

# The Great Gatsby



## INTRO

### BRIEF BIOGRAPHY OF F. SCOTT FITZGERALD

F. Scott Fitzgerald grew up in Minnesota, attended a few private schools (where his performance was mediocre), and went to Princeton University. In 1917, Princeton put Fitzgerald on academic probation. He enlisted in the Army. On base in Alabama in 1918, he met and fell in love with Zelda Sayre, who refused to marry him unless he could support her. He returned to New York to pursue fame and fortune. The publication of his first novel, *This Side of Paradise*, in 1920, made Fitzgerald a literary star. He married Zelda one week later. In 1924, the couple moved to Paris, where Fitzgerald began work on *The Great Gatsby*. Though now considered his masterpiece, the novel sold only modestly. The Fitzgeralds returned to the United States in 1927. Fitzgerald published several more novels, including *Tender is the Night* (1933), but none matched the success of his first. Deep in debt because of their ritzy lifestyle, the Fitzgeralds began to spiral into alcoholism and mental illness. Fitzgerald died of a heart attack on December 21, 1940. Zelda died eight years later in a fire.

### HISTORICAL CONTEXT

Fitzgerald coined the term "Jazz Age" to refer to the period more commonly known as the Roaring Twenties. Jazz is an American style of music marked by its complex and exuberant mix of rhythms and tonalities. *The Great Gatsby* portrays a similarly complex mix of emotions and themes that reflect the turbulence of the times. Fresh off the nightmare of World War I, Americans were enjoying the fruits of an economic boom and a renewed sense of possibility. But in *The Great Gatsby*, Fitzgerald's stresses the darker side of the Roaring Twenties, its undercurrent of corruption and its desperate, empty decadence.

### RELATED LITERARY WORKS

Modernist fiction attempted to represent the sense of emptiness and disillusionment that dominated Europe and the United States after World War I. In this way, *Gatsby* can be considered as related to such modernist works as James Joyce's *Ulysses* (1922) and Virginia Woolf's *Mrs. Dalloway* (1925). But *The Great Gatsby* and all of Fitzgerald's works are best compared to those written by other Americans such as Ernest Hemingway, members of the "Lost Generation" of American writers who moved to Europe after World War I. All these writers depicted the reality, corruption, and sadness of

the human condition, but Fitzgerald most effectively portrayed the American cultural moment he called the "Jazz Age."

### KEY FACTS

- **Full Title:** The Great Gatsby
- **Where Written:** Paris and the US, in 1924
- **When Published:** 1925
- **Literary Period:** Modernism
- **Genre:** Novel
- **Setting:** Long Island, Queens, and Manhattan, New York in the summer of 1922
- **Climax:** The showdown between Gatsby and Tom over Daisy
- **Point of View:** First person

### EXTRA CREDIT

**Puttin' on the Fitz.** Fitzgerald spent most of his adult life in debt, often relying on loans from his publisher, and even his editor, Maxwell Perkins, in order to pay the bills. The money he made from his novels could not support the high-flying cosmopolitan life his wife desired, so Fitzgerald turned to more lucrative short story writing for magazines like *Esquire*. Fitzgerald spent his final three years writing screenplays in Hollywood.

**Another Failed Screenwriter.** Fitzgerald was an alcoholic and his wife Zelda suffered from serious mental illness. In the final years of their marriage as their debts piled up, Zelda stayed in a series of mental institutions on the East coast while Fitzgerald tried, and largely failed, to make money writing movie scripts in Hollywood.



## PLOT SUMMARY

In the summer of 1922, **Nick Carraway** moves from Minnesota to work as a bond salesman in New York. Nick rents a house in West Egg, a suburb of New York on Long Island full of the "new rich" who have made their fortunes too recently to have built strong social connections. Nick graduated from Yale and has connections in East Egg, a town where the people with social connections and "old" money live. One night Nick drives to East Egg to have dinner with his cousin, **Daisy** and her husband **Tom Buchanan**, a classmate of Nick's at Yale. There, he meets **Jordan Baker**, a beautiful and cynical professional golfer. Jordan tells Nick that Tom is having an affair. Upon returning home from dinner, Nick sees his mysterious neighbor **Jay Gatsby** holding out his arms toward the Long Island Sound.

Nick looks out across the water, but sees only a **green light** blinking at the end of a dock on the far shore.

A few days later, Tom invites Nick to a party in New York City. On the way, Tom picks up his mistress, **Myrtle Wilson**, the wife of **George Wilson**, the owner of an auto shop in an industrial area between West Egg and New York City called the **Valley of Ashes**. At the party, Myrtle gets drunk and makes fun of Daisy. Tom punches her and breaks her nose.

Nick also attends one of Gatsby's extravagant Saturday night parties. He runs into Jordan there, and meets Gatsby for the first time. Gatsby privately tells Jordan a story she describes as the most "amazing thing." After going to lunch with Gatsby and a shady business partner of Gatsby's named **Meyer Wolfsheimer**, Nick meets with Jordan and learns the "amazing" story: Gatsby met and fell in love with Daisy before World War I, and bought his West Egg **mansion** just to be near her and impress her. At Gatsby's request, Nick arranges a meeting between Gatsby and Daisy. The two soon rediscover their love.

Daisy invites Nick and Gatsby to lunch with her, Tom, and Jordan. During the lunch, Tom realizes Daisy and Gatsby are having an affair. He insists they all go to New York City. As soon as they gather at the Plaza Hotel, though, Tom and Gatsby get into an argument about Daisy. Gatsby tells Tom that Daisy never loved Tom and has only ever loved him. But Daisy can only admit that she loved them both, and Gatsby is stunned. Tom then reveals that Gatsby made his fortune by bootlegging alcohol and other illegal means. Tom then dismissively tells Daisy to go home with Gatsby, since he knows Gatsby won't "bother" her anymore. They leave in Gatsby's car, while Tom, Nick, and Jordan follow sometime later.

As they drive home, Tom, Nick, and Jordan come upon an accident: Myrtle has been hit and killed by a car. Tom realizes that it must have been Gatsby's car that struck Myrtle, and he curses Gatsby as a coward for driving off. But Nick learns from Gatsby later that night that Daisy was actually behind the wheel.

George Wilson, distraught, is convinced that the driver of the car yellow car that hit Myrtle is also her lover. While at work that day, Nick fights on the phone with Jordan. In the afternoon, Nick has a kind of premonition and finds Gatsby shot to death in his pool. Wilson's dead body is a few yards away. Nick organizes a funeral, but none of the people who were supposedly Gatsby's friends come. Only Gatsby's father and one other man attend.

Nick and Jordan end their relationship. Nick runs into Tom soon after, and learns that Tom told Wilson that Gatsby had run over Myrtle. Nick doesn't tell Tom that Daisy was at the wheel. Disgusted with the corrupt emptiness of life on the East Coast, Nick moves back to Minnesota. But the night before he leaves he walks down to Gatsby's beach and looks out over Long Island Sound. He thinks about Gatsby, and compares him to the

first settlers to America. Like Gatsby, Nick says, all people must move forward with their arms outstretched toward the future, like boats traveling upstream against the current of the past.



## CHARACTERS

**Jay Gatsby** – Nick's wealthy neighbor in West Egg. Gatsby owns a gigantic mansion and has become well known for hosting large parties every Saturday night. Gatsby's lust for wealth stems from his desire to win back the love of his life, **Daisy Buchanan**, whom he met and fell in love with while in military training in Louisville, Kentucky before WW I. Gatsby is a self-made man (his birth name was Jay Gatz) who achieved the American Dream of rising up from the lower classes to the top of society. But to Gatsby, the desire for love proves more powerful than the lust for money. Fitzgerald uses Gatsby's downfall as a critique of the reckless indulgence of Roaring Twenties America.

**Nick Carraway** – A young man from Minnesota who has come to New York after graduating Yale and fighting in World War I, Nick is the neighbor of **Jay Gatsby** and the cousin of **Daisy Buchanan**. The narrator of *The Great Gatsby*, Nick describes himself as "one of the few honest people that [he has] ever known." Nick views himself as a man of "infinite hope" who can see the best side of everyone he encountered. Nick sees past the veneer of Gatsby's wealth and is the only character in the novel who truly cares about Gatsby. In watching Gatsby's story unfold, Nick becomes a critic of the Roaring Twenties excess and carelessness that carries on all around him.

**Daisy Buchanan** – The love of **Jay Gatsby's** life, the cousin of **Nick Carraway**, and the wife of **Tom Buchanan**. She grew up in Louisville, Kentucky, where she met and fell in love with Gatsby. She describes herself as "sophisticated" and says the best thing a girl can be is a "beautiful little fool," which makes it unsurprising that she lacks conviction and sincerity, and values material things over all else. Yet Daisy isn't just a shallow gold digger. She's more tragic: a loving woman who has been corrupted by greed. She chooses the comfort and security of money over real love, but she does so knowingly. Daisy's tragedy conveys the alarming extent to which the lust for money captivated Americans during the Roaring Twenties.

**Tom Buchanan** – A former football player and Yale graduate who marries **Daisy Buchanan**. The oldest son of an extremely wealthy and successful "old money" East Egg family, Tom has a veneer of gentlemanly manners that barely veils a self-centered, sexist, racist, violent ogre of a man beneath.

**Jordan Baker** – A friend of **Daisy's** who becomes **Nick's** girlfriend. A successful pro golfer, Jordan is beautiful and pleasant, but does not inspire Nick to feel much more than a "tender curiosity" for her. Perhaps this is because Baker is "incurably dishonest" and cheats at golf. Still, there is some

suggestion in the novel that she loves Nick, and that he misjudges her.

**Myrtle Wilson** – The wife of **George Wilson** and the mistress of **Tom Buchanan**. Myrtle disdains her beaten down husband and desperately wants to improve her lot in life. She chooses Tom as the means to this end, but he sees her as little more than an object.

**George Wilson** – The husband of **Myrtle Wilson** and the owner of an auto garage in the Valley of Ashes. Wilson is a beaten-down man, who nevertheless loves and adores his wife. Her affair with **Tom** drives Wilson to the edge, and her death pushes him over.

**Meyer Wolfsheim** – **Gatsby's** business partner and friend. A small, fifty-year-old Jewish man with hairy nostrils and beady eyes, Wolfsheim is a gambler who made his name in organized crime by fixing the 1919 World Series.

**Owl Eyes** – A drunken man **Nick** encounters looking through **Gatsby's** vast library, amazed at the "realism" of all the unread novels.

**Ewing Klipspringer** – A man who is such a frequent guest at **Gatsby's** mansion that he almost seems to live there. Yet he turns out to be nothing more than a leech, and after **Gatsby's** death cares only about retrieving a pair of sneakers he left at **Gatsby's** mansion.

**Dan Cody** – **Jay Gatsby's** first mentor and best friend. Cody left **Gatsby** twenty-five thousand dollars when he died, but **Gatsby** never received it due to a legal complication.

**Henry Gatz** – **Jay Gatsby's** father. A dignified but poor man, Henry Gatz loves his son deeply and believes he was destined for great things.

**Pammy Buchanan** – **Daisy** and **Tom Buchanan's** young daughter.

**Michaelis** – A young Greek man who runs a coffee shop near **Wilson's** garage.

**Catherine** – **Myrtle Wilson's** sister.

expansion. The surging economy turned the 1920s into a time of easy money, hard drinking (despite the Prohibition amendment to the Constitution), and lavish parties. Though the 1920s were a time of great optimism, Fitzgerald portrays the much bleaker side of the revelry by focusing on its indulgence, hypocrisy, shallow recklessness, and its perilous—even fatal—consequences.

## 2 THE AMERICAN DREAM

The American Dream—that hard work can lead one from rags to riches—has been a core facet of American identity since its inception. Settlers came west to America from Europe seeking wealth and freedom. The pioneers headed west for the same reason. *The Great Gatsby* shows the tide turning east, as hordes flock to New York City seeking stock market fortunes. *The Great Gatsby* portrays this shift as a symbol of the American Dream's corruption. It's no longer a vision of building a life; it's just about getting rich.

**Gatsby** symbolizes both the corrupted Dream and the original uncorrupted Dream. He sees wealth as the solution to his problems, pursues money via shady schemes, and reinvents himself so much that he becomes hollow, disconnected from his past. Yet **Gatsby's** corrupt dream of wealth is motivated by an incorruptible love for **Daisy**. **Gatsby's** failure does not prove the folly of the American Dream—rather it proves the folly of short-cutting that dream by allowing corruption and materialism to prevail over hard work, integrity, and real love. And the dream of love that remains at **Gatsby's** core condemns nearly every other character in the novel, all of whom are empty beyond just their lust for money.

## 3 CLASS (OLD MONEY, NEW MONEY, NO MONEY)

*The Great Gatsby* portrays three different social classes: "old money" (**Tom** and **Daisy Buchanan**); "new money" (**Gatsby**); and a class that might be called "no money" (**George** and **Myrtle Wilson**). "Old money" families have fortunes dating from the 19th century or before, have built up powerful and influential social connections, and tend to hide their wealth and superiority behind a veneer of civility. The "new money" class made their fortunes in the 1920s boom and therefore have no social connections and tend to overcompensate for this lack with lavish displays of wealth.

*The Great Gatsby* shows the newly developing class rivalry between "old" and "new" money in the struggle between **Gatsby** and **Tom** over **Daisy**. As usual, the "no money" class gets overlooked by the struggle at the top, leaving middle and lower class people like **George Wilson** forgotten or ignored.

## 4 PAST AND FUTURE

## THEMES

In LitCharts each theme gets its own color and number. Our color-coded theme boxes make it easy to track where the themes occur throughout the work. If you don't have a color printer, use the numbers instead.

### 1 THE ROARING TWENTIES

F. Scott Fitzgerald coined the term "Jazz Age" to describe the decade of decadence and prosperity that America enjoyed in the 1920s, which was also known as the Roaring Twenties. After World War I ended in 1918, the United States and much of the rest of the world experienced an enormous economic

**Nick** and **Gatsby** are continually troubled by time—the past haunts Gatsby and the future weighs down on Nick. When Nick tells Gatsby that you can't repeat the past, Gatsby says "Why of course you can!" Gatsby has dedicated his entire life to recapturing a golden, perfect past with **Daisy**. Gatsby believes that money can recreate the past. Fitzgerald describes Gatsby as "overwhelmingly aware of the youth and mystery that wealth imprisons and preserves." But Gatsby mixes up "youth and mystery" with history; he thinks a single glorious month of love with Daisy can compete with the years and experiences she has shared with **Tom**. Just as "new money" is money without social connection, Gatsby's connection to Daisy exists outside of history.

Nick's fear of the future foreshadows the economic bust that plunged the country into depression and ended the Roaring Twenties in 1929. The day Gatsby and Tom argue at the Plaza Hotel, Nick suddenly realizes that it's his thirtieth birthday. He thinks of the new decade before him as a "portentous menacing road," and clearly sees in the struggle between old and new money the end of an era and the destruction of both types of wealth.



## SYMBOLS

Symbols appear in **red text** throughout the Summary and Analysis sections of this LitChart.

### THE GREEN LIGHT AND THE COLOR GREEN

The green light at the end of **Daisy's** dock is the symbol of **Gatsby's** hopes and dreams. It represents everything that haunts and beckons Gatsby: the physical and emotional distance between him and Daisy, the gap between the past and the present, the promises of the future, and the powerful lure of that other green stuff he craves—money. In fact, the color green pops up everywhere in *The Great Gatsby*. Long Island sound is "green"; **George Wilson's** haggard tired face is "green" in the sunlight; **Michaelis** describes the car that kills Myrtle Wilson as "light green" (though it's yellow); Gatsby's perfect lawn is green; and the New World that Nick imagines Dutch explorers first stumbling upon is a "fresh, green breast." The symbolism of green throughout the novel is as variable and contradictory as the many definitions of "green" and the many uses of money—"new," "natural," "innocent," "naive," and "uncorrupted"; but also "rotten," "gullible," "nauseous," and "sickly."

### THE EYES OF DOCTOR T. J. ECKLEBURG

The eyes of Doctor T. J. Eckleburg on the billboard overlooking the Valley of Ashes represent many things at once: to **Nick** they seem to symbolize the haunting waste of the past, which lingers on though it is irretrievably vanished, much like Dr. Eckleburg's

medical practice. The eyes can also be linked to **Gatsby**, whose own eyes, once described as "vacant," often stare out, blankly keeping "vigil" (a word Fitzgerald applies to both Dr. Eckleburg's eyes and Gatsby's) over Long Island sound and the green light. To **George Wilson**, Dr. Eckleburg's eyes are the eyes of God, which he says see everything.

### THE VALLEY OF ASHES

An area halfway between New York City and West Egg, the Valley of Ashes is an industrial wasteland covered in ash and soot. If New York City represents all the "mystery and beauty in the world," and West Egg represents the people who have gotten rich off the roaring economy of the Roaring Twenties, the Valley of Ashes stands for the dismal ruin of the people caught in between.

### EAST AND WEST

**Nick** describes the novel as a book about Westerners, a "story of the West." **Tom**, **Daisy**, **Jordan**, **Gatsby**, and **Nick** all hail from places other than the East. The romanticized American idea of going West to seek and make one's fortune on the frontier turned on its ear in the 1920's stock boom; now those seeking their fortune headed back East to cash in. But while *Gatsby* suggests there was a kind of honor in the hard work of making a fortune and building a life on the frontier, the quest for money in the East is nothing more than that: a hollow quest for money. The split between the eastern and western regions of the United States is mirrored in *Gatsby* by the divide between East Egg and West Egg: once again the West is the frontier of people making their fortunes, but these "Westerners" are as hollow and corrupt inside as the "Easterners."

### GATSBY'S MANSION

**Gatsby's** mansion symbolizes two broader themes of the novel. First, it represents the grandness and emptiness of the 1920s boom: Gatsby justifies living in it all alone by filling the house weekly with "celebrated people." Second, the house is the physical symbol of Gatsby's love for **Daisy**. Gatsby used his "new money" to create a place that he thought rivaled the houses of the "old money" that had taken her away.



## QUOTES

The color-coded and numbered boxes under each quote below make it easy to track the themes related to each quote. Each color and number corresponds to one of the themes explained in the Themes section of this LitChart.

## CHAPTER 1 QUOTES

In my younger and more vulnerable years my father gave me some advice that I've been turning over in my mind ever since. "Whenever you feel like criticizing any one," he told me, "just remember that all the people in this world haven't had the advantages that you've had."

- **Speaker:** Nick Carraway
- **Related themes:** Class (Old Money, New Money, No Money)
- **Theme Tracker code:**



He stretched out his arms toward the dark water in a curious way, and, far as I was from him, I could have sworn he was trembling. Involuntarily I glanced seaward – and distinguished nothing except a single green light, minute and far away, that might have been the end of a dock.

- **Speaker:** Nick Carraway
- **Mentioned or related characters:** Jay Gatsby
- **Related themes:** The American Dream, Past and Future
- **Theme Tracker code:**



"And I hope she'll be a fool – that's the best thing a girl can be in this world, a beautiful little fool."

- **Speaker:** Daisy Buchanan
- **Mentioned or related characters:** Pammy Buchanan
- **Related themes:** The Roaring Twenties, Class (Old Money, New Money, No Money)
- **Theme Tracker code:**



## CHAPTER 2 QUOTES

This is a Valley of Ashes—a fantastic farm where ashes grow like wheat into ridges and hills and grotesque gardens; where ashes take the forms of houses and chimneys and rising smoke and, finally, with a transcendent effort, of men who move dimly and already crumbling through the powdery air. Occasionally a line of gray cars crawls along an invisible track, gives out a ghastly creak, and comes to rest, and immediately the ash-gray men swarm up with leaden spades and stir up an impenetrable cloud, which screens their obscure operations from your sight.

- **Speaker:** Nick Carraway
- **Related themes:** Class (Old Money, New Money, No Money)

- **Theme Tracker code:**



## CHAPTER 3 QUOTES

He smiled understandingly—much more than understandingly. It was one of those rare smiles with a quality of eternal reassurance in it, that you may come across four or five times in life. It faced—or seemed to face—the whole external world for an instant, and then concentrated on you with an irresistible prejudice in your favor. It understood you just as far as you wanted to be understood, believed in you as you would like to believe in yourself, and assured you that it had precisely the impression of you that, at your best, you hoped to convey.

- **Speaker:** Nick Carraway
- **Mentioned or related characters:** Jay Gatsby
- **Related themes:** The American Dream
- **Theme Tracker code:**



## CHAPTER 5 QUOTES

"It makes me sad because I've never seen such – such beautiful shirts before."

- **Speaker:** Daisy Buchanan
- **Mentioned or related characters:** Jay Gatsby
- **Related themes:** The American Dream, Class (Old Money, New Money, No Money), Past and Future
- **Theme Tracker code:**



## CHAPTER 6 QUOTES

The truth was that Jay Gatsby, of West Egg, Long Island, sprang from his Platonic conception of himself. He was a son of God—a phrase which, if it means anything, means just that—and he must be about His Father's business, the service of a vast, vulgar, and meretricious beauty. So he invented just the sort of Jay Gatsby that a seventeen year old boy would be likely to invent, and to this conception he was faithful to the end.

- **Speaker:** Nick Carraway
- **Mentioned or related characters:** Jay Gatsby
- **Related themes:** The Roaring Twenties, The American Dream, Class (Old Money, New Money, No Money), Past and Future
- **Theme Tracker code:**



"I wouldn't ask too much of her," I ventured. "You can't repeat the past."

"Can't repeat the past?" he cried incredulously. "Why of course you can!"

He looked around him wildly, as if the past were lurking here in the shadow of his house, just out of reach of his hand.

- Speaker: Jay Gatsby, Nick Carraway
- Mentioned or related characters: Daisy Buchanan
- Related themes: The American Dream, Past and Future
- Theme Tracker code:



## CHAPTER 7 QUOTES

"Her voice is full of money," he said suddenly. That was it. I'd never understood before. It was full of money—that was the inexhaustible charm that rose and fell in it, the jingle of it, the cymbals' song of it.

- Speaker: Jay Gatsby, Nick Carraway
- Mentioned or related characters: Daisy Buchanan
- Related themes: The American Dream, Class (Old Money, New Money, No Money)
- Theme Tracker code:



## CHAPTER 8 QUOTES

"They're a rotten crowd," I shouted across the lawn. "You're worth the whole damn bunch put together." I've always been glad I said that. It was the only compliment I ever gave him, because I disapproved of him from beginning to end. First he nodded politely, and then his face broke into that radiant and understanding smile, as if we'd been in ecstatic cahoots on that fact all the time.

- Speaker: Nick Carraway
- Mentioned or related characters: Jay Gatsby
- Related themes: The Roaring Twenties, Class (Old Money, New Money, No Money)
- Theme Tracker code:



## CHAPTER 9 QUOTES

They were careless people, Tom and Daisy—they smashed up things and creatures and then retreated back into their money or their vast carelessness, or whatever it was that kept them

together, and let other people clean up the mess they had made.

- Speaker: Nick Carraway
- Mentioned or related characters: Daisy Buchanan, Tom Buchanan
- Related themes: Class (Old Money, New Money, No Money)
- Theme Tracker code:



That's my Middle West . . . the street lamps and sleigh bells in the frosty dark. . . I see now that this has been a story of the West, after all—Tom and Gatsby, Daisy and Jordan and I, were all Westerners, and perhaps we possessed some deficiency in common which made us subtly unadaptable to Eastern life.

- Speaker: Nick Carraway
- Mentioned or related characters: Jay Gatsby, Daisy Buchanan, Tom Buchanan, Jordan Baker
- Related themes: The Roaring Twenties, The American Dream
- Theme Tracker code:



Gatsby believed in the green light, the orgastic future that year by year recedes before us. It eluded us then, but that's no matter—tomorrow we will run faster, stretch out our arms farther.... And then one fine morning—So we beat on, boats against the current, borne back ceaselessly into the past.

- Speaker: Nick Carraway
- Mentioned or related characters: Jay Gatsby
- Related themes: The American Dream, Past and Future
- Theme Tracker code:



And as the moon rose higher the inessential houses began to melt away until gradually I became aware of the old island here that flowered once for Dutch sailors' eyes—a fresh, green breast of the new world.... And as I sat there, brooding on the old, unknown world, I thought of Gatsby's wonder when he first picked out Daisy's light at the end of his dock. He had come such a long way to this blue lawn, and his dream must have seemed so close he could hardly fail to grasp it. But what he did not know was that it was already behind him, somewhere in the vast obscurity beyond the city, where the dark fields of the republic rolled on under the night.

- Speaker: Nick Carraway

- Mentioned or related characters: Jay Gatsby, Daisy Buchanan
- Related themes: The American Dream, Past and Future
- Theme Tracker code:



## SUMMARY AND ANALYSIS

The color-coded and numbered boxes under each row of Summary and Analysis below make it easy to track the themes throughout the work. Each color and number corresponds to one of the themes explained in the Themes section of this LitChart.

### CHAPTER 1

**Nick Carraway**, the novel's narrator and protagonist, begins *The Great Gatsby* by recounting a bit of advice his father taught him: don't criticize others, because most people have not enjoyed the "advantages" that he has. Nick says that as a result of following this advice, he's become a tolerant and forgiving person who resists making quick judgments of others.

For instance, **Nick** says that though he scorns everything **Gatsby** stood for, he withholds judgment entirely regarding him. Nick says Gatsby was a man of "gorgeous" personality and boundless hope. Nick views Gatsby as a victim, a man who fell prey to the "foul dust" that corrupted his dreams.

In the summer of 1922, **Nick**, a Yale graduate, moves from his hometown in Minnesota, where his family has lived for three generations, to live and work in New York. He has recently returned from military service in World War I, an experience that left him feeling restless in the dull **Midwest**.

*Nick's "advantages" come from "old money." Nick casts himself as someone who doesn't judge based on class, which indicates that other people do judge based on class.*



*Nick introduces Gatsby and connects him to both new money and the American Dream, and indicates that Gatsby was done in by the "foul dust" of the Roaring Twenties.*



*As a Yale graduate, Nick clearly comes from old money. His wealthy heritage has been closely tied to one place, but WW I and the 1920s upset that old order.*



**Nick** intends to become a bond salesman, a line of work he says that almost everyone he knew was entering. Nick hopes to find a taste of the excitement and sense of possibility that was sweeping the nation in the early 1920s. He says moving to New York offered him and everyone else the chance to discover or reinvent themselves.

**Nick** rents a house in West Egg, a Long Island suburb located directly across a bay from East Egg. Nick observes that the two communities differed greatly in every way but shape and size. West Egg is where the "new rich" live, people who have made their fortunes only recently and have neither the social connections nor the cultural refinement to be accepted among the "old money" families of East Egg.

The West Egg "new rich" are characterized by garish displays of wealth that the old money families find distasteful. For instance, **Nick's** small house sits next to an "eyesore" of a mansion owned by **Gatsby**, a man Nick knows only by name. Gatsby's mansion is a gigantic reproduction of a French hotel, covered in ivy and surrounded by forty acres of lush lawns and gardens.

*The 1920s boom turns the American Dream on its head. Instead of going west to build a fortune and a life, people in the 20s abandoned their roots to come east for the chance at fortune.*



*"Old money" East Egg faces "new money" West Egg across the water, symbolically showing the class rivalry: the towns literally oppose each other. That "old money" Nick rents a house in "new money" West Egg shows he spans both worlds.*



*Gatsby's mansion represents the "new money" class, which overcompensates for its lack of social connections through lavish displays of wealth. The "old money" class considers this tacky, proof of their superiority to "new money."*



The main story begins when **Nick**, who, though he lives in West Egg has East Egg connections, drives over to East Egg to have dinner at the Buchanans. **Daisy Buchanan** is Nick's cousin, and Nick vaguely knew her husband **Tom** because Tom also attended Yale. When Nick arrives, Tom is dressed in riding clothes. Tom speaks to Nick politely but condescendingly. Nick remembers that plenty of people hated Tom at Yale, and notes that both Tom's arrogance and imposing stature have changed little since those days.

*Tom's riding clothes identify him as a member of the "old money" class: horseback riding was a hobby only of the rich who had great country estates. The more urban "new money" wouldn't ride horses. Yet Tom's stately riding clothes can't hide his hulking body, just as his politeness can't hide that he's a jerk.*



At dinner **Nick** meets **Jordan Baker**, a young professional golfer, who is beautiful but also seems constantly bored by her surroundings.

*Jordan's world-weary boredom shows the emptiness of "old money."*



Soon, Tom launches into a diatribe about the downfall of civilization as described in a book entitled *The Rise of the Colored Empires*. The book explains that the Nordic race, with which **Tom** identifies himself, created civilization and is now threatened by the rise of other, inferior races. Tom urges everyone to read the book. Daisy tries to make light of his suggestion.

*Tom's outburst shows that old money is insecure about the rise of new money, which makes old money feel as if the world was falling apart. Old money is also hypocritical, hiding hatred and corruption behind a veneer of taste and manners.*



Just then, **Tom** learns he has a phone call and leaves the room. **Daisy** follows quickly behind, and **Jordan** tells **Nick** that the call is from Tom's mistress. The rest of dinner is awkward. As Nick is leaving, Daisy and Tom suggest he think about striking up a romance with Jordan.

*While Tom shows off his house and family and manners, he has a mistress on the side. Hypocrisy and rot are at the heart of old money in the 1920s boom.*



Upon returning from dinner, **Nick** sees **Jay Gatsby** standing on his lawn and gazing out across Long Island sound. Nick considers calling out to Gatsby, but stops himself when he sees Gatsby extend his arms out toward the far side of the water. Nick looks across the water and sees only a tiny **green light** blinking at the end of a dock.

*Gatsby's gesture is symbolic of his character: he is a hopeful seeker of unattainable dreams. It's not clear at this point what the green light symbolizes, but it's clear that to Gatsby it symbolizes some dream or hope.*



## CHAPTER 2

**Nick** describes a "waste land" between West Egg and New York City where the ashes from the city are dumped. The ashes cover everything, including the men who live there. Above this bleak "**Valley of Ashes**" stare out two huge spectacled eyes from a billboard for an eye doctor's defunct practice. These haunting, unblinking **eyes of Doctor T. J. Eckleburg** watch over everything in the Valley of Ashes.

*The "Valley of Ashes" represents the people left behind in the Roaring Twenties. The dust recalls Nick's reference to the "foul dust" that corrupted Gatsby. Eckleburg's eyes witness the bleakness, and represent the past that the 1920s wasted.*



One day, as **Tom** and **Nick** ride a train from Long Island into the city, Tom gets off at a stop in the **Valley of Ashes** and tells Nick to come along. Tom leads Nick to **George Wilson's** auto garage, and Nick learns that Tom's mistress is Wilson's wife, **Myrtle**. Wilson is good-looking, but beaten-down and lifeless and has ashes in his hair, while Myrtle strikes Nick as vibrant and oddly sensuous. Tom talks with Wilson about selling a car. When Wilson goes to get some chairs, Tom whispers to Myrtle to meet them in a little while at the train station.

*The old money represented by Tom uses the "no money" people while pretending to help them. Wilson and Myrtle have different reactions to the world that has left them behind. Wilson is left weak and defeated, with vague dreams he can't fulfill. Myrtle wants desperately to be a part of the world she sees but can't touch, and so takes up with Tom.*



Tom, Myrtle, and Nick go to the apartment Tom keeps in New York City to conduct his affair. Myrtle's sister Catherine soon shows up, as does another couple. Everyone gets very drunk, including Nick. He says the party is only the second time he's been drunk.

*The drunken party shows both the "fun" and hidden desperation of the Roaring Twenties. Getting drunk, it seems, is the only thing making the party fun, or at least bearable.*



The topic of conversation eventually turns to Nick's neighbor Gatsby. Catherine says she's afraid of Gatsby because she's heard that he's a relative of the German emperor, Kaiser Wilhelm, and everyone agrees that Gatsby is involved in some sort of shifty business.

*Rumors swirl around Gatsby. He has become so rich and is so mysterious he seems almost hollow—all surface and no substance.*



As Myrtle gets more and more drunk she also gets increasingly loud. After Tom gives her a puppy as a gift, she starts talking about Daisy. Tom warns her that she doesn't have the right to use Daisy's name. But she starts to tease him by repeatedly calling out "Daisy! Daisy! Daisy!" Tom punches her in the nose, breaking it. The party ends, and Nick takes the train home alone.

*Tom's degrading treatment of Myrtle reveals the cruel side of his privileged "old money" upbringing. His "loyalty" to Daisy also reveals his hypocrisy: he's cheating on her.*



## CHAPTER 3

Every Saturday night, Gatsby throws incredibly luxurious parties at his mansion. Nick eventually receives an invitation. At the party, he feels out of place, and notes that the party is filled with people who haven't been invited and who appear "agonizingly" aware of the "easy money" surrounding them. The main topic of conversation is rumors about Gatsby. Nick hears from various people that Gatsby is a German spy, an Oxford graduate, and someone even claims Gatsby once killed a man.

*People used Gatsby for his extravagant parties: most of his "new money" guests didn't even know him. Gatsby continues to be a man who barely seems to exist beyond the rumors about him. Nick's feelings of discomfort at the party shows that he senses the emptiness behind the party.*



Nick runs into Jordan Baker at the party. While spending time with her, he observes all the amazing luxuries of the party: a live orchestra, a cornucopia of food and imported fruits, and endless reserves of alcohol.

*The party's incredible luxury seems to be the fulfillment of the American Dream.*



Nick and Jordan decide to find their mysterious host, and wander into Gatsby's library. There they meet a short, somewhat drunk man who wears owl-like glasses (and whom Nick refers to as Owl-Eyes). Owl Eyes is amazed by Gatsby's books: the vastness and "realism" of Gatsby's book collection astounds him.

*The shallowness of the Roaring Twenties: the vast library of "realism" that Owl Eyes admires is full of books no one reads. The books contain "realism" but are just for show.*



Later, as Nick and Jordan sit outside watching the party, Nick strikes up a conversation with the man sitting next to him. The man thinks Nick looks familiar. They realize they may have crossed paths during World War I. The man introduces himself: he's Jay Gatsby. Gatsby has a dazzling smile, and refers to everyone as "old sport."

*Gatsby's enchanting smile is like a mask, just as the "fun" of the Roaring Twenties hides an emptiness beneath. Nick and Gatsby connect because they share a common past: the war.*



**Gatsby** also interests **Nick** because he remains apart from the party, as if his pleasure derives from observing the spectacle, not participating in it.

*Gatsby's distance suggests he has goals other than just fun and money.*



At almost two in the morning, a butler approaches **Jordan** and asks her to come meet with **Gatsby**. She returns a while later from this meeting and tells **Nick** that she has just heard a story that is "the most amazing thing."

*Until now Gatsby has been a smile and a bunch of rumors. Suddenly he has a story, a past, though Nick doesn't know what it is.*



After saying goodbye to **Gatsby** (who has to run off to receive a phone call from Philadelphia), **Nick** leaves the party. As he walks home, he sees a crowd gathered around an automobile accident. The drunken **Owl Eyes** has driven his car into a ditch and is trying to get it out. After very little effort, Owl Eyes gives up and walks away, leaving the car where it is.

*The crash is symbolic in two ways. It represents the reckless disregard of the Roaring Twenties and the inevitable plunge Fitzgerald sensed would end the boom. It also foreshadows a car accident later in the novel.*



**Nick** then describes his everyday life that summer to the reader: he wants it clear he does more than just go to parties. He works each day in the city, has a brief relationship with a woman from New Jersey, and then begins to date **Jordan Baker**. Yet though he's attracted to Jordan, he doesn't like her because she's dishonest and even cheats at golf. Nick then says that he is one of the only honest people he's ever known.

*Nick isn't comfortable with the carefree Roaring Twenties mentality of easy money and loose morals shared by other characters in the novel, including Jordan. He prefers substance, and generally seems honest. Yet having a relationship with someone he dislikes makes him not entirely honest.*



## CHAPTER 4

**Nick** observes some drunken women on Gatsby's lawn discussing Gatsby's mysterious identity, which includes all the usual rumors. Nick then lists a slew of the prominent guests who attended Gatsby's parties that summer, none of whom knew anything about their host.

*Another damning portrayal of the Roaring Twenties. Nick's list of Gatsby's guests reads like a who's who of 1922, but they're all just using Gatsby for his hospitality.*



**Nick** then describes accompanying **Gatsby** on a trip into the city for lunch. They ride to the city in Gatsby's monstrous cream-colored car. While he drives, Gatsby tells Nick about his past. Gatsby claims to be the son of wealthy parents from the "Midwest" town of San Francisco, to have graduated from Oxford, been a noted jewel collector in Europe and a decorated hero in the war. He even shows Nick a war medal, and then tells Nick to expect to hear a very sad story about him later in the afternoon.

*Gatsby's story is sketchy: he's a Midwesterner from San Francisco? It seems that in typical "new money" fashion, Gatsby entirely reinvented his identity after coming to New York and getting rich. Gatsby has achieved the American Dream of incredible wealth, but he had to give up his past to get it.*



**Gatsby** pays little attention to the speed limit, and a policeman pulls him over. Gatsby shows the officer a little card. The officer apologizes and lets him go.

*Gatsby acts like a superstar, above the law and the police.*



For lunch they meet a business partner of Gatsby's named **Meyer Wolfsheim**. Wolfsheim tells **Nick** that **Gatsby** is a man of "fine breeding" who would "never so much as look at a friend's wife." As for Wolfsheim, Gatsby tells Nick he's the man behind the fixing of the 1919 World Series. Nick begins to think Gatsby's might be involved in organized crime.

*Wolfsheim's connection to Gatsby is a sign of the corruption of the American Dream, "new money," and the Roaring Twenties. Wolfsheim equates wealth with "fine breeding," which is a very "new money" way of thinking.*



On the way out of the restaurant, **Nick** sees **Tom Buchanan** and introduces him to **Gatsby**. Gatsby appears embarrassed and leaves the scene without saying goodbye.

After lunch, **Nick** meets **Jordan** at the Plaza Hotel. She tells him the "amazing thing" that Gatsby had told her earlier: as a young man, Gatsby had a passionate romance with Daisy Fay, who is now **Daisy Buchanan**. During the war, when Daisy was not yet twenty, Gatsby met her while he was stationed in Louisville and the two of them fell in love. Her family prevented Daisy from leaving and marrying Gatsby, and one year later she married **Tom Buchanan**, a wealthy man from Chicago who gave her a string of pearls worth \$350,000 and a three-month honeymoon to the South Seas.

**Jordan** finishes the story later in Central Park. She says **Gatsby** never fell out of love with **Daisy** and bought his **giant mansion** in West Egg to be across the bay from her. He had hoped that the magnificent house would impress her and win back her love. **Nick** realizes that the **green light** he saw Gatsby gazing at sits at the end of Daisy's dock. Finally, Jordan adds that Gatsby has requested that Nick invite Daisy over to his house for tea. Then Gatsby will show up so that Daisy will have to see him, even if, as Gatsby fears, she doesn't want to.

*Foreshadows the conflict between both Tom and Gatsby in particular and "old money" and "new money" in general.*

1  3

*Now Gatsby's purpose is clear. He has achieved the Roaring Twenties version of the American Dream by becoming very rich. To achieve that wealth he reinvented himself, possibly became involved in criminal activities, and sacrificed his past. But he did it all in service of a purer, more traditional American Dream: real love.*

1  2  3  4

*Daisy chose the security of money over love. So Gatsby made himself rich: he thinks that money will win her back. Now his mansion, the symbol of "new money," is directly across the bay from her house, symbolic of "old money." The green light represents both Gatsby's dream of recreating his past with Daisy and the corrupt American Dream of extreme wealth.*

1  2  3  4

## CHAPTER 5

After returning from the city, **Nick** encounters **Gatsby** late at night on his front lawn. Gatsby seems nervous, and asks if Nick would like to take a swim in his pool. Nick realizes that Gatsby's is trying to convince him to set up the meeting with **Daisy**. Nick tells Gatsby he'll do it. Gatsby then offers Nick the chance to join a "confidential," probably illegal, business venture. Nick is offended at Gatsby trying to buy him off, but continues to discuss with Gatsby the plans for how and when to arrange the meeting.

**Gatsby** is nervous on the day of the meeting. Though it's raining he sends a man to cut **Nick's** grass, and also makes sure Nick's house is full of flowers. Gatsby disappears just as **Daisy** arrives. When Gatsby arrives at Nick's front door, he looks pale and deathlike, and knocks over a clock by mistake.

**Gatsby** and **Daisy** treat each other formally at first, and Gatsby's nerves threaten to overwhelm him. **Nick** leaves them alone for half an hour. When he returns they are blissfully happy. Gatsby then takes them on a tour of his **mansion**. In Gatsby's bedroom, as he tells Daisy about staring at the **green light** on her dock. Daisy breaks down crying while looking through Gatsby's vast collection of luxurious English shirts.

*Nick agrees to help Gatsby achieve his dream. Yet in that same moment Gatsby reveals how he has been corrupted by his pursuit of the money he feels is crucial to making his love with Daisy a reality. Instead of thanking Nick for his friendship and help, he offers him money. It's "new money" at its worst.*

1  2  3

*Gatsby's blunder with the clock is symbolic. He knocks over time just as he tries to recreate his past with Daisy.*

4

*Two ways to view Daisy's breakdown: 1) she realizes that Gatsby could have given her the life she chose by marrying Tom or 2) she realizes that she's most in love with money. Either way, she misses Gatsby describing his love for her.*

2  3

**Nick**, meanwhile, privately wonders how **Daisy** can possibly fulfill **Gatsby's** idealized vision of her. Nick reflects that over the years Gatsby has remained faithful to their love, while Daisy has given herself to another man she never loved in exchange for the security of wealth.

*Gatsby's focus on the past prevents him from seeing how Daisy has changed. In fact, it prevents him from even considering the possibility that she could have changed.*



They move from the house to Gatsby's well-manicured grounds. **Gatsby** remarks that mist on the bay blocks his view of Daisy's house and the single blinking **green light** on its dock.

*The light has no significance now that Gatsby seems to have achieved his dream: Daisy.*



Next, **Gatsby** gets one of his hangers-on, **Ewing Klipspringer**, to play the piano for the three of them. Gatsby holds **Daisy's** hand and she whispers something to him that seems to stir his emotions. **Nick**, sensing that they no longer realize he's there, leaves them, walking out alone into the rain.

*Once Gatsby achieves his dream, he becomes absorbed in it, and forgets Nick. A critique of "new money" values.*



## CHAPTER 6

**Nick** notes that newspaper reporters soon started to appear at **Gatsby's** home to try to interview him. He then gives Gatsby's biographical details, the truth behind both the public rumors and Gatsby's own claims: born Jay Gatz on a farm in North Dakota around 1900; changed his name to Jay Gatsby at age seventeen; spends more than a year on the south shore of Lake Superior clamming and fishing; attends and drops out of St. Olaf College in southern Minnesota after two weeks; meets **Dan Cody**, a fifty-year-old multimillionaire expert in mining and precious metals, and ends up as his assistant for five years aboard the *Tuolomee*, Cody's boat; Cody dies and leaves Gatsby \$25,000, which he never receives due to a legal technicality; Gatsby dedicates himself to becoming rich and successful.

*Like so many who sought and achieved the American Dream during the Roaring Twenties, Gatsby is a self-made man. He literally created himself, even changing his name in order to become a "success." Gatsby's story is not as unique as all the rumors about him suggest. Instead, he represents a typical member of the rags-to-riches "new money" class.*



For a few weeks, **Nick** doesn't see **Gatsby**. Then, one afternoon, Gatsby turns up at his house. A few moments later, **Tom Buchanan** also shows up unexpectedly with some friends, the Sloanes. Gatsby tells Tom that he knows his wife, and invites Tom and his friends to stay for dinner. They say they can't stay, but invite Gatsby to dinner. Gatsby doesn't realize that the invitation was just to be polite, and accepts.

*The conflict between Gatsby and Tom, new money and old money, continues to build. Here, Gatsby fails to understand the "old money" behavior of insincere politeness; he mistakes it for actual politeness. "Old Money" hides its cruelty, and calls it good manners.*



The next Saturday night, **Tom** and **Daisy** come to a party at **Gatsby's**. The party strikes **Nick** as particularly unpleasant. Tom is disdainful of the party, and though Daisy and Gatsby dance together she also seems to have a bad time. As Tom and Daisy are leaving, Tom says he suspects Gatsby's fortune comes from bootlegging, which Nick denies. Daisy says Gatsby made his money from drug stores that he built up himself.

*Nick has clearly come to sympathize with Gatsby against Tom. Tom's disdain for the party is to be expected. But that Daisy has a bad time suggests that Gatsby might not so easily be able to recreate their love. There may be too many obstacles.*



After the party, **Gatsby** is depressed. He suspects that **Daisy** neither enjoyed the party nor understands the depth of his feelings for her. **Nick** reminds him that the past is impossible to repeat, but Gatsby disagrees. He says he will return everything to the way it was before.

*Gatsby believes in the future and the American Dream, and believes that money can buy both.*



**Nick** recalls a memory that **Gatsby** once shared with him about the first time Gatsby kissed **Daisy**. Nick calls Gatsby's sentimentality about history "appalling" and reflects that in that kiss Gatsby's dreams of success focused solely on Daisy. She became an idealized dream for Gatsby and the center of his life.

*Nick calls Gatsby's sentimentality appalling because it has made Daisy into a symbol of perfection, an idealized vision to which Gatsby has sacrificed his identity.*



## CHAPTER 7

Gatsby's house becomes much quieter, and his party's come to an end. **Nick** visits, and learns that **Gatsby** ended the parties because he no longer needed them to attract Daisy. He also learns that Gatsby also fired all of his servants because Daisy thought they might gossip about their relationship (she now visits often during the afternoon). He replaced the servants with some of Wolfsheim's men.

*As soon as he gets Daisy, Gatsby no longer needs "new money" parties. But Gatsby can't escape the way he corrupted himself in his quest to become rich enough to win Daisy, as the presence of Wolfsheim's men shows.*



On the hottest day of the summer, **Daisy** invites **Nick** and **Gatsby** to lunch with her, **Tom**, and **Jordan**. At one point, while Tom is out of the room, Daisy kisses Gatsby on the lips and says she loves him. But the next instant the nurse leads in her young daughter, **Pammy**. Daisy basically ignores the child, but Gatsby keeps glancing at the little girl in surprise.

*When Daisy kisses Gatsby it seems that he's won. But even Gatsby senses that Daisy's daughter symbolizes a shared past between Daisy and Tom that Gatsby can't touch.*



When **Tom** and **Gatsby** take a tour around the house, Gatsby points out that his house is directly across the sound from Tom's house.

*The opposition of the houses shows the rivalry between Gatsby and Tom.*



The lunch is awkward, at least in part because of the intense heat. At one point **Daisy** asks what they should do with the rest of the day and the next thirty years of their lives. She cries out that she wants them all to go to the city. Daisy and **Gatsby** lock eyes, and Daisy comments that Gatsby always looks like an advertisement. **Tom** can see in Daisy's eyes that Daisy and Gatsby are in love. He suddenly agrees that they should all go to the city.

*Tom discovers Daisy and Gatsby's affair. Daisy's comparing Gatsby to a man in an advertisement is her way of saying she loves him. For Daisy, corrupted by the consumer culture of the Roaring Twenties, love is just another material thing that can be advertised.*



Before they leave for the city, **Nick** and **Gatsby** have a moment alone, in which they agree that Daisy is indiscreet. Gatsby comments that Daisy's voice is "full of money."

*Gatsby seems to half-sense that Daisy has been corrupted.*



**Tom** insists on driving Gatsby's big yellow car. **Gatsby** and **Daisy** travel alone in Tom's coupe, while Tom drives **Nick** and **Jordan**. It's clear Tom now knows about the affair between Gatsby and Daisy. Gatsby's car is low on gas, though, and Tom pulls in to **Wilson's** Garage in the **Valley of Ashes**.

*The car swap is a crucial plot point, and comes about through Tom and Gatsby's conflict, old money versus new.*



While selling him the gas, **Wilson** inquires about buying **Tom's** other car to resell it. He says he's trying to raise money to finance the move **west** that he has planned for him and his wife **Myrtle**. Tom is startled at the imminent loss of his mistress.

*Wilson has his own dream of moving west. With Daisy's affair and Myrtle about to go west with Wilson, Tom's world now really is falling apart.*



**Wilson** adds that he has "wised up" recently and became physically ill upon discovering that his wife has been living a double life. **Nick** realizes that Wilson has figured out his wife is having an affair but doesn't know that **Tom** is the other man. He also thinks that Wilson and Tom are identical, except that Tom is healthy and Wilson sick.

*Nick sees across class lines to the fundamental similarity between Tom and Wilson. Wealth does not make Tom any better than Wilson, it just keeps him healthier and stronger.*



**Nick** notices the haunting eyes of **Doctor T. J. Eckleburg** looming in the distance, then spots **Myrtle Wilson** staring down from the windows above the garage at **Jordan Baker**, whom she seems to have mistaken for **Daisy**, her rival in love.

*Myrtle seeing Tom with Gatsby's car is another crucial plot point. Myrtle's despair at seeing Tom with his "wife" is linked to T. J. Eckleburg's dead eyes.*



In the city, the group takes a suite at the Plaza Hotel near Central Park. Soon after arriving, **Tom** challenges Gatsby's history as an "Oxford man." When **Gatsby** successfully answers the question, Tom then asks what kind of a split Gatsby's trying to cause between Tom and his wife. **Daisy** tries and fails to quiet Tom.

*The confrontation between Tom and Gatsby, old money and new money, comes out into the open. Daisy does not want the confrontation to happen. She likes things the way they are.*



**Gatsby** says **Daisy** never loved **Tom** and has only ever loved him. Tom protests, but Daisy says it's true.

*Gatsby's sacrifice appears to have been worth it.*



Yet when **Tom** asks her to think about their history together, **Daisy** admits that she did love Tom in the past, she just loved **Gatsby** too. Gatsby is stunned.

*Gatsby considers Daisy's only past to be the single month she shared with him.*



**Tom** pushes his advantage: he reveals that **Gatsby** really is involved with organized crime, such as bootlegging. All this terrifies **Daisy**, who begs that they leave and go home. Tom, realizing he's won, tells her to go back with **Gatsby**, who won't "annoy" her anymore.

*Gatsby corrupted himself and his dream to win Daisy's heart. Now that corruption scares her away. Tom sends Daisy off with Gatsby as a final insult.*



**Nick** remembers at that moment that the day is his thirtieth birthday. He says that a "menacing" new decade stretched before him. In **Tom's** car heading back toward Long Island (**Gatsby** and **Daisy** took Gatsby's car), **Nick** observes that unlike Daisy, people like **Jordan Baker** know better than to hold onto irretrievable dreams. Nick describes the car he rides in as driving toward death.

*Nick envies those not haunted by the past (though he's wrong about Jordan). Nick's wariness about the future and his comment about the car headed toward death foreshadow a death in the novel and the end of the Roaring Twenties.*



The point of view shifts to that of **Michaelis**, a Greek man who runs the coffee shop next to George Wilson's garage, and who, **Nick**, says, was the chief witness in the police investigation: that afternoon, Michaelis saw **Wilson** sick in his office and heard **Myrtle** struggling upstairs. Wilson told him he had locked her up until they moved **west** the following day.

*Wilson tries to make his dream of a new life with Myrtle a reality. (The shift in point of view makes sense in the novel because Nick can recreate Michaelis's experience by reading or viewing Michaelis's testimony.)*



That evening, though, **Michaelis** saw **Myrtle** shout at **Wilson** downstairs and then run into the street where she was struck and killed by a passing car that may have been light **green**.

*Nearly every character's "Dream" dies with Myrtle's death.*



The point of view shifts back to **Nick: Tom**, Nick, and **Jordan** arrive at the scene in their car. Both Tom and **Wilson** are overwhelmed by grief at Myrtle's death. Tom suspects that it was **Gatsby** who hit Myrtle.

*Tom realizes that Myrtle saw Gatsby's car and thought it was Tom's car because he had been driving it earlier.*



**Tom**, **Jordan**, and **Nick** drive to the Buchanan's house. Tom calls a taxi for Nick. As Nick waits for it outside, he sees **Gatsby** hiding in the bushes. Gatsby tells him that **Daisy** was driving the car and that he tried to stop the accident, but was too late. He says he'll take responsibility for it. He's less interested in what happened to **Myrtle** though, than in his fear that Tom will harm Daisy.

*Daisy caused the crash, but just as old money hides its corruption behind a veneer of good manners, Daisy hides behind Gatsby. Gatsby dedicated his life to winning Daisy's heart. Now he only cares about her and ignores Myrtle's death.*



**Nick** goes and checks on Daisy through the window, and sees **Tom** and **Daisy** sitting on either side of some fried chicken, reconciled. They are not exactly happy, Nick thinks, but not exactly unhappy either.

*Daisy chooses the security of Tom over Gatsby's love, just as she did while Gatsby was away at the war.*



**Nick** tells **Gatsby** everything is quiet, but Gatsby still refuses to leave. Nick leaves him "watching over nothing."

*Gatsby can't give up his dream, even though it's dead.*



## CHAPTER 8

**Nick** visits **Gatsby** for breakfast the next morning. Gatsby tells Nick that **Daisy** never came outside the previous night, but rejects Nick's advice to forget Daisy and leave Long Island. He tells Nick about the early days of his relationship with Daisy. He remembers how taken he was by her wealth, her enormous house, and even by the fact that other men had loved her. To be with her he let her believe he was of the same class as her. One night they slept together, and he felt he had married her. Then he left for World War I. Daisy waited for a while and then drifted away from him and into marriage with **Tom Buchanan**.

*Gatsby's story explains his actions. He was in love with the idea of Daisy: Daisy's love gave Gatsby an identity as a young man, and made his manufactured "new money" identity legitimate. To preserve that identity, he had to have her. Note that "old money" types like Tom could avoid the war while poor nobodies like Gatsby couldn't.*



**Gatsby** and **Nick** finish breakfast. As they walk together, the gardener tells Gatsby he's going to drain the pool. But Gatsby tells him to wait. He says he hasn't used it once all summer, and would like to. On his way out, Nick tells Gatsby that he's worth more than all of the "rotten crowd... put together." Gatsby smiles broadly.

*Nick always disapproved of the way Gatsby lived his life, but he respected the purity of Gatsby's dream. He certainly preferred it to the "rotten crowd" that used Gatsby.*



At work that day, **Nick** falls asleep. The phone wakes him: it's **Jordan**. Their conversation quickly turns unpleasant and one of them hangs up on the other. Nick finds that he doesn't care.

*The events of last night have convinced Nick to cut ties with the old money world of Tom and Daisy.*



Next, **Nick** relates what happened at Wilson's garage after Myrtle's death. **Wilson** spent all night talking to **Michaelis** about **Myrtle**, revealing that she had a lover and his suspicion that the man driving the car must have been her lover because she ran out to meet it. He told Michaelis how he had confronted her and told her she was sinning in the eyes of God. It was near dawn at this point, and Wilson was staring into the eyes of **T. J. Eckleburg** when he mentioned God. Wilson says he has a way of finding out who was driving the car and later that morning disappeared from the garage.

*Myrtle's death destroys Wilson's dream, leaving him nothing. The Roaring Twenties conflict between old and new money has destroyed him: he can't even distinguish an advertisement from God. Wilson's "way" of finding out who killed Myrtle is mysterious. Fitzgerald is building tension.*

1 2 3 4

At two, **Gatsby** went for a swim, leaving word that he was to be alerted if any phone call came. None came. Later that afternoon, **Nick** and some of Wolfsheim's men working at Gatsby's house discover Gatsby, shot dead in his pool. **Wilson's** dead body is close by lying in the grass.

*The recklessness of the Roaring Twenties destroys every relationship: Myrtle and Wilson, Myrtle and Tom, Daisy and Gatsby, Jordan and Nick. Only "old money" prevails: Daisy returns to Tom.*

1 2 3 4

## CHAPTER 9

It's now two years later and **Nick** is recounting his memories of the days shortly after **Gatsby's** death. Wild rumors about Gatsby's relationship with **Myrtle** and **Wilson** swirl, and reporters and other gossips prowl around the **mansion** looking for stories.

*In death, Gatsby is just as he was in life: little more than a rumor spread by Roaring Twenties "new money" socialites.*

1 2 3 4

**Nick** finds himself the primary contact for all matters relating to **Gatsby** because nobody else wanted to be. **Daisy** and **Tom** disappear with no forwarding address, and **Meyer Wolfsheim** says he has pressing business and can't help at the present time.

*The abandonment of Gatsby reveals the emptiness of the age. Wolfsheim and the Buchanans are all corrupt at heart.*

1 2 3 4

Three days after **Gatsby's** death, a telegram arrives from his father, **Henry C. Gatz**. Mr. Gatz arrives in person at Gatsby's **mansion** a few days later. He appears old, dressed in cheap clothing, and is devastated by his son's death, who he believed was destined for great things. He asks **Nick** what his relationship was to Gatsby. Nick says they were close friends.

*Gatz's appearance confirms that Gatsby rose from humble beginnings to achieve the American Dream. Yet in the process he left behind his father, who truly loves him. He gave up his past.*

1 2 3 4

That night, **Klipspringer** calls. **Nick** tells him about the funeral. But Klipspringer says he can't attend because he has to attend a picnic in Greenwich, Connecticut. Klipspringer then asks if Nick could send to him a pair of tennis shoes he had left at Gatsby's mansion.

*Gatsby's "new money" friends are shallow, emotionless parasites who care only about "fun."*

1 2 3 4

**Gatsby's** funeral takes place the next day. In an effort to assemble more people to attend the service, **Nick** goes to New York to try to retrieve **Wolfsheim** in person. At his sketchy office, Wolfsheim discusses memories of his early days of friendship with Gatsby, whom he claims to have raised up "out of nothing." Nick tries to convince him to attend the funeral, but he refuses, citing a policy he has of not getting mixed up with murdered men.

*Wolfsheim exhibits the worst qualities of the "new money" class: he is corrupt, selfish, and callous. By claiming to have raised Gatsby up from nothing, Wolfsheim essentially claims that money is everything.*

1 2 3 4

**Nick** returns to **Gatsby's** house for the funeral. Only, **Nick**, **Henry Gatz**, and, to **Nick's** surprise, **Owl Eyes** show up. Owl Eyes pities **Gatsby** as a "poor son-of-a-bitch."

**Nick** now describes *The Great Gatsby* as a story of the **West** since many of the key characters (**Daisy**, **Tom**, **Nick**, **Jordan**, **Gatsby**) involved were not from the **East**. He says that after **Gatsby's** death, the East became haunted for him.

**Nick** goes to **Jordan Baker's** house to set things straight with her. She tells him she is engaged to another man, though **Nick** doesn't really believe her. Then she accuses **Nick** of being dishonest with her. **Nick** leaves, feeling angry and sorry.

Later that October, **Nick** runs into **Tom Buchanan** on Fifth Avenue in New York. He refuses to shake **Tom's** hand, and learns that **Tom** was the one who told **George Wilson** that **Gatsby** ran over **Myrtle**. **Tom** adds also that he cried when he gave up the apartment in which he conducted his affair with **Myrtle**. **Nick** doesn't tell **Tom** that **Daisy** was at the wheel. He describes **Tom** and **Daisy** as careless people who destroy things and then retreat back into their money.

*Owl Eyes' appearance at the funeral suggests that Gatsby, like the novels Owl Eyes admired, was a mere ornament.*

1  3

*The American Dream had long involved people moving west, to find work and opportunity. The novel documents a time when the tide had shifted the other way, as Westerners sought to join those making money in financial industries like "bonds" in the East. But now Nick seems to see such searching after wealth and status in the east as corrupt and deadening, as people returning to their past only to find ghosts.*

2

*Nick thought his relationship with Jordan was superficial. But Jordan implies she really loved him. Nick, too, it appears, was corrupted by the East.*

1  2

*Tom doesn't even know that Daisy was really driving the car. Tom is completely blind to the emptiness of his old money world. He even sees himself as a victim for losing Myrtle, his mistress. His corruption is complete.*

3

On his last night in West Egg before moving back home to Minnesota, **Nick** walks down to **Gatsby's** beach and looks out over Long Island sound. He wonders how the first settlers to America must have felt staring out at the "green breast" of the new continent, and imagines **Gatsby's** similar wonder when he realized that tiny blinking green light across the bay belonged to **Daisy Buchanan**.

**Nick** describes **Gatsby** as a believer in the future, a man of promise and faith. He compares everyone to **Gatsby**, moving forward with their arms outstretched like **Gatsby** on the shore, like boats beating upstream against the current, looking to the future but searching for a lost past.

*Nick connects Gatsby's American Dream of winning Daisy's love to the American Dream of the first settlers coming to America. Both dreams were noble, and ultimately much more complicated and dangerous than anyone could have predicted.*

2

*Nick sees Gatsby as symbolic of everyone in America, each with his or her own great dream. And each dream an effort to regain a past already lost.*

4

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### MLA CITATION

Kestler, Justin. "The Great Gatsby." LitCharts. LitCharts LLC, 22 Jul 2013. Web. 26 Oct 2016.

### CHICAGO MANUAL CITATION

Kestler, Justin. "The Great Gatsby." LitCharts LLC, July 22, 2013. Retrieved October 26, 2016. <http://www.litcharts.com/lit/the-great-gatsby>.