

The Great Gatsby

by F. Scott Fitzgerald · Language: EN

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Overview

The Great Gatsby, published in 1925, is F. Scott Fitzgerald's masterpiece of American literature, set in the summer of 1922 on Long Island's North Shore. The novel is narrated by Nick Carraway, a young Yale graduate and World War I veteran who moves to West Egg, a less fashionable area, and becomes entangled in the lives of his wealthy and mysterious neighbor Jay Gatsby and his cousin Daisy Buchanan, who lives across the bay in the more aristocratic East Egg. Gatsby, a self-made millionaire known for his lavish parties, is revealed to be hopelessly in love with Daisy, whom he met and lost five years earlier. The story unfolds as Gatsby attempts to recreate the past, using Nick as a go-between to reunite with Daisy, leading to a tragic chain of events that exposes the emptiness and moral decay beneath the glittering surface of the Jazz Age.

The novel's central arc moves from the intoxicating promise of the American Dream to its brutal disillusionment. Gatsby's wealth, acquired through bootlegging and other shady dealings, is ultimately a means to an end: winning Daisy's love. However, Daisy, though attracted to Gatsby's wealth and devotion, is ultimately a creature of her class, choosing the safety and status of her husband, Tom Buchanan, a brutish and unfaithful aristocrat. The climax occurs in a New York hotel room where Gatsby forces a confrontation between Daisy and Tom, after which Daisy, driving Gatsby's car, accidentally kills Tom's mistress, Myrtle Wilson. Gatsby takes the blame, and Myrtle's husband, George Wilson, murders Gatsby in his pool, believing him to be the driver. The novel ends with Gatsby's funeral, attended only by Nick and Gatsby's father, and Nick's disillusioned return to the Midwest, reflecting on the futility of Gatsby's dream and the carelessness of the rich.

The Great Gatsby matters because it is a profound critique of the American Dream, exploring themes of class, wealth, love, and the impossibility of escaping one's past. Its lyrical prose, symbolic imagery (the green light, the eyes of Dr. T.J. Eckleburg, the valley of ashes), and tragic hero have made it a staple of high school and college curricula, and it is widely considered one of the greatest American novels. Its relevance endures because it captures the universal human longing for something unattainable and the moral compromises people make in its pursuit.

Key Takeaways

- The American Dream is often an illusion; Gatsby's wealth cannot buy him the love or social acceptance he craves.

- The rich are careless and destructive, as seen in Tom and Daisy's ability to retreat into their money after causing tragedy.
- You cannot repeat the past; Gatsby's attempt to recreate his romance with Daisy is doomed from the start.
- Social class and old money versus new money create insurmountable barriers, even in a supposedly egalitarian society.
- The green light symbolizes the elusive nature of hope and desire, always just out of reach.
- Nick Carraway's moral awakening shows the importance of judgment and integrity in a corrupt world.
- The novel warns against the dangers of obsession and the idealization of another person.
- The Jazz Age's glamour masks deep moral decay and spiritual emptiness.

Chapter Summaries

Chapter 1

Nick Carraway introduces himself as a man who reserves judgment, and recounts his move to West Egg in the summer of 1922. He visits his cousin Daisy and her husband Tom Buchanan in East Egg, where he meets Jordan Baker. Tom reveals his affair with Myrtle Wilson, and Nick sees his neighbor Gatsby for the first time, standing on his lawn, reaching toward a green light across the bay.

Chapter 2

Nick accompanies Tom to New York, where they stop in the valley of ashes to meet Tom's mistress, Myrtle Wilson, at her husband's garage. They go to an apartment in Manhattan for a party, where Myrtle talks about her unhappy marriage and Tom's social status. The party ends with Tom breaking Myrtle's nose when she repeatedly says Daisy's name.

Chapter 3

Nick attends one of Gatsby's lavish parties, where he is one of the few guests actually invited. He meets Gatsby, who is charming and mysterious, and learns that Gatsby is a self-made man. Jordan Baker tells Nick a rumor that Gatsby was a German spy, and later, Nick and Jordan leave, but not before Nick notices Gatsby's intense, watchful presence.

Chapter 4

Gatsby drives Nick to lunch in New York, telling him an elaborate story about his past, claiming to be from a wealthy Midwestern family and an Oxford graduate. Nick is skeptical. Later, Jordan tells Nick the truth: Gatsby and Daisy were in love in 1917, but Daisy married Tom while Gatsby was overseas. Gatsby bought his house to be near Daisy, and he wants Nick to arrange a reunion.

Chapter 5

Nick invites Daisy to tea at his house, and Gatsby arrives, nervous and awkward. The reunion is initially strained, but after Nick leaves them alone, they rekindle their romance. Gatsby shows Daisy around his mansion, and they are both overwhelmed by the material proof of his success. Nick notes that Gatsby's dream of Daisy seems to have been achieved, but he senses something is off.

Chapter 6

Nick recounts Gatsby's true origins: James Gatz of North Dakota, who reinvented himself as Jay Gatsby after meeting Dan Cody, a wealthy copper magnate. Gatsby and Daisy's affair becomes more open, and Tom begins to suspect. At a party at Gatsby's house, Tom and Daisy attend, but Daisy is disgusted by the vulgarity. Tom and Gatsby have a tense exchange, and Gatsby realizes his dream is slipping away.

Chapter 7

Gatsby fires his servants and stops throwing parties. On a hot day, the group goes to New York, where Gatsby confronts Tom in a hotel room, forcing Daisy to choose between them. Daisy says she loves Gatsby but cannot deny she loved Tom. Tom reveals Gatsby's bootlegging, and Daisy, distraught, drives Gatsby's car home, accidentally killing Myrtle Wilson. Gatsby takes the blame, and Tom and Daisy leave, while Gatsby watches over Daisy's house.

Chapter 8

Nick visits Gatsby the next morning, and Gatsby tells him about his past with Daisy, including how he waited for her after the war. Nick urges Gatsby to leave, but he refuses. George Wilson, having traced the car to Gatsby, arrives at Gatsby's mansion and shoots Gatsby in his pool, then kills himself. Nick finds Gatsby's body floating in the pool, and the green light is extinguished.

Chapter 9

Nick takes charge of Gatsby's funeral, but almost no one attends. Daisy and Tom have left town, and Gatsby's business associates are absent. Gatsby's father, Henry Gatz, arrives and shows Nick a schedule Gatsby wrote as a boy, revealing his ambition. Nick reflects on the emptiness of Gatsby's dream and the carelessness of the rich, and decides to return to the Midwest, disillusioned with the East.

Themes

- The American Dream
- Class and wealth
- Love and obsession
- The past and memory

- Moral decay
- The carelessness of the rich

Notable Quotes

- "So we beat on, boats against the current, borne back ceaselessly into the past." — The final line of the novel, spoken by Nick as he reflects on Gatsby's futile dream and the human struggle to move forward while being pulled back by the past.
- "Gatsby believed in the green light, the orgastic future that year by year recedes before us." — Nick's meditation near the end of the novel, connecting Gatsby's hope to the universal human pursuit of an ever-elusive future.
- "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." — Nick's bitter assessment of Tom and Daisy after Gatsby's death, highlighting their moral irresponsibility.
- "Can't repeat the past? Why of course you can!" — Gatsby's reply to Nick when Nick tells him he cannot repeat the past, revealing Gatsby's delusion about reclaiming Daisy.
- "Her voice is full of money." — Gatsby's observation about Daisy's voice, which Nick interprets as a sign of her privileged, materialistic nature.
- "I hope she'll be a fool—that's the best thing a girl can be in this world, a beautiful little fool." — Daisy's comment to Nick and Jordan about her daughter, reflecting her cynical view of women's limited options in a patriarchal society.

Frequently Asked Questions

What is The Great Gatsby about?

The Great Gatsby is about Jay Gatsby, a self-made millionaire who throws lavish parties in hopes of attracting his former love, Daisy Buchanan, who is now married to the wealthy but brutish Tom Buchanan. Narrated by Nick Carraway, the novel explores themes of wealth, class, and the American Dream, culminating in a tragic ending that reveals the emptiness of Gatsby's obsession.

Is The Great Gatsby worth reading?

Yes, The Great Gatsby is widely considered one of the greatest American novels. Its concise yet powerful prose, memorable characters, and timeless themes of love, ambition, and disillusionment make it a rewarding read. It offers a sharp critique of the Jazz Age and the American Dream, and its symbolism and imagery continue to resonate with modern readers.

How does The Great Gatsby end?

Spoiler: Daisy, driving Gatsby's car, accidentally kills Myrtle Wilson. Gatsby takes the blame to protect Daisy. Myrtle's husband, George Wilson, tracks down Gatsby and shoots him in his pool, then kills himself. Gatsby dies alone, with only Nick and his father at the funeral. Tom and Daisy escape, and Nick, disillusioned, returns to the Midwest.

Who should read *The Great Gatsby*?

Anyone interested in classic American literature, the Jazz Age, or stories about the American Dream's dark side. It is a staple in high school and college curricula, but its themes of class, love, and moral decay appeal to adult readers as well. If you enjoy character-driven narratives with rich symbolism, this book is for you.

How long does it take to read *The Great Gatsby*?

The Great Gatsby is a short novel, about 180 pages. At an average reading speed of 250 words per minute, it takes roughly 3 to 4 hours to read. Most readers can finish it in a single sitting or over a weekend.