American Lit--*Dougherty*

The Great Gatsby—Study and Discussion Questions

These questions are provided as a study aid to help you when reading *The Great Gatsby*. You should answer all questions completely. Your answers will act as part of your study notes later, when reviewing for the Klausur.

Essentially, I am doing for you here what you should be doing for yourself as you read all literature for which you will be held responsible: pose thematic questions about the text and be able to answer them; account for incidents, details, descriptions that purposefully influence the reader's perceptions; write your observations down; gather your notes together into coherent groupings; and, ultimately, read over your notes to look for correspondences and striking threads of thought or detail; formulate final statements about the book that might, then, work as theses for a paper or essay exam.

Chapter 1

What do we learn about Nick Carraway from the first chapter? What character traits does he openly discuss, and which are revealed?

Where is Nick Carraway from, and where does he move when the novel opens? One of the novel's themes first appears here. Can you guess at its nature?

Carraway refers on page 5 to East Egg's and West Egg's "dissimilarity in every particular except shape and size." To what, specifically, is he referring here? As you read, keep an eye open for references to East vs. West. What idea is Fitzgerald exploring?

Carraway says early on of Tom Buchanan (page 6), "I felt that Tom would drift on forever seeking, a little wistfully, for the dramatic turbulence of some irrecoverable football game." How is this an apt introduction to Tom Buchanan, and to the world in which Buchanan lives?

Wistful irony pervades the novel and lends it its undertone of melancholy and bitter-sweetness. On page 6, Buchanan says, "And so it happened that on a warm windy evening I drove over to East Egg to see two old friends whom I scarcely knew at all." How could a sentence like this be seen as characteristic of the mood of this novel—and of the problems presented? Find other sentences like this.

Characterize Tom Buchanan and Daisy Buchanan. Be as precise as possible, and cite specific examples from this chapter to support your inferences. Note particularly recurring adjectives or images that Fitzgerald uses in having Carraway describe the Buchanans and their residence.

How is Tom's harangue about the threat of "The Rise of the Colored Empires" (page 13) characteristic of him?

We learn enough about Daisy in chapter 1 to make an inference about why she stays with Tom, even though she's being cheated on. What is it that we learn? Read pages 14-18 again.

The final image of Gatsby at the end of chapter one stands in stark contrast to the rest of the events we have witnessed. Explain.

Chapter II

Fitzgerald introduces two important symbols in this chapter—the "valley of ashes" and the eyes of Doctor T.J. Eckleburg, which "brood on over the silent dumping ground." Explain the symbolism in relation to the world Fitzgerald is presenting.

What images dominate the first few pages of chapter 2, especially the description of Wilson's garage and Wilson himself?

How are Tom and Myrtle Wilson peculiarly suited for one another?

A close examination of class consciousness is apparent in this chapter, and indeed in the entire novel. What does Fitzgerald seem to be suggesting about class divisions within the United States? In deciding how to answer this, examine Tom's buying the dog for Mrs. Wilson, as well as the "apartment party" scene on pages 28-37.

The way that Fitzgerald handles violence in *The Great Gatsby* is significant. Describe the tone of the one sentence in which Tom breaks Myrtle's nose (37). What effect does this tone have on our understanding of the events that have taken place?

There are ironic touches throughout this chapter. Pick out one irony and discuss its significance.

Chapter III

Nick Carraway begins the chapter by describing Gatsby's parties, and during the description the narrative changes verb tense. Where does this occur? And what could be the reason? Chance? Or is there something underscored about Carraway and Gatsby?

Describe the ambience, the mood, at a typical Gatsby party. On page 42, Nick says, "the cocktail table...[was] the only place in the garden where a single man could linger without looking purposeless and alone." How could this line be considered ironic?

The conversation among Jordan, Nick, and the girls (42-44) is the first instance in which Gatsby's past is openly speculated about; we receive yet other hints during when the man "with enormous owl-eyed spectacles" points out Gatsby's books to Nick and Jordon Baker (45-46). What is the effect of these discussions about Gatsby on the reader?

Note the imagery of the party scene just before we meet Gatsby. What dominates the imagery (page 47)? Now, which words does Nick use to characterize Gatsby and his aura?

Re-read the scene about "The large room...full of people" (51-52). This scene can be viewed symbolically as a comment upon the societies with which we deal in *The Great Gatsby*. Explain. (Hint: note the shift in imagery in the last paragraph on page 51.)

Pages 54-56: Fitzgerald rather deliberately inserts this scene about the car accident in Gatsby's driveway. What is Fitzgerald underscoring with this scene? Note particularly, too, the juxtaposition of the accident scene and Nick's description of his glance back at Gatsby's house on page 56.

Finally, in Nick's discussion of his own life at the end of chapter III (57-end), we learn more about him that makes us understand the reason he is engrossed in Gatsby. What is it that we learn?

Nick ends the chapter with the words "I am one of the few honest people that I have ever known." Shortly before, he discloses Jordan Baker as "incurably dishonest." Are we to believe Nick here?

Chapter IV

Why does Nick bother to recount all the names of people who typically "came to Gatsby's house in the summer"? Is there any distinction to be made between those from East Egg and those from West Egg?

Nick consciously compares Gatsby in the beginning of this chapter (64) to someone "so peculiarly American." On the next page, Gatsby says, "I'll tell you God's truth." Think about the Gatsby-America connection in the entire novel. Herein lies one of the novel's themes. Write down a hypothesis about this theme.

What is *your* impression of Gatsby on pages 66-69? Does this match Nick's impression? Note Nick's discussion of moving into the city on page 69. How does this discussion fit nicely with the impression he has of Gatsby so far, with what Gatsby may represent?

What do we learn of both Gatsby and Nick through the conversation with Meyer Wolfsheim (69-74)?

How does Jordan Baker's disclosure of Gatsby's past, and of his dreams, change our view of Gatsby? Or does it change our view?

Chapter V

In the beginning pages of Chapter 5, we are reminded several times of a certain "odd" characteristic of Jay Gatsby: "Your place looks like the world's fair," Nick tells Gatsby. "Does it?" Gatsby replies (82); "Well, suppose we take a plunge in the swimming pool? I haven't used it all summer," Gatsby says (82); "The grass looks fine, if that's what you mean," says Nick. "What grass?" Gatsby inquires (85). These quotations could hint simply at Gatsby's nervousness in this crucial chapter, but they point, too, at an essential quality that separates Gatsby from Tom and those who frequent Gatsby's parties. What is it?

When Gatsby's mood has shifted to ebullience on page 91, he notes in a demanding tone to Nick, "My house looks well, doesn't it?" Directly after this, the subject of how Gatsby "acquired" his money comes up. There is something telling about the Gatsby's remark that his house looks "well," and it has to do with the conversation that follows. What does the quotation reveal about Gatsby?

On page 92, Nick remarks, "As Gatsby closed the door of `The Merton College Library' I could have sworn I heard the owl-eyed man break into ghostly laughter." Read this passage over again. Whom does this "owl-eyed man" remind you of? In what way does this passage seem ominously foreboding? How does Gatsby's library reflect Gatsby's approach to fulfilling his dream?

Analyze the passage in which Gatsby throws his many-colored shirts on the bed before Nick and Daisy (93). Why does he do this? Is he missing something? How does Daisy's response suggest far more than is actually said?

Several times there has been mention of the green light at the end of Daisy's dock. On page 94 Gatsby mentions it specifically again, and he remains "absorbed in what he

had just said." How can the green light at the end of the dock be seen as a symbol within the larger framework of the story?

At the end of Chapter 5, Nick notes, "No amount of fire or freshness can challenge what a man will store up in his ghostly heart." The word "ghostly" here seems odd in relation to "heart." How do you explain the use of this modifier? The idea of "ghosts" is several times related to Gatsby (e.g., see pages 106 and 136). With what notion is Fitzgerald playing here?

Trace the imagery in this chapter. How does it reflect the progression of events?

Chapter VI

In the "true" story of Gatsby at the beginning of Chapter 6, what aspect of Gatsby does Nick mention several times that bears heavily on the present story? [See "a promise that the rock of the world was founded securely on a fairy's wings" (100); "while Gatsby...caught his breath, to clear his misconceptions away" (102).]

Notice that the pace of the narrative begins to pick up in Chapter 6. How would you describe the pace of the narrative in Chapter 5? In the chapters preceding Chapter 5? How does this match well the rise and fall of Gatsby's dream?

On page 105, Nick says, "West egg [was] a world complete in itself, with its own standards and its own great figures, second to nothing because it had no consciousness of being so...." What essential qualities are implied about West Egg here—and, by extension, all that "west" in the United States has come to represent?

Note the recurrence of "green" as associated with Daisy at the end of page 105. Significance?

This chapter is full of quotations and details that can be used to support theses about the novel. What threads of thought are picked up by the following: Nick notes, "Tom and Daisy stared, with that peculiarly unreal feeling that accompanies the recognition of a hitherto ghostly celebrity of the movies" (106); "I'd rather not be a polo player," said Tom pleasantly, "I'd rather look at all these famous people—in oblivion" (106); Daisy tells Nick to remain in the garden, and adds, "In case there's a fire or a flood...or any act of God" (107).

Re-read the paragraph on page 108 beginning "But the rest offended her...." Come to a precise inference of what qualities of West Egg make it a pale imitation of East Egg.

Re-read the paragraph on page 110 beginning "Her glance left me...." What, specifically, does Gatsby's world lack that Daisy's world of East Egg does not?

Page 111: The nature of Gatsby's tragedy is mapped out here more clearly than anywhere in the novel. What do we learn about Gatsby's errors on this page?

Interpret the last lines of this chapter.

Chapters VII-IX

What are the dominant images in this chapter, and how do they relate to the events that occur here?

Trace the similarities between the opening scene in the Buchanans' home here (page 115) and the scene in which we first meet Daisy and Tom—also in the Buchanans' home. Why is there this parallel in this chapter?This careful repitition of physical detail suggests that despite Gatsby's intrusion into Daisy's life, the basic situation of the Buchanans is really unchanged from what it was at the opening of the novel.

What does kissing Gatsby while Tom is out of the room (116) illustrate about Daisy's attitude toward her relationship with Gatsby?

Examine the scene when Daisy shows her little girl to Jay Gatsby (116-117). What does this scene reveal about how Daisy views Gatsby.

Tom Buchanan's personality is more firmly established here than ever before. Pages 129-132 are important in this regard. Read these pages again and arrive at inferences that properly characterize Buchanan. Then, note especially Tom's response on pages 131-2 to his learning of Gatsby's having "loved" Daisy for five years. What is revealed?

This chapter is the climactic one of the novel: in it, much about the problems of this society and about Jay Gatsby's strengths and weaknesses is emphasized. Choose one scene that you feel represents an important aspect of this novel and explain its significance.

Why does Nick, on page 136, suddenly, oddly remember his 30th birthday? What significance could this possibly have in relation to what is occurring in this scene?The age of thirty is symbolic of the passing of youth, and so the turning point in Nick's life occurs

simultaneously with the turning point in Gatsby's career, the death of his youthful dream.

How does the fact that Daisy was at the wheel when Myrtle Wilson was killed seem appropriate in relation to Daisy's character thus far? (144-146)

What's the point of the last words in chapter seven, "watching over nothing"? (146)

Why does Nick abandon Daisy and Tom and side with Gatsby at the end of chapter 7 and throughout the rest of the novel?

In chapter 8, what elements of Gatsby's reminiscence of Daisy five years earlier (pages 148-152) are stressed? How do these elements characterize the primary ingredients wrapped up in Gatsby's dream?

Read page 152 carefully. How does Gatsby's remark that Daisy's relationship with Tom was "just personal" underscore something essential about Gatsby's conception of love?

In what ways is it a tragedy that Gatsby dies while waiting for a phone call from Daisy? In what ways is it not a tragedy?

Wilson's remark (on 158) that he "[doesn't] belong to any" church is significant. Why? How, then, to we make sense of Wilson's seeing God in the eyes of Doctor T.J. Eckleburg on page 160?

How is Wilson's killing Gatsby particularly appropriate, given what Gatsby and Wilson represent? (Recall when we first encounter Wilson, the denizen of the ash heaps, with ash dust covering him.)

How is one of the novel's main themes emphasized in the last paragraphs of the novel? (182)

What realization does Nick arrive at in the last lines of the text?