

Acknowledgements

Written and edited by Barbara Bleiman and Lucy Webster

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Thanks also to all the teachers who attended English and Media Centre courses on 'Studying Narrative' and 'Studying *The Great Gatsby*'.

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The screenshots on pages 79 to 83 are taken from the 1974 film adaptation of *The Great Gatsby* directed by Jack Clayton, starring Robert Redford and Mia Farrow. This adaptation is widely available on DVD.

Text extracts from *The Great Gatsby* have been checked against the Penguin Classics edition (1926; 2000 with Introduction and Notes by Tony Tanner).

The DVD

In addition to the 13 sections of video interview with Nicolas Tredell, there is also a slideshow of 40 screenshots from the 1974 film adaptation (see pages 79-83). Use the skips keys ◀▶ to navigate.

The DVD also includes a folder called 'GG_Extras'. This folder contains the following additional materials:

- 40 screenshots from the 1974 film adaptation as JPEGs to use in programs such as PowerPoint and Picture Power 3 ('GG_Screenshots')
- 12 context images as JPEGs for use with the activities on pages 18-23 ('GG_Contexts')
- text resources for the activities on pages 6-7 and page 59 ('GG_Word')
- a printable PDF of the complete publication, with the screenshots in both black and white and colour ('EMC_GG.pdf').

To access the additional resources on a PC you will need to navigate to the 'Windows Explorer' program (Start > All programs > Accessories > Windows Explorer). This will enable you to see the folder called 'GG_Extras' and copy it to your hard disk. On a Mac you double-click the DVD icon and copy the folder to the hard disk.

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INTRODUCTION & NOTES

Overview

'Studying *The Great Gatsby*' is intended as a set of resources to be used after completing a first reading, when you and your students are exploring key aspects of the text in more detail or are stepping back to consider it in relation to contexts, criticism or other narrative texts. The section 'Reading the Text – Teacher Resources' includes a few suggestions for during reading activities, along with an overview of some key aspects of the novel and possibilities for further work on linguistic analysis. You might like to use some of the materials on context (pages 18 to 25) before beginning the reading. The PDF on the DVD includes both a black and white and colour version of the screenshots on pages 79-83. You'll get a better quality image by printing directly from the PDF rather than photocopying the print publication. The screenshots are also available on DVD as a slideshow at the end of the interview and as JPEG images.

Notes on Activities

Structure – Charting Gatsby's story (page 43)

The activity on page 43 asks students to explore James E. Miller's schematic diagram of Gatsby's story. The significant events represented by the letters are:

- A: Gatsby's boyhood
- B: Gatsby's youth/the period with Dan Cody
- C: Gatsby's relationship with Daisy
- D: Gatsby's wartime experiences
- E: Gatsby's entry into his present mysterious occupation
- X: Straight chronological account of the events of the summer of 1922

When discussing with students the way in which the story of Jay Gatsby is relayed in the novel, you may want to use the following brief discussion by Nicolas Tredell.

[A]ccording to the opening section of the novel, Nick is recalling events that happened the previous year, and although by the last chapter of the novel the time-lapse seems to have extended to two years, this apparent inconsistency could be explained by saying that it has taken Nick a year to write his story. Within this prolonged flashback, other, shorter flashbacks are inserted. In Chapter 4, there is Jordan Baker's story, told in the first person, of the young Daisy Fay, her encounter with the young Gatsby, her marriage to Tom, his early infidelity with a chambermaid at the Santa Barbara Hotel, and the birth of Tom and Daisy's daughter, Pammie. In Chapter 6, Nick provides, near the start of the chapter, a summary of Gatsby's years with Dan Cody, and then concludes the chapter with an account of the first time Gatsby kissed Daisy. In Chapter 8, Nick interrupts his account of the morning of Gatsby's death with a flashback based on what Gatsby supposedly told him that morning. This flashback covers the development and consummation of Gatsby's relationship with Daisy in Louisville, his success in the war, his going to Oxford, Daisy's marriage to Tom, and Gatsby's brief return to Louisville. The final fragment of Gatsby's story is supplied in Chapter 9, when Wolfsheimer tells Nick he first met Gatsby in Winebrenner's poolroom. [...] [T]here is still a large gap in Gatsby's story between the point at which Wolfsheimer takes him up and his emergence as the lavish party-giver of West Egg; the source of Gatsby's wealth remains a mystery, though there are hints that he is engaged in a range of lucrative criminal activities – bootlegging, fixing the results of sporting events in order to win bets on them, and dealing in stolen bonds. But the reader who seeks traditional narrative satisfactions and wants to know the whole truth about the novel's protagonist will be thwarted: *Gatsby* will not fill in all the gaps.

Continuum Reader's Guide: Fitzgerald's The Great Gatsby, 2007

N I C K – C H A R A C T E R

A N D S T O R Y T E L L E R

The choice of the point(s) of view from which the story is told [...] fundamentally affects the ways readers will respond emotionally and morally to the fictional characters and their actions.

David Lodge: The Art of Fiction, 1994

Introducing Nick

In *The Great Gatsby* Fitzgerald chooses to use a first-person narrator. However, this narrator, Nick Carraway, does not set out to tell his own story but that of Jay Gatsby ‘the man who gives his name to this book’ (*The Great Gatsby*, p8).

1. In your group, spend 10 minutes reading and talking about one of the clusters of quotations on pages 36 to 37. Each cluster includes a range of quotations by and about Nick from across the novel. Focus your discussion on what you discover about:
 - Nick as a character, for example:
 - what he says (and doesn’t say)
 - how he says it (what makes his ‘voice’ distinctive, for example word choices, sentence structures, key phrases and so on)
 - what others say about him
 - what he does
 - Nick as a narrator, for example:
 - the way in which he presents himself and the other characters
 - his telling of Gatsby’s story
 - gaps, silences and inconsistencies in this telling
 - your own response to Nick and the role he plays in the telling of Gatsby’s story.
2. Re-form into sharing groups and take it in turns to spend 10 to 15 minutes introducing your quotations and the main points of your discussion. What first ideas and questions have been raised for you about Nick as a character and narrator?

GROUP 1	<p>When I came back from the East last autumn I felt that I wanted the world to be in uniform and at a sort of moral attention forever; (p8)</p> <p>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 eternal world for an instant, and then concentrated on <i>you</i> with an irresistible prejudice in your favour. It understood you just so 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. Precisely at that point it vanished – and I was looking at an elegant young rough-neck, a year or two over thirty, whose elaborate formality of speech just missed being absurd. (p49)</p> <p>Then it had not been merely the stars to which he had aspired on that June night. He came alive to me, delivered suddenly from the womb of his purposeless splendour. (p76)</p> <p>what I had almost remembered was uncommunicable forever. (p107)</p> <p>Now I want to go back a little and tell what happened at the garage after we left there the night before. (p148)</p>
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GROUP 2	<p>I was rather literary in college – (p10)</p> <p>Among the broken fragments of the last five minutes at table I remember the candles being lit again, pointlessly, and I was conscious of wanting to look squarely at every one, and yet to avoid all eyes. (pp20-21)</p> <p>I slunk off in the direction of the cocktail table – the only place in the garden where a single man could linger without looking purposeless and alone. (p43-44)</p> <p>Every one suspects himself of at least one of the cardinal virtues, and this is mine: I am one of the few honest people that I have ever known. (p59)</p> <p>It was this night that he told me the strange story of his youth with Dan Cody – told it to me because ‘Jay Gatsby’ had broken up like glass against Tom’s hard malice, and the long secret extravaganza was played out. I think that he would have acknowledged anything now, without reserve, but he wanted to talk about Daisy. (p141)</p>
----------------	--

GROUP 3	<p>Gatsby, who represented everything for which I have an unaffected scorn. (p8)</p> <p>And as I walked on I was lonely no longer. I was a guide, a pathfinder, an original settler. He had casually conferred on me the freedom of the neighbourhood. (p9)</p> <p>It had occurred to me that this shadow of a garage must be a blind, and that sumptuous and romantic apartments were concealed overhead, when the proprietor himself appeared in the door of an office, (p27)</p> <p>Reading over what I have written so far, I see I have given the impression that the events of three nights several weeks apart were all that absorbed me. (p56)</p> <p>There was the smile again, but this time I held out against it. (p69)</p> <p>One of the taxi drivers in the village never took a fare past the entrance gate without stopping for a minute and pointing inside; perhaps it was he who drove Daisy and Gatsby over to East Egg the night of the accident, and perhaps he had made a story about it all his own. (p170)</p>
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Beyond the question of reliability

Nick's reliability is only one aspect of his role as narrator. Included here are ten interpretative statements on Nick's dual role as character and narrator.

2. Read the statements, using ticks, crosses, question marks and exclamation marks to indicate your immediate response.
3. Choose one of the statements that grabs your attention or that you have a strong response to (whether or not you agree with it). Alternatively, come up with your own interpretative statement.
4. Use the statement as the starting point for writing a short opinion piece on the narrative voice of *The Great Gatsby*.

1

Nick's romanticising of Gatsby is an important part of the meaning of the novel.

2

Nick is an even more interesting and enigmatic character than Gatsby.

3

The gaps, silences, inconsistencies and contradictions in Nick's narration are central to the meaning of the novel.

4

All first-person narratives are partial. This is what makes them interesting and engaging.

5

Nick is neither reliable nor unreliable. He is just an individual trying to understand a complex set of events and equally complex set of personalities.

6

Fitzgerald's skill is in creating a narrator who tells a story he believes is full and truthful, at the same time as revealing to the reader the gaps and contradictions in that story and the telling of it.

7

Nick's 'blind spots', particularly about himself, are techniques Fitzgerald uses to create and convey the character of his narrator.

8

It is only through Nick's narrative voice that Gatsby and his story become great.

9

If we do not believe Nick's account, then the whole story falls apart.

10

When reading *The Great Gatsby*, the reader is swept up in Nick's story of the summer of 1922. It is only after reading, that doubts creep in.

Ways of Exploring the Structure



Included here are some of the ways in which Fitzgerald structures *The Great Gatsby*. Nicolas Tredell's discussion on '**Structure**' would make a useful starting point for tackling any of these aspects of the novel's structure. If you are exploring the role place plays (f) in structuring the novel, you might also find it helpful to watch the section on '**Setting**'.

1. In pairs, take one of the techniques and explore the way in which it contributes to the effect of the novel and the meaning the reader takes (and makes) from it.
 - a. The division of the story into nine chapters and the sectioning within chapters.
 - b. The episodic or 'scenic' method of telling the story.
 - c. Repeated tellings of a story (and whether the story remains the same or alters with each re-telling).
 - d. The relationship between the frame narrative (Nick setting himself up as author of Gatsby's story some time between one and two years after the events he is narrating) and the story he is telling.
 - e. The staggered release of information and what Nicolas Tredell has called the 'jigsaw-like quality' of *The Great Gatsby* with events (or pieces) which the reader must put together on each reading.
 - f. The use of place, the movements between different places and the associations each conjures up.
 - g. Journeys which either take place during the summer of 1922 or are recounted in Nick's narrative.
 - h. Near repetitions, foils and echoes (for example, similarities and differences in the characterisation and role of each of the three main female characters: Daisy, Myrtle and Jordan).
 - i. Repeated events such as parties, luncheons and other encounters.
 - j. Motifs, images and lexical groups.

T H E M E S

Subject matter and themes

The **subject matter** of a text is the literal thing the book is about. For instance, you might say 'It's a book about baseball', or 'It's a book about a teenage girl'.

The **themes** of a text are the underlying issues and ideas being dealt with. For instance, you might say that 'It's a book about baseball and its themes are success, the American dream and modern urban society'. Or 'It's a book about a teenage girl and its themes are adolescence, inter-generational conflict and family love'.

1. Try writing no more than 25 words describing the subject matter of *The Great Gatsby*. Then try listing what you believe to be some of its key themes. Share these ideas as a class.

How a writer develops his/her themes

To say that a novel is about love or death or friendship doesn't take you very far. As a student of literature, you should be just as interested in *how* the writer develops the themes of the text as what those themes are. To do this you will need to consider:

- what the key themes are
- what aspects of those themes the writer is most interested in exploring
- what ideas emerge from the narrative and the way it is told
- what is unique and special about the way that particular text develops those themes. (Here you'll be thinking about all aspects of style, structure, voice and language.)

A flow diagram

You will be creating a flow diagram on a theme. The example of a flow diagram on page 52, shows you how you might develop your initial thinking about love, one of the key themes in *The Great Gatsby*.

What theme?

Love



What aspects of love?

*Romantic love
Attraction
Marriage and adultery
Loss of love
Obsessive or destructive love
Love's struggle against materialism*



What ideas emerge from the narrative?

*That romantic love is doomed?
That the world is too pragmatic and materialistic for it to survive?
That placing too much emphasis on romantic notions of love and idealising a loved one can ultimately lead to tragedy and self-destruction?
That however foolish and deluded, yearning for an ideal of love is in some sense heroic and noble?
That some people have a greater capacity for heroic acts of love than other, more ordinary people?*



What is unique and special about the way the theme is explored in *The Great Gatsby*?

*Contrasting of Gatsby's romantic optimism and idealism, with all the other characters, in particular Tom Buchanan, Jordan, Daisy, Nick.
Telling Gatsby's 'love story' in the voice of Nick, a character who is so much less open to romantic feelings for women yet so enchanted by Gatsby, creates a complex view of such feelings.
The symbolism associated with Daisy and with Gatsby's feelings of hope (religious imagery, natural imagery, imagery of the air as opposed to the more physical earth) creates a poetic and idealised mood, in contrast with a more pragmatic, ruthless real world (epitomised by the fact that Daisy is also associated with money and gold).
Theme of lost love conveyed through the tone of retrospection and grief-fuelled nostalgia – emphasised by lexical clusters of time passing, the retrospective narration, the symbolism of falling leaves, the lyricism of the prose style.*

Debating Gatsby

Here are 10 statements about Fitzgerald's representation of Gatsby.

1. In pairs, choose one statement. Each member of the pair should take up a position of either agreeing or disagreeing with it, with each person doing his or her very best to argue for this view, using evidence from the text.
2. At the end, step out of role and talk about whether you are more convinced by the arguments for or against.
3. You could hold the paired debates just between the two of you, or choose to do some in front of the whole class.

1	The real hero of the novel is not Gatsby but Nick.
---	--

2	Gatsby is a really good protagonist, as much for his weaknesses as for his strengths.
---	---

3	By the end of the novel you are left knowing just as little about the real Gatsby as you did at the beginning.
---	--

4	Fitzgerald's technique of giving fragments of knowledge about Gatsby rather than the whole story means that there really is no such thing as the 'real' Gatsby.
---	---

5	Fitzgerald wants us to side with Gatsby, as opposed to Daisy, Tom, Jordan and everyone else in the novel.
---	---

6	Having a bootlegger and criminal as its hero, makes it a novel without a moral core.
---	--

7	Of all the male characters, Gatsby is the most interesting.
---	---

8	Gatsby is too slight a character to hold up the weight of big ideas Fitzgerald wants to explore through him.
---	--

9	Gatsby is a tragic hero in the classical sense – a man of greatness with tragic flaws, who comes to understand his own failures.
---	--

10	Like Nick, the reader is swept along by Gatsby's romantic vision of himself, despite knowing the sordid reality.
----	--