who killed Myrtle, and the husband shoots Gatsby and then himself. With its sharp depiction of the consequences of the "American dream" and of a man betrayed by the ambitions nurtured by a meretricious society, *The Great Gatsby* is widely regarded as one of the greatest English-language novels of the 20th century.

(americanwriters.org)

About the Author

Born September 24, 1896 in Saint Paul, Minnesota, Francis Scott Key Fitzgerald was a distant descendant of the writer of the national anthem. His mother's family had money, his father's family had breeding, but combined they were not well off or elite. Fitzgerald was the darling of the household growing up, and he developed a fondness for associating with the socially successful. He went on to a disappointing academic career at Princeton, where he was briefly involved with a wealthy socialite whom he had no chance of winning.

In 1920, Fitzgerald's first novel, *This Side of Paradise*, established him as a literary force. He married Zelda Sayre of Montgomery, Alabama. The couple first tried to live in New York, as well as the surrounding areas, and then in Europe. As part of the expatriate community, Fitzgerald struck up a friendship with the relatively unknown Ernest Hemingway. Their friendship soon died in the face of Hemingway's ego. The Fitzgeralds' marriage was rocky, to say the least, and by 1930 Zelda was in one of the many sanatoriums where she would spend much of the rest of her life. The one lasting product of their marriage was their daughter, Scottie.

The Fitzgeralds were spendthrift and always in debt, so Scott expended much of his creative energy on short stories that fetched a handsome price. After *The Great Gatsby* came out in 1926, he did not publish another book until the hauntingly powerful *Tender is the Night* came out in 1934. This book did not have nearly the commercial or critical success of *The Great Gatsby*, and the public began to regard Fitzgerald as essentially washed up. Mired in increasing alcoholism, Fitzgerald went to Hollywood in the early 1930s to write screenplays, but his only screen credit was for *Three Comrades*. When he died in 1940, he left behind an unfinished manuscript, *The Last Tycoon*. After his death, Fitzgerald was out of fashion in the forties, but writers, scholars, and the public began to rediscover him in the 1950s.

(Novelist)

Reviews

“In 1925, *The Great Gatsby* was published and hailed as an artistic and material success for its young author, F. Scott Fitzgerald. It is considered a vastly more mature and artistically masterful treatment of Fitzgerald's central theme: the results of the Jazz Age generation's adherence to false material values.” – *eNotes.com*

“A curious book, a mystical, glamorous story of today. It takes a deeper cut at life than hitherto has been essayed by Mr. Fitzgerald. He writes well - he always has - for he writes naturally, and his sense of form is becoming perfected.” -- *Books Of The Century / from the New York Times*

Further Reading

The Big Money by John Dos Passos

On the Road by Jack Kerouac

In Our Time by Ernest Hemingway

BOOK CLUB To Go!

The Great Gatsby

F. Scott Fitzgerald

Possible Discussion Questions

1. What is Nick Carraway's role in the novel? Consider Nick's father's advice in chapter one: "Whenever you feel like criticizing anyone, just remember that all the people in this world haven't had the advantages that you've had." Does telling the story from Nick's point of view make it more believable?
2. Whom do you think the characters in *The Great Gatsby* represent? Do they seem like real people? Which characters seem the most real to you?
3. Think about the two worlds, the Midwest and the East, as Fitzgerald describes them, and what they represent for Nick and for Gatsby.
4. Compare and contrast Gatsby's social class with that of Tom and Daisy Buchanan. How does geography contribute to the definition of social class in *The Great Gatsby*?
5. What is the symbolism of the green light that appears throughout the novel (at the end of Daisy's pier, at intersections throughout the book)?
6. Fitzgerald returns several times to describe a decrepit optical products sign -- the eyes of Doctor T. J. Eckleberg -- that hovers over "the valley of ashes." What does that sign represent?
7. Discuss elements of the Jazz Age that Fitzgerald includes in *The Great Gatsby*.
8. In what ways does Fitzgerald present a tension between Modernism and Victorianism in *The Great Gatsby*?
9. What is the American Dream? How does Gatsby represent this dream? Has the American dream changed since Gatsby's time?
10. What makes *The Great Gatsby* a classic novel? Why has it maintained its place in American literature?

(The College of Staten Island of the City University of New York & Duluth Public Library)