English III

Mr. Fox

The Great Gatsby Discussion Questions

Introduction to the 1920s Video

1. Describe the clash of societal values in 1920s America as presented in the video.
2. List two ways in which the 1920s represented a departure from America’s cultural past.
3. Some would argue that the 1920s were a time period where African Americans gained a higher social status in American society. Do you agree or disagree with this statement, based on what you have seen and read? Explain your answer.
4. List one invention that helped shape American culture in the 1920s, and explain how it did so.
5. How does jazz music, popular during the 1920s, symbolize the mood of Americans during this time period?

Chapter One

1. Why does Nick move from Minnesota to New York? What is his vision of the American Dream?

2. The first time Nick sees his neighbor, he is standing on his lawn, reaching his arm out toward the water in the bay. When Nick looks out at the water, all he sees is a distant green light which might mark the end of a dock. The first image of a character in a novel is significant. What thoughts do you have about Nick’s neighbor based on this scene?

3. What does Daisy’s statement, “I hope she’ll be a fool – that’s the best thing a girl can be in this world, a beautiful little fool,” reveal about the way she views her own life?
4. What do Daisy’s and Jordan’s statements about Tom reveal about him, and what do they reveal about Daisy? Explain your answer.

5. What does Nick’s opinion of Tom and Daisy seem to be at this point in the novel? Support your answer.

6. What is your opinion of Daisy Buchanan, based on what you have read so far? Explain your answer.

Chapter Two

1. Explain how Fitzgerald uses the Eyes of Dr. T.J. Eckleburg, a billboard, as a metaphor.

2. The story is told from the point of view of Nick Carraway, who is from the Minnesota, and has traveled to the East (New York) to achieve his American Dream. How does this point-of-view affect the story? How would the story be different if it were told from Daisy’s point-of-view, or Tom’s?

3. Nick begins the story in chapter one by saying that Gatsby represents everything he scorns, but that he exempts Gatsby completely from his usual judgments, and says that Gatsby’s personality was nothing short of “gorgeous.” Why would an author start a story this way? Consider the roles of judgment and storytelling in your answer.

4. How is the character Myrtle Wilson used as a metaphor for those who are pursuing the American Dream in the East?

5. During the scene at the Morningside Heights apartment, how does Nick initially react to the behavior of the other characters? How does he end up behaving differently from the way he acted back home, and why is this significant?

6. A motif is a recurrent theme, subject, character type, or image that becomes a unifying element in a text. Examine the characters at the Morningside Heights apartment, and also
the character of Daisy Buchanan. What do they have in common? How are they examples of the motif of pursuit of the American Dream?

7. Briefly describe each character at this point in the novel. Include a few facts and your opinion of each character:
   a. Nick Carraway
   b. Tom Buchanan
   c. Daisy Buchanan
   d. Myrtle Wilson
   e. George Wilson
   f. Jordan Baker

8. How are the characters George and Tom opposites of one another?

9. Give an example of how two characters in the story have different points-of-view on the same topic. Which character does the author seem to want you to agree with? Explain your answer.

10. Write an original metaphor that you would use to describe your own life or a situation you are in right now. Avoid clichés.

Chapters 3 and 4

1. What do you think Nick means when he describes Jay Gatsby in this way: “He had one of those rare smiles with a quality of eternal reassurance in it, that you may come across four or five times in life.”?

2. Describe the relationship between Daisy Buchanan and Jay Gatsby that occurred years before the events of the story.
3. Give one example of irony in the character Jay Gatsby, or an example of something ironic about the party at Gatsby’s mansion in chapter three.

4. What is the tone of Nick’s description of Gatsby’s party in chapter three? What does his attitude seem to be toward the people at the party? Support your answer using the text.

5. How does Nick’s attitude toward Gatsby begin to change in chapter four? Support your answer using the text.

6. The first time we saw Jay Gatsby was in chapter one, when Nick simply knew him as his neighbor. In this scene, Gatsby was looking out over the water with his arms stretched out toward a green light. Where was this light coming from? How is the green light symbolic of the American Dream?

Chapter Five

1. What does Nick say when Gatsby offers him a side job that wouldn’t require much work but would be very profitable?

2. Based on Nick’s response, what is he feeling and/or thinking about the job offer?

3. What type of work do you think Gatsby has in mind for Nick?

4. How does Klipspringer respond when Gatsby asks him to play piano for them?

5. What does Klipspringer’s response reveal about his apparent arrangement with Gatsby?

Chapter Six

1. What is Gatsby’s response when Nick warns him that “You can’t repeat the past?”

2. What does Gatsby’s response reveal about his character?

3. How is Nick’s warning to Gatsby symbolized by the green light?
4. In your opinion, is the reunion between Gatsby and Daisy a good thing or a bad thing? Explain your answer.

5. In this story, Gatsby “comes clean” with Nick, telling the story of how he became wealthy. Does his story seem believable? Does it change your view of Gatsby? Explain your answers.

6. Explain how Tom Buchanan and George Wilson are in the same situation, and why this is ironic.

7. Explain how the geography of this novel is symbolic. Consider that Nick, Daisy, Tom, and Gatsby are all from the West, and have moved East to achieve the American Dream, or discuss the differences between East Egg and West Egg, and/or the Valley of Ashes, and how each symbolizes some part of America or the American Dream.

8. Explain the difference between what Gatsby appears to be on the outside, and what he really is on the inside, based on your perception of his character.

9. During the 1920’s jazz and blues music were popular throughout the country. Listen to the blues music played in class. If you were to write a blues song from the perspective of a character in this novel, which character would you choose, and what would the title be? (As an optional project, you could write a full song, and even perform it).

Chapters 7 and 8

1. Describe the appearance of Gatsby’s mansion at the beginning of chapter 7. Why is this description so different from how the house used to look?

2. What change comes over Daisy as Tom and Gatsby argue over who will win her love?

3. Where do Nick, Tom, and Jordan stop for gas in chapter 7?
4. Driving back to Long Island after the argument between Tom and Gatsby, Nick, Tom, and Jordan discover a frightening scene on the border of the Valley of Ashes. What has happened?

5. At the end of chapter 8, Gatsby sends Nick to check on Daisy, afraid that Tom will abuse her. When Nick arrives at the Buchanan house, what are Tom and Daisy doing?

6. What does the hysterical George Wilson believe about the “Eyes of Dr. T.J. Eckleburg” on the billboard in chapter 8?

7. What is George Wilson’s understanding of the accident involving the yellow car?

8. How does George’s perception of the accident compare with what actually happened?

9. What violent action does George take in chapter 8, and why?

10. Whose body is found on the lawn at Gatsby’s mansion?

11. Explain how the position and posture of the body found in Gatsby’s pool is symbolic.

Chapter 9

1. The death scenes in chapters 7 and 8 have little description. What effect did this have on your understanding of the events? Why might Fitzgerald have chosen to use so little description at such an important point in the novel?

2. Why does Nick move back West at the end of the novel? What does this suggest about Fitzgerald’s idea of the American Dream?

3. How has the green light been symbolic of the American Dream?

4. Nick says that Gatsby wasn’t a bad person, but “it’s what preyed on Gatsby” that was to blame for the tragedy. What does he mean by this?

5. Which character in the novel do you most relate to, and why?

6. In your opinion, who or what is to blame for the tragedies in this novel?
7. Do you think Fitzgerald’s portrayal of the American Dream is accurate? Explain your answer.