



MTC STUDY GUIDE

# The Great Gatsby

## Overview and Historical Context

### Introduction To the Play

Literature to Life has adapted F. Scott Fitzgerald's *The Great Gatsby* into a monodrama—a dynamic, one-actor performance—and added it to their renowned Signature Performance touring series. Set in the vibrant Jazz Age and Prohibition Era, this timeless story unfolds in Long Island and New York City, capturing the decadence and disillusionment of the 1920s. First published in 1925, *The Great Gatsby* is celebrated as one of the greatest works in American literature, offering a sharp critique of the American Dream. Through its exploration of wealth, ambition, love, and the socio-cultural upheavals of the era, Fitzgerald's novel continues to resonate with modern audiences as a powerful reflection on human aspirations and the costs of success.



#### KEYWORD

**A monodrama**, or “one-man show,” is a theatrical performance where a single actor portrays all characters, carrying the entire play. How do you think one actor can portray all the characters?

### 2. Plot Summary

- **Setting:** Long Island, New York, and New York City during the summer of 1922.

### 3. Main Characters

- **Jay Gatsby:** A wealthy and mysterious man known for his extravagant parties and unrequited love for Daisy Buchanan.
- **Nick Carraway:** The novel's narrator and Gatsby's neighbor, who becomes friends with Gatsby and observes the events of the story.

- **Daisy Buchanan:** The beautiful and shallow cousin of Nick Carraway, and the object of Gatsby's affection.
- **Tom Buchanan:** Daisy's wealthy and arrogant husband who has an affair with Myrtle Wilson.
- **Jordan Baker:** A professional golfer and Nick's love interest, who is also Daisy's friend.
- **Myrtle Wilson:** Tom Buchanan's mistress, who is unhappily married to George Wilson, a mechanic and owner of a garage.

### 4. Historical Context

- **The Roaring Twenties:** The novel captures the exuberance and decadence of the 1920s, a time of economic prosperity, jazz music, and flappers.
- **Prohibition Era:** During this time, the sale of alcohol was illegal, leading to the rise of speakeasies and organized crime.

### 5. Themes

- **The American Dream:** Gatsby's rise from poverty to wealth reflects the ideal of the American Dream, but the novel questions whether this dream is attainable or worth pursuing.
- **Class and Social Status:** The novel contrasts the old money of the Buchanans with Gatsby's new money, highlighting issues of class and social mobility.
- **Love and Relationships:** Gatsby's idealized love for Daisy and the complexities of his relationships reveal the superficial nature of romantic pursuits in the context of wealth and status.

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*“Life is essentially a cheat and its conditions are those of defeat; the redeeming things are not happiness and pleasure but the deeper satisfactions that come out of struggle.”*

—F. Scott Fitzgerald

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# Analysis and Discussion

## 1. Key Symbols

- **The Green Light:** Located at the end of Daisy's dock, it symbolizes Gatsby's hope and the unattainable nature of his dreams.
- **The Valley of Ashes:** Represents moral and social decay and the corruption hidden beneath the façade of wealth.
- **The Eyes of Dr. T.J. Eckleburg:** The billboard with the eyes symbolizes the moral and spiritual oversight that is lacking in the characters' lives.

## 2. Character Analysis

- **Jay Gatsby:** Analyze Gatsby's transformation from James Gatz to Jay Gatsby and how his desire for wealth and status affects his identity and relationships.
- **Nick Carraway:** Discuss Nick's role as the narrator and how his perspective influences the reader's understanding of the events and characters.
- **Daisy Buchanan:** Explore Daisy's role as both a symbol of Gatsby's dreams and a reflection of the novel's critique of superficial values.

## 3. Major Scenes and Their Significance

- **Gatsby's Parties:** Discuss what Gatsby's lavish parties reveal about his character and the society he is trying to impress.
- **The Confrontation in the Plaza Hotel:** Analyze the confrontation between Gatsby and Tom Buchanan and its impact on the characters and the plot.
- **The Climax and Conclusion:** Reflect on the novel's ending, including Gatsby's death and the aftermath for the surviving characters.



## 4. Discussion Questions

1. How does Fitzgerald use symbolism to enhance the themes of the novel? Provide specific examples.
2. In what ways does *The Great Gatsby* critique the concept of the American Dream?
3. How do the characters' relationships reflect the social and moral issues of the 1920s?
4. What role does the setting play in the development of the novel's themes and characters?
5. Do you think Nick Carraway serves as a reliable narrator in the story?

## 5. Suggested Activities

- **Character Diary Entries:** Write diary entries from the perspective of one of the main characters, reflecting on key events and personal feelings.
- **Improvise Scenes:** Divide students into small groups and assign each a key scene (e.g., Gatsby's party, Daisy and Gatsby's reunion, or Tom confronting Gatsby). Ask them to create improvised scenes by portraying characters and reimagining scenarios, such as Gatsby revealing his true background at a party or Nick confronting Daisy after Gatsby's death.
- **Debate:** Host a debate on the validity of the American Dream as portrayed in the novel and its relevance to modern society.

This study guide should help students engage with *The Great Gatsby* on a deeper level, enhancing their understanding of its themes, characters, and historical context.