

Characters– ‘The Great Gatsby’ **Jay Gatsby**



Tasks:

- **Imagine you are Jay Gatsby. Write a diary entry about your reunion with Daisy.**
- **Create a table comparing Gatsby with Tom.**

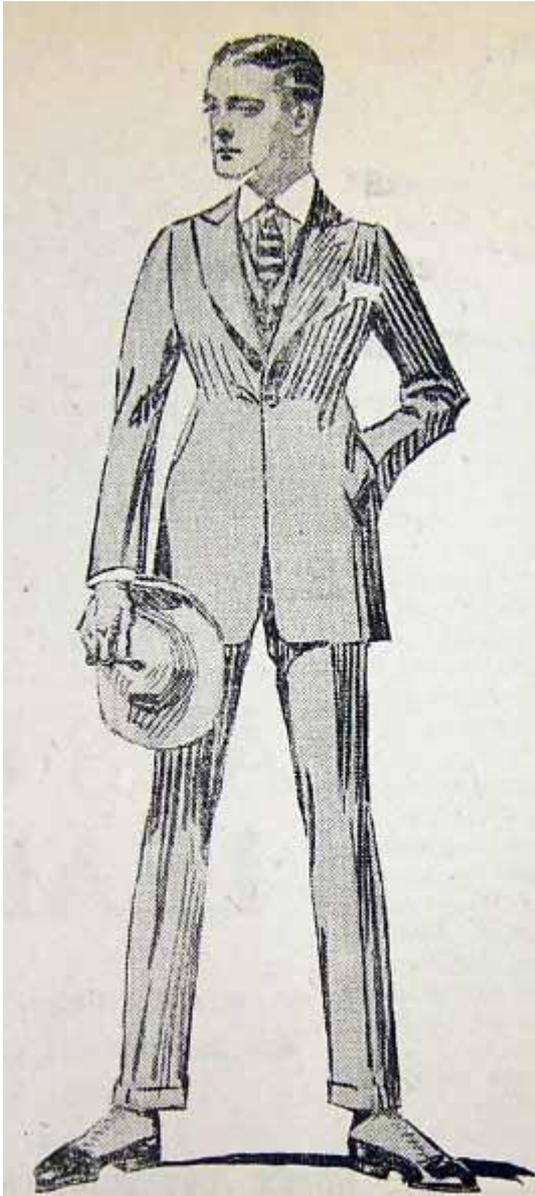
Jay Gatsby rejected his former identity as James Gatz – in order to live and achieve the American Dream and its successes. In the end, Gatsby becomes totally obsessed with the perfect image he has of his former love, Daisy Buchanan. It is an impossible situation as he is trying to grasp the past and trying to prove he is just as good as the rich man she fell for. In the process his vision of Daisy becomes distorted and illusory- clearly Gatsby is chasing an ideal that bears no resemblance to the real Daisy. This illusion ‘had gone beyond her, beyond everything’, reflects Nick. That Gatsby actually pointed out the green light across the bay to Daisy’s house, highlights how obsessive he had become and that too much was riding on this fantasy/illusion.

Having been rejected by Daisy once, clearly set Gatsby on a frantic search to make money at whatever the cost, as he kept the vision of his beloved alive in his imagination. Such effort can seem both tragic and pathetic, and was clearly divorced from reality. Nick believes that Gatsby had ‘heightened sensitivity to the promises of life...’, and fell victim to other people’s greed and George Wilson’s vindication. We see that Nick admired Gatsby because he was a dreamer and dared to challenge the existing social order that rejected him. Standing against Tom Buchanan, Gatsby comes across as the better man.

Gatsby has made his money in many ways, some of them including illegal activities such as bootlegging, investments and the black market. His lavish parties are attended by hundreds of people, most of whom he does not know or care about, as he only has one focus in mind. Gatsby has bought into the American dream, has made his millions – but that is not enough, for he represents the detested ‘new money’, as Tom gleefully points out. His displays of wealth are seen as vulgar – and it is ironic that he is the victim of much gossip from the very people who are at his parties and enjoying themselves at Gatsby’s expense. Gatsby is not personally involved in the parties because they really mean nothing to him – he has achieved his wealth only to lure Daisy back to him.

Interestingly enough, Gatsby remains an enigma – a mystery in the novel, as we never really get a grip on him. He is always removed and elusive, but through Nick’s comments, we realise that there is something honourable and deeper within him. There is a great deal riding on Gatsby for he represents the ‘self made man’, coming from a background of poverty. He has moved through the ranks of society and really bought into the Great American Dream. In the end we need to decide what Gatsby stood for. Is he a failure because he failed to achieve his dream? Or is he a hero because he followed and tried to live his dream?

Characters– ‘The Great Gatsby’ **Nick Carraway**



Not only is Nick Carraway the narrator of the story, he is also a key character and ever present. Nick is a young man, not wealthy who is trying to earn a living by selling bonds, but not being very successful. He is Daisy's cousin, and settles into the 'unfashionable' side of the river, next to Gatsby's mansion. Given his connection with Daisy, he is thus useful to Gatsby and also able to mingle with the rich. Nick is an ethical person, he can see through artifice and is disturbed by some of the things he observes. He was definitely uncomfortable with Tom's affair with Myrtle. He admires Gatsby and is intrigued by the mystery of him. Nick is only passing through within this echelon of society – he knows he does not belong here and will go back to where he belongs, to a more honest and straightforward type of life.

In his role as the narrator, Nick not only gives a narrative voice to the novel but also positions us as readers to interpret events and people through his eyes. Nick views Gatsby positively and defensively as a tragic hero, and this is how we are encouraged to view him. Through his moral and ethical stance, we are encouraged to accept his condemnatory rejection of Eastern life.

'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.'

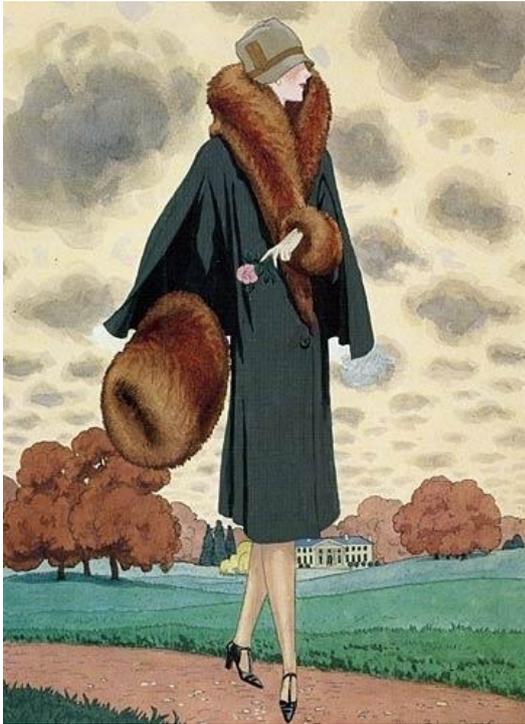
We see Nick fluctuate from being a mere observer to actively participating in life, and this includes his relationship with Jordan. He also goes from passing judgements about some of the characters, to merely observing them. About Daisy, he states 'The instant her voice broke off...I felt the basic insincerity of what she had said.'

Ultimately, for Nick, he sees the glamour, parties and materialism is all empty and symptomatic of a deep malaise within society- an all pervading amorality and meaninglessness.

Tasks:

1. How would the novel be different if it was not written from Nick's first person narrative?
2. Why do you think his relationship with Jordan did not succeed?
3. Write a letter as Nick, to another character in the novel.

Characters– ‘The Great Gatsby’ **Daisy and Tom Buchanan**



‘They were careless people, Tom and Daisy – they smashed up things and creatures and then retreated back into their vast carelessness, or whatever it was that kept them together, and let other people clean up the mess they had made...’

Daisy Buchanan

Daisy is self centred, shallow and seen by Nick as insincere. She does not care what happens to Gatsby in the end. Everything about Daisy is fake, from her interest in others to her sincerity. Daisy is proud about being so rich and clearly relishes the material possessions and lifestyle it brings her. It is hard not to judge Daisy as a weak character – she rejected a real relationship with Gatsby for Tom’s money. In her defence, Daisy is very aware of her real lack of power as a woman in that society. She is unhappy about her husband’s affair/s, but cannot bear to leave him. We see this in her comment about her daughter: ‘I hope she’ll be a fool—that’s the best thing a girl can be in this world, a beautiful little fool.’ Although she would have been happy to continue as Gatsby’s lover, it was clear that he wanted more than that from her – and she was not about to make any changes that would rock her materially comfortable world. In the end we are appalled by her lack of ethics as Gatsby takes the blame for the killing of Myrtle.

Tom Buchanan

Tom is proud of his status in society and clearly sees himself as better than others. He is prejudiced and insular, being totally self absorbed. Tom wants to continue to live in his perfect elitist society and not be invaded by outsiders. He is derisive of Gatsby, and other people representing ‘new money’. Clearly he has gone from mistress to mistress, lying to Daisy and enjoying the power he has over the likes of Myrtle, whom he just uses. Tom feels no guilt over Gatsby’s death, and no doubt will move on to another mistress in time. Tom is cowardly and shallow, especially in the way he treats George Wilson. We also realise how physically powerful and brutal he can be in his breaking Myrtle’s nose, just to keep her quiet. Tom will always be protected by his social standing, which only serves to dislike him even more. Perhaps, in the end, we feel that Daisy and Tom really do belong together.

Characters– ‘The Great Gatsby’



Jordan Baker

Daisy’s friend Jordan comes across as typical of the new young women at the time – she is independent, but still beautiful and likes to use her womanly ways to get what she wants or needs. As a friend of Gatsby, she too wants to set up Daisy and Gatsby together – partly to get back at the unfaithful Tom.

She has a short lived affair with Nick, but things did not work out, as she too is part of the Long Island elite, and just as unaffected by the car accident as the Buchanans. Interestingly, she is observed cheating in her professional golfing career, and is described by Nick as ‘incurably dishonest’.

Question: In what ways is Nick attracted to Jordan?

Myrtle Wilson

Myrtle feels trapped in her poor life as a working class woman, living with George above the garage. She is dazzled by Tom’s money and the life she tastes when she is with him. Tom rents an apartment for her, and through Tom she also meets the social elite. In reality she gains nothing by being with Tom, it does not really empower or improve her life.

George Wilson

George is a hardworking garage attendant in the industrial part of town- and business and life are poor. George is one of the ‘ash-grey men ‘who live and work in the deplorable ‘valley of ashes’. He tries to take in extra work to keep his wife happy, but does not succeed. When he realises Myrtle is having an affair, he is devastated and reacts by locking her up in her room. George feels his life is spinning out of control. ‘It’s not right what you’re doing, it’s just not right...You can fool me but you can’t fool God.’ When he confronts Tom, he is easily duped and misled into killing Gatsby.

Myer Wolfshiem

A shady underworld figure with connections to organised crime. Gatsby has worked with/for him in the past.

Questions:

1. What is Jordan’s role in the novel?
2. Why would Wolfshiem not attend Gatsby’s funeral?

Characters

In pairs, create an 'attributes mind map' or use the one below - for the main characters in the text.

