

The Great Gatsby

Developed by John Edlund

MODULE: STUDENT VERSION

Module Text

Fitzgerald, F. Scott. *The Great Gatsby*. Scribner, 1925.

Reading Rhetorically

Preparing to Read

Section One

Activity 1: Getting Ready to Read – Impostors

Write a short paragraph answering the following question:

Have you ever tried to impress someone by pretending to be someone or something you are not, either in person or on social media? Have you ever known someone else who did that? Describe what you (or someone else) did and why you (or someone else) did it. Was the deception discovered? What happened?

Share and discuss your paragraph with a partner.

Activity 2: Exploring Key Concepts – The American Dream

The most important theme of *The Great Gatsby* is often seen to be “The American Dream.”

Historian James Truslow Adams coined the term “American Dream” in his 1931 book *The Epic of America*. He defines the American Dream as

That dream of a land in which life should be better and richer and fuller for everyone, with opportunity for each according to ability or achievement. It is a difficult dream for the European upper classes to interpret adequately, and too many of us ourselves have grown weary and mistrustful of it. It is not a dream of motor cars and high wages merely, but a dream of social order in which each man and each woman shall be able to attain to the fullest stature of which they are innately capable, and be recognized by others for what they are, regardless of the fortuitous circumstances of birth or position. (214-215)

Note that the novel was published in 1925, but the term “American Dream” was invented later, in 1931. That means that Fitzgerald was probably not literally thinking of the phrase “American Dream” when he was writing. Instead, he was responding to the same aspects of society observed by Adams. Let’s break the concept of the American Dream as defined by Adams into its elements:

- **Progress** – Life “should be better and richer and fuller for everyone” than it was in the past
- **Merit** – There will be “opportunity for each according to ability or achievement”

- **Prosperity** – There will be material and economic prosperity, but not just “motor cars and high wages”
- **Equal Opportunity** – There will be a “social order in which each man and each woman shall be able to attain to the fullest stature of which they are innately capable”
- **Equality of Social Classes** – People will “be recognized by others for what they are, regardless of the fortuitous circumstances of birth or position”

If *The Great Gatsby* has the American Dream as one of its themes, all of these elements should be present in the novel. However, it may be that the novel questions whether the American Dream truly exists or whether it is a possible or even a good dream to have. As you read, look for specific passages in the novel that are relevant to questions about the American Dream.

A first step in thinking about this might be to ask, “Is it possible to pursue the American Dream in our current society? Why or why not?”

Activity 3: Exploring Key Concepts – The American Dream and Social Class

Fitzgerald called an earlier version of *The Great Gatsby* “Trimalchio.” Trimalchio is a character in the 1st Century C.E. Roman novel *Satyricon* by Petronius. Trimalchio, a freed slave who has accumulated immense wealth from business, throws lavish parties that feature huge quantities of the most expensive wines, endless courses of exotic dishes presented in surprising shapes, and every kind of singer, dancer, actor, and entertainer. Most of the guests are also freed slaves, but many, including Trimalchio, own numerous slaves themselves. Throughout the banquet, Trimalchio continuously brags about his wealth and shows off his expensive possessions. At the end of the banquet, Trimalchio shows off the shroud and toga he intends to be buried in and asks the guests to pretend that they are mourners at his funeral. At this point, he and his guests are so drunk and noisy that the fire department and the night watchmen break down the front door.

In *The Great Gatsby* Trimalchio is mentioned at the beginning of chapter VII. Nick tells us, “It was when curiosity about Gatsby was at its highest that the lights in his house failed to go on one Saturday night—and, as obscurely as it had begun, his career as Trimalchio was over” (p. 113).

Fitzgerald clearly had Trimalchio in mind when he wrote the novel. Roman society had class differences as well, with slaves at the bottom and noble families at the top. Freed slaves sometimes became wealthy, but were not often respected. Both Gatsby and Trimalchio use lavish parties to attract attention and to try to gain the respect of their social superiors.

Can you think of examples of individuals in our society who throw lavish parties or do outrageous things to gain attention and respect?

Activity 4: Surveying the Text – Reading the Cover

- Think about the title of the novel. What question does it make you want to ask?
- The cover picture on the original edition, “Celestial Eyes” painted by Francis Cugat, represents several important elements of the novel. (The *Atlantic* magazine published an article, “Will There Ever Be Another Book Cover as Iconic as The Great Gatsby’s?”) What do you see when you look at the cover?

- Read the quotes, descriptions, biography, and other material on the back cover of the novel. Does it convince you that the book is worth reading? Why or why not?

Activity 5: Making Predictions and Asking Questions

Read the first paragraph of the novel and the quotation from Nick Carraway’s father. What does this quotation mean? What does it tell you about Nick? Is it a good philosophy of life? Does it only apply to rich people, or to anybody?

- Continue reading to the bottom of page 2, paying special attention to what Nick says about Gatsby. Does Nick like Gatsby? Does he admire him? How would you describe his attitude toward Gatsby?
- From the first two pages of the novel, what predictions can you make about what will happen? Write a short paragraph about your predictions and speculations. We will revisit this later to see how close you were.

Activity 6: Understanding Key Vocabulary – Guessing the Meaning

As you read the novel, you are likely to encounter many words that are either unknown or unclear to you. List the word, guess the meaning from the context and then look it up to see how close you were. Don’t worry if your guess is way off the mark. That happens to all readers when they encounter a new word. List the words in your notebook in a chart that looks like this:

Word	Guess at Meaning	Dictionary or Online

Stump Your Partner Activity

When you have accumulated 15-20 words in your list, get together with a partner. Take turns saying one of your words and having the partner guess the meaning. Try to choose words you think your partner won’t know. The person who stumps the partner the most wins the game.

Activity 7: Setting Your Learning Goals

Choose one of the learning goals for the module and write a few sentences discussing what you think it means and how well you were able to accomplish it when reading in the past. Trade papers with a partner and see if you chose the same goals. Then discuss the following questions:

- Based on the learning goals of the module, which one is most relevant to you?
- Based on your past experience reading novels, what do you most want to improve about your own reading process?

Based on your past experience writing about literature, what do you want to work on the most? If this goal isn’t in the ones for this module already, create your own learning goal.

Reading Purposefully

Activity 8: Reading for Understanding – Reading the Characters

As you read and meet the characters, think about the following questions:

- Where does this character come from? Where does he or she live? Where does he or she want to go?
- What does this character value?
- Does this character have money? Where did the money come from?
- What is this character trying to accomplish?

Keep track of the information in the following character chart. You may want to read the chapters first, then go back and look for the information.

Character	Origin	Current Residence	Values	Money	Goal
Nick Carraway					
Jordan Baker					
Tom Buchanan					
Daisy Buchanan					
George Wilson					
Myrtle Wilson					
Meyer Wolfsheim					
Jay Gatsby					

Activity 9: Annotating and Questioning the Text – True and False (and In-between) Statements

Skim the following statements before you read the chapter. After reading, go back and put an X or a checkmark in the box that you think best describes the truthfulness of the statement. Use the following criteria:

- “Implied” means that the text does not specifically say that the statement is a fact, but it is a reasonable conclusion to make.

- “True” means that in the world of the story, this statement is factual.
- “Exaggerated” means that the statement has some truth in it, but it overstates the facts (hyperbole).
- “False” means that in the world of the story, the statement is false.

After filling out the chart, share your answers with a partner. If you don’t agree with every statement, discuss your reasoning and your evidence for your answers.

The first six are done for you to demonstrate how it works. Number 1 is clear. Your answer to number 2 might depend on how you define “friends.” Nick and Tom know each other, but they are not close. They are more like acquaintances. Number 3 is “exaggerated” because although Daisy knows people in Chicago who miss her, it is not the whole city and those people are not “desolate.” Number 4 is clear. Daisy has a daughter, though we do not see her at this point. Number 5 is “exaggerated” because although Jordan may have been lying on the couch for several hours, she probably remembers her life before the couch. Number 6 is a difficult one. Tom has been reading a racist book and he tries to summarize the arguments in it but doesn’t present much detail. The others don’t seem to value his analysis very much, so “implied” is a good answer. One could argue, however, that Tom is smarter than George Wilson.

Chapter I	Implied	True	Exaggerated	False
1. Nick lives in West Egg (5).				
2. Nick and Tom Buchanan are friends (7).				
3. The city of Chicago is desolate because Daisy left (9).				
4. Daisy has a daughter (10).				
5. Jordan Baker has been lying on Daisy’s sofa for as long as she can remember (10).				
6. Tom is not very smart (13).				
7. Nick is like a rose (14).				
8. Nick is engaged to be married (19).				
9. Nick lives next door to Gatsby (20).				
10. The green light represents Gatsby’s desire for Daisy (22).				
11. Tom Buchanan has a mistress (24).				

Chapter I	Implied	True	Exaggerated	False
12. George Wilson is not very smart (26).				
13. Nick drinks too much (29).				
14. Mr. McKee is not a very good photographer (32-33).				
15. Nick really enjoys the party at the apartment Tom keeps for Myrtle (35).				
16. Tom Buchanan is a violent man (37).				
Chapter III				
17. Gatsby is a rich man (39-40).				
18. Gatsby's parties are invitation only (41).				
19. East Egg people think they are superior to West Egg people (44).				
20. Gatsby reads a lot (46).				
21. Both Nick and Gatsby fought in the war (47).				
22. Gatsby drinks too much (50).				
23. Nick is in love with Jordan Baker (57).				

You may find that something that is implied at one point in the novel is confirmed as a fact, or proven false, later in the novel. This is part of the fun of reading a novel.

Activity 10: Negotiating Meaning – Creating a Difficulty Chart

It is perfectly normal to find words, phrases, sentences, and even whole passages in a novel that you can't understand completely. It happens to the best of readers. The problem might be a word you haven't seen or heard before, a gap in background knowledge, or a complicated sentence structure. It could also be that the writer isn't doing a good job of taking care of his or her audience. All readers experience difficulty, but the difference between a fluent reader and a struggling reader is often a matter of having strategies for dealing with comprehension problems. Reading difficulties have causes. The first step is to figure out what the problem is, a process that starts with rereading.

As you reread, ask yourself:

- Where did my attention wander? Where did I lose track of the thread of the text?
- What was the nature of the reading block—was I distracted, bored, confused?
- Did I stumble at an unfamiliar word?
- Is there a reference I didn't know? Something in history, technology or culture?
- Am I having trouble visualizing the scene?

In the chart below, record the page and paragraph number of some of the parts of the text that you find most difficult. Write in the difficult word or the first three words of the difficult passage, and rate the level of difficulty, 1, 2, or 3. Then get into your group to discuss the difficult passages and try to identify the cause of each difficulty and the solution.

Difficulty Levels: 1=Unsure; 2=Somewhat Confused; 3=Totally Mystified				
Page & Paragraph #	Confusing Word or First Three Words of Passage	Difficulty Level	Cause of Difficulty	Solution

After the group has discussed the charts, look for common sources of difficulty. Did some of you get stuck in the same spot? Also, can you think of some strategies you could use to avoid getting stuck in the same kinds of places later in the novel?

Activity 11: Examining the Structure of the Text - Tracking Shifts in Time and Place

The action in a novel doesn't unfold in strict chronological order. For us, all of the action in the novel is in the past, but in the world of the novel, there is a past, a present, and a future. The narrator may shift back and forth from a fictional past to a fictional present, or even to a fictional future. One way to understand the structure of a novel is to pay attention to these shifts in time.

For example, the novel begins with Nick saying "In my younger and more vulnerable years . . ." signaling that he is beginning in the past. On page five Nick describes the "white palaces of fashionable East Egg" across the water from his own house, and states that "the history of the summer really begins on the evening I drove over there to have dinner with the Tom Buchanans." We are still in the past, but he is signaling that the time is about to shift. On the next page, he says "And so it happened that on a warm windy evening I drove over to East Egg to see two old friends whom I scarcely knew at all." After that phrase, we are in the fictional present, even though the writer is still using past tense verbs. We are in a scene, with characters speaking to one another.

Another way to analyze the structure is to track locations. In this novel, the action happens in West Egg, where Nick and Gatsby live, in East Egg, where Tom and Daisy live, in “The Valley of Ashes” where George and Myrtle live, and in New York, where people go to see movies and other entertainment. Sometimes, when Nick is simply explaining things to the reader, we seem to be in no location at all.

As you read, note places in the text where either the time or the location shifts. Write down the signal phrases that cue the shifts and the page numbers where they occur. As a class, share the phrases and pages to see if everyone noticed the same shift points. Discuss how these shifts affect the reader’s experience.

Activity 12: Analyzing Rhetorical Grammar - Describing Characters

As you read, note how the characters are introduced and described. In the chart below, write down some descriptive words (adjectives) and action words (verbs) that are used in presenting the characters. Then note in the “Implications” column how these words make you feel about each character.

You can use this information in a variety of ways. It may be useful when you write your paper. For now, however, you might form groups to play out scenes from the novel. For example, your group might act out the scene near the beginning (starting on page 8) where Nick first visits Tom and Daisy and meets Jordan or the scene when Nick and Gatsby meet Meyer Wolfsheim. Your notes will help you decide how to play each character.

Character	Descriptive Words	Action Words	Implications
Nick Carraway			
Jordan Baker			
Tom Buchanan			
Daisy Buchanan			
George Wilson			
Myrtle Wilson			
Meyer Wolfsheim			
Jay Gatsby			

Activity 13: Analyzing Stylistic Choices – Noticing Style

As you read the following sentences, how do the word choices, sentence structures, and punctuation marks affect you? Paying close attention to the sounds of the words as well as their meanings, the order of the ideas, and the pauses signaled by the punctuation, describe your experience of the sentence or sentences. The first one is done as an example.

1. No—Gatsby turned out all right at the end; it is what preyed on Gatsby, what foul dust floated in the wake of his dreams that temporarily closed out my interest in the abortive sorrows and short-winded elations of men (2).
2. I decided to call him. Miss Baker had mentioned him at dinner, and that would do for an introduction. But I didn't call to him, for he gave a sudden intimation that he was content to be alone—he stretched out his arms toward the dark water in a curious way, and, far as I was from him, I could have sworn he was trembling. Involuntarily I glanced seaward—and distinguished nothing except a single green light, minute and far away, that might have been the end of a dock.
3. But above the gray land and the spasms of bleak dust which drift endlessly over it, you perceive, after a moment, the eyes of Doctor T.J. Eckleburg. The eyes of Doctor T.J. Eckleburg are blue and gigantic—their retinas are one yard high. They look out of no face, but, instead, from a pair of enormous yellow spectacles which pass over a non-existent nose (23).
4. Making a short deft movement, Tom Buchanan broke her nose with his open hand (37).
5. Half a dozen fingers pointed at the amputated wheel—he stared at it for a moment, and then looked upward as though he suspected that it had dropped from the sky (55).

Questioning the Text

Activity 14: Summarizing – Who and Where

In a paragraph, summarize what you know about the characters and the setting of the novel. What do you think of the characters, their behaviors, characteristics, and actions? Are there any good guys or bad guys? Why or why not?

Activity 15: Thinking Critically – Questioning the Text

1. On the first page, Nick says that on the basis of his father's advice, he "is inclined to reserve all judgments." Is this true? Does Nick avoid judging people? Why or why not?
2. Daisy says to Nick, "I think everything's terrible anyhow. . . Everybody thinks so—the most advanced people" (17). What is Daisy talking about? Is she sincere in saying this?
3. As Nick is trying to leave the small drinking party at the apartment Tom keeps for Myrtle he thinks:

Yet high over the city our line of yellow windows must have contributed their share of human secrecy to the casual watcher in the darkening streets, and I was him too, looking up and wondering. I was within and without, simultaneously enchanted and repelled by the inexhaustible variety of life. (35)

What does Nick mean by saying that he is both “within and without”? Does this describe his role in the novel? Why or why not?

4. Nick and Jordan meet a man with “enormous owl-eyed spectacles” in Gatsby’s library. The man is very impressed that Gatsby’s books are real, but notes that the pages have not been cut, which means that they have not been read (45-46). (It used to be that the pages of books were printed on both sides, folded, and then bound together so that it was necessary to use a knife to cut the folds in order to read both sides of the pages.)
 - The owl-eyed man expects fake books. What does that mean about his impression of Gatsby?
 - The books are real. What does that mean about Gatsby?
 - The pages are uncut, so the books have not been read. What does that mean about Gatsby?
 - How do these details fit into our overall picture of Gatsby?
5. Nick meets Gatsby, though he does not know it is Gatsby, and they talk about the war (47-48). Was Gatsby really in the war?
6. Nick says that Jordan is “incurably dishonest,” but it doesn’t bother him much because “Dishonesty in a woman is a thing you never blame deeply” (58). What does this tell us about Nick’s attitude toward women?
7. Nick says, “I am one of the few honest people I have ever known” (59). Is this true? Is Nick honest with himself?

Activity 16: Reflecting on the Reading

What was your response to the text as a whole so far? Did the text engage you? Why or why not? Did you enjoy the text, or did it make you uncomfortable or disappointed? What emotions did you experience while reading it, and why? Write a paragraph about your thoughts.

Preparing to Respond

Discovering What You Think

Activity 17: Considering Your Task and Your Rhetorical Situation – Writing Topic

On your phone, computer, or another device, go to a map program and type in your address, or the address of someplace near your home. Look at the map of your surrounding area. It shows you streets, major landmarks, geographical features, and probably the names of some businesses and restaurants. Now think about what the map does not show you. It shows you the physical landscape, but does it show the social landscape of your neighborhood or town? Does it show what kinds of people live in the various sections of your town? Does it show the social boundaries between different neighborhoods? Does it show where the rich people live and where the poor people live? Does it show the ethnic and language differences that may exist?

Now imagine that Nick Carraway is coming to visit your neighborhood to write a book about relations between different social classes in your area. Your task will be to write a letter giving him advice about what areas to visit and what areas to avoid and why. Give him advice about how to get along with the people he will find in different places.

Activity 18: Gathering Relevant Ideas and Materials

Go back and look at passages where Nick is describing important places in the story, especially East Egg, West Egg, the “Valley of Ashes,” and New York City. Try to figure out how Nick feels about these places, and how he might feel about the places you are going to describe.

Activity 19: Making Choices as You Write – Writing a Draft

You are writing a letter to Nick Carraway, so you probably want to start out with “Dear Nick.” As you write, think about Nick’s personality and interests. You will have to decide how to organize your description. What section of town will you begin with? What part of town will be left to the last? How will you decide to divide up the neighborhoods? By wealth and social class? By ethnicity and language? By some other criteria? Remember to thank Nick for taking an interest in your neighborhood.

Compose your draft. Before you turn it into your teacher, try to share it with a classmate who lives in a different neighborhood to see if it makes sense to an outsider.

Section Two

Preparing to Read

Activity 20: Making Predictions and Asking Questions – Revisiting Your Predictions

Look in your notebook at the predictions you made about the first section of the novel based on the first two pages. Did your predictions come true?

Now think about the characters and the situations you read about in the first three chapters. What do you think will happen next? Write a short paragraph in your notebook about what you think will happen.

Activity 21: Understanding Key Vocabulary – Guessing the Meaning

Continue the activity you started in Section One. List unknown words, guess the meanings from the context and then look them up to see how close you were. List the words in your notebook in a chart that looks like this:

Word	Guess at Meaning	Dictionary or Online Definition

You may want to try the “Stump Your Partner Activity” again at the end of this section.

Reading Purposefully

Activity 22: Reading for Understanding – Finding Gatsby

On page 61 a woman announces that Gatsby is a “bootlegger” (someone who smuggles whiskey or other alcoholic beverages into the U.S., where at this time they are illegal to manufacture or sell). Various people, including Gatsby himself, describe different theories about Gatsby’s past and the source of his money. It seems that Gatsby is a mystery, perhaps even to himself. As you read, take note of statements about Gatsby. Later, you will decide whether they are truthful or not.

Activity 23: Examining the Structure of the Text – Tracking Time

This part of the novel skips around a lot from future to present to versions of the past. As you read, notice the time shifting on the pages noted below. Look for cues that tell the reader the time is shifting. Then answer the questions.

Future: Pages 61-63 contain a list of people who attended Gatsby’s parties during that summer. Nick says that he recorded these names on an old timetable, now “disintegrating at its folds” (61). That means that Nick is looking back from a time that is in the future of the “now” of the novel. What is the effect on the reader of reading this list?

A Version of the Past: A few pages later, while Nick is riding in his car, Gatsby asks, “What’s your opinion of me, anyhow?” (65) Before Nick can really answer, Gatsby tells him the story of his life, which includes growing up in the Midwest, inheriting a lot of money, traveling in Europe, fighting in the war, winning a medal, and going to Oxford. Is Nick convinced? How much of this is true?

Back to the Present (Mostly): Gatsby introduces Nick to Meyer Wolfsheim (69). What business is Wolfsheim in? What does this tell us about Gatsby?

Back to the Past: Jordan tells Nick about Daisy’s past and her marriage to Tom Buchanan (74). The day before the wedding, Daisy gets a letter, gets very drunk, and tells everyone she has changed her mind. The next day she gets married anyway. Who was the letter from?

Back the Present: Gatsby has arranged to meet Daisy for tea at Nick’s house (84). They talk, and Gatsby gives her a tour of his house. How does the reader feel about Gatsby and Daisy after this meeting?

Back to the Past: Nick finally tells us the real story of Jay Gatsby, born James Gatz (98). Does this story ring true? Are we surprised that the earlier stories were not true?

Back to the Present, and then to the Past: Gatsby meets Tom and later Daisy and Tom attend one of Gatsby’s parties (101). Gatsby is disappointed because he thinks Daisy did not enjoy the party. Nick tells him, “You can’t repeat the past,” but Gatsby says, “Can’t repeat the past? Why of course you can!” Then at the end of the chapter, Gatsby is thinking about when he kissed Daisy five years before. Who is right, Nick or Gatsby?

What is the effect on the reader of all of this shifting of time? Would the story be better if it were told in chronological order?

Activity 24: Annotating and Questioning the Text – True and False (and In-between) Statements

As before, skim the following statements before you read the chapter. After reading, go back and put an X or a checkmark in the box that you think best describes the truthfulness of the statement. Use the following criteria:

- “Implied” means that the text does not specifically say that the statement is a fact, but it is a reasonable conclusion to make.
- “True” means that in the world of the story, this statement is factual.
- “Exaggerated” means that the statement has some truth in it, but it overstates the facts (hyperbole).
- “False” means that in the world of the story, the statement is false.

After filling out the chart, share your answers with a partner. If you don’t agree with every statement, discuss your reasoning and your evidence for your answers. (No page numbers provided this time.)

	Implied	True	Exaggerated	False
Chapter IV				
1. Gatsby is a bootlegger.				
2. Gatsby killed a man.				
3. Important people came to Gatsby’s parties.				
4. Americans are not as disciplined as the English.				
5. Gatsby is a liar.				
6. Gatsby got a medal.				
7. Gatsby is in love with Jordan.				
8. Meyer Wolfsheim is a crook.				
9. Wolfsheim’s cufflinks are made of human teeth.				
10. Daisy once loved Gatsby.				
11. Nick is in love with Jordan.				
Chapter V				
12. Nick’s house caught on fire.				
13. Gatsby is a crook.				
14. Nick’s wife is a Finn.				
15. Gatsby broke Nick’s clock.				

	Implied	True	Exaggerated	False
16. Daisy is impressed by Gatsby's house, especially his shirts.				
17. Gatsby is in love with Daisy.				
Chapter VI				
18. Gatsby's real name is James Gatz.				
19. Gatsby saves a boat from wrecking.				
20. Dan Cody trusted Gatsby.				
21. Gatsby inherited money from Cody.				
22. Tom Buchanan has a wonderful time at Gatsby's party.				
23. Daisy has a wonderful time at Gatsby's party.				

Activity 25: Analyzing Stylistic Choices – Noticing Style

As you read the following sentences, how do the word choices, sentence structures, and punctuation marks affect you? Paying close attention to the sounds of the words as well as their meanings, the order of the ideas, and the pauses signaled by the punctuation, describe your experience of the sentence or sentences. The first one is done as an example.

1. On Sunday morning while the church bells rang in the villages alongshore, the world and its mistress returned to Gatsby's house and twinkled hilariously on his lawn (61).
2. He was balancing himself on the dashboard of his car with that resourcefulness of movement that is so peculiarly American—that comes, I suppose, with the absence of lifting work or rigid sitting in youth and, even more, with the formless grace of our nervous, sporadic games (64).
3. 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 splendor (78).
4. "If it wasn't for the mist we could see your home across the bay," said Gatsby. "You always have a green light that burns all night at the end of your dock" (92).
5. Daisy put her arm through his abruptly, but he seemed absorbed in what he had just said. Possibly it had occurred to him that the colossal significance of that light had now vanished forever (93).
6. A universe of ineffable gaudiness spun itself out in this brain while the clock ticked on the washstand and the moon soaked with wet light his tangled clothes upon the floor (99).

7. Through all, he said, even through his appalling sentimentality, I was reminded of something—an elusive rhythm, a fragment of lost words, that I had heard somewhere a long time ago (111).

Questioning the Text

Activity 26: Summarizing and Responding – Gatsby and Daisy

In your notebook, write two paragraphs—one summarizing everything you know about Gatsby and another summarizing everything you know about Daisy. Trade you paragraphs with a partner, see if you have the same points and discuss the differences. Then discuss whether Daisy and Gatsby are a good match.

Activity 27: Thinking Critically – Interpreting the Text

Answer the following questions in your notebook.

1. Gatsby spent five years working for Dan Cody. What influence did Cody have on him?
2. Gatsby tells Daisy at the party, “You must see the faces of many people you’ve heard about” (104). Then he points out a movie actress, “a gorgeous, scarcely human orchid of a woman who sat in state under a white-plum tree.” Gatsby is proud of all of the celebrities at his party, but when he introduces Tom as “the polo player,” Tom says, “I’d rather not be the polo player. . . I’d rather look at all these famous people in—in oblivion” (105). Is being rich better than being famous? Is that what Tom means? Why or why not?
3. When Tom says of Gatsby, “I’d like to know who he is and what he does . . . And I think I’ll make a point of finding out,” Daisy says, “He owned some drug-stores, a lot of drug-stores. He built them up himself” (108). Is this true? Why is Tom so interested in finding out about Gatsby? Why is Daisy interested in defending him?
4. At the end of chapter VI, we get a description of the night that Gatsby first kissed Daisy and “forever wed his unutterable visions to her perishable breath” (110). First, how can Nick know enough about this moment to describe it? Is he imagining it, or have we somehow shifted to Gatsby’s point of view? Second, is Gatsby’s love for Daisy true love? Why or why not?

Activity 28: Reflecting on Your Reading Process – Reflecting on the Novel So Far

You are now more than halfway through the novel. Imagine that a friend who has never read *The Great Gatsby* asks you what it is about and if it is any good. In your notebook, write a paragraph answering your friend’s question.

Preparing to Respond

Discovering What You Think

Activity 29: Considering Your Task and Your Rhetorical Situation – Writing Topic

What defines a person's true identity? Is it a birth name? Is it family and upbringing? Is it a set of personality traits? Is it the values and intentions of the person? Is it honors, degrees, or accomplishments of some kind? Is it the person's DNA?

Considering the questions above, write a definition of "true identity." Using your definition, answer this question: Was Jay Gatsby a phony? Why or why not? Support your answer with evidence from the text.

Activity 30: Developing a Position – Taking a Stance

Consider the following questions in developing your position:

- How do you think most people define identity? Do you agree with them? Why or why not?
- Do people invent identities on Facebook, Instagram, and other social media platforms? What kinds of strategies do people use to create identities that are not quite who they really are? Are people who do that "phonies"?
- Does Nick Carraway think that Gatsby is a phony? How can you know?
- Tom clearly thinks Gatsby is a phony. What evidence does he have?

Activity 31: Making Choices as You Write – Writing a Draft

Your thesis will be your answer to the question, "Is Jay Gatsby a phony?" Your answer will depend on how you define "true identity," or what you mean by "phony," so in your introduction you will have to explore your concept of identity and help your reader understand it. On one level you will be exploring what the novel means, but the question of identity is a broader question that many people struggle with. People wonder, "Who am I?" and try to express their answers through the clothes they wear, the music they like, the pictures they post on social media, and the messages they send to others. Gatsby himself is no different really. He doesn't have social media, but he has other ways of trying to make people think he is a certain kind of person.

Your response to this assignment will probably take the form of a short essay that defines "identity" and uses Jay Gatsby as an example of someone struggling to be someone. Before you turn your essay in, share it with a group of people to see if they agree with your definition and your evaluation of Gatsby's character.

Section Three

Preparing to Read

Activity 32: Making Predictions and Asking Questions - Revisiting Your Predictions and Making New Ones

Look in your notebook at the paragraph you wrote making predictions about what will happen in section two. Did your predictions come true? Write another paragraph describing how the novel was or was not like you predicted. Then make some predictions about what will happen in the next chapter.

Reading Purposefully

Activity 33: Analyzing Rhetorical Grammar – Thinking about a Word

On page 114, Fitzgerald uses the word “caravansary,” an old-fashioned word which refers to a stopping place for caravans transporting spices, silks, and other exotic goods on camels from distant lands. Such a place usually had a courtyard for parking wagons and keeping beasts and a hotel for travelers. At this point, Gatsby has stopped giving parties, and Nick thinks, “So the whole *caravansary* had fallen in like a card house at the disapproval in her eyes.”

When you encounter this word as you read this chapter, think about the meaning. What is Nick implying? Is this the right word in this context? Why or why not? What are some other words that we might use today to mean something similar? Write down your answer and discuss it with a partner.

Activity 34: Annotating and Questioning the Text - True and False (and In-between) Statements

As before, skim the following statements before you read the chapter. After reading, go back and put an X or a checkmark in the box that you think best describes the truthfulness of the statement.

	Implied	True	Exaggerated	False
Chapter VI				
1. Gatsby fired all of his servants because the old ones gossiped.				
2. The new servants are crooks.				
3. Daisy and Jordan are paralyzed because of the heat.				
4. Daisy is a bad mother.				

	Implied	True	Exaggerated	False
5. When Nick, Jordan, Daisy, Tom, and Gatsby get together, there is a lot of tension.				
6. Tom wants to go to town.				
7. Tom drives Gatsby's car, and Gatsby drives Tom's.				
8. Tom sells George Wilson Gatsby's car.				
9. Tom and George have something in common—both of their wives are in love with someone else.				
10. Tom is a hypocrite.				
11. Daisy never loved Tom.				
12. Daisy is a shallow person.				
13. Wilson found out that Myrtle was seeing Tom.				
14. Gatsby is a bootlegger.				
15. Daisy killed Myrtle.				

Activity 35: Analyzing Stylistic Choices – Words and Voices

Choose one of the motifs below. Read the examples, then look to find at least two more. Write a paragraph in your notebook answering the questions.

1. Daisy's Voice

A motif is an idea that is repeated throughout the work. One of the recurring ideas in this novel is Daisy's voice. On page 120, Nick and Gatsby talk about it.

"She's got an indiscreet voice," I remarked. "It's full of—" I hesitated.

"Her voice is full of money," he said suddenly.

That was it. I'd never understood it before. It was full of money—that was the inexhaustible charm that rose and fell in it, the jingle of it, the cymbal's song of it. . . . High in a white palace the king's daughter, the golden girl. . . .

However, the focus on Daisy's voice begins early in the novel. On page 9, Nick says "I've heard it said that Daisy's murmur was only to make people lean toward her; an irrelevant criticism that made it no less charming." A bit later, on page 17, he says, "The instant her

voice broke off ceasing to compel my attention, my belief, I felt the basic insincerity of what she had said.” You will find other examples if you look for them.

What is Fitzgerald trying to do with this reoccurring focus on Daisy’s voice? Is her voice some kind of trick? Does she speak in this way to attract people? Or is it her nature to speak this way, part of her natural charm?

2. “Old sport”

Gatsby also has a reoccurring verbal habit. He calls every man he meets, “old sport.” Tom asks him about it on page 127.

“That’s a great expression of yours, isn’t it?” said Tom sharply.

“What is?”

“All this ‘old sport’ business. Where’d you pick that up?”

Later, on page 134, Tom finally says, “Don’t call me ‘old sport!’”

“Old sport” is probably the most common phrase in the novel. Why does Gatsby say it so much? Is it just an unconscious habit, or does he do it consciously, for a reason?

Questioning the Text

Activity 36: Summarizing and Responding - Summarizing Chapter VII

Chapter VII is an important chapter. In your notebook, summarize what happens.

Activity 37: Thinking Critically - Inside Daisy’s Mind

After Tom tells the group that his investigation has revealed that Gatsby is an associate of Meyer Wolfsheim and that his money comes from illegal activities, Gatsby tries to explain.

He began to talk excitedly to Daisy, denying everything, defending his name against accusations that had not been made. But with every word she was drawing further and further into herself, so he gave that up, and only the dead dream fought on as the afternoon slipped away, trying to touch what was no longer tangible, struggling unhappily, undesperingly, toward that lost voice across the room.

The voice begged again to go.

“*Please*, Tom! I can’t stand this anymore.”

Her frightened eyes told that whatever intentions, whatever courage she had had, were definitely gone. (134-35)

Does money triumph over love? Or is it that honest money triumphs over illegal money? What is going on in Daisy’s head?

Preparing to Respond

Discovering What You Think

Activity 38: Considering Your Task and Your Rhetorical Situation – Writing Topic

“Love” is an important word in the English Language and it motivates much of human action. However, it is a word that is hard to define and means different things to different people in different situations. In a short paper, analyze what “love” means to one or more of these characters: Nick, Daisy, Gatsby, and Tom. Support your arguments with evidence from the text.

Activity 39: Gathering Relevant Ideas and Materials - Gathering Ideas

Go through your notes and annotations for section three looking for references to the word or the concept of “love” or related synonyms. Find some interesting quotations from the text regarding the character or characters you have chosen to explore.

Activity 40: Making Choices as You Write – Writing a Draft

This assignment will probably take the form of a short essay, though it might also be done as a poster or a PowerPoint.

If you chose to work with two characters, you could make it a comparison and contrast. If you are dealing with three or more characters, your focus might shift to the way the author explores the theme of love in the novel, using the characters as lenses through which to examine this idea.

Section Four

Preparing to Read

Activity 41: Getting Ready to Read – The Foghorn

Chapter VIII begins with a foghorn. Nick says, “I couldn’t sleep all night; a fog-horn was groaning incessantly on the Sound, and I tossed half-sick between grotesque reality and savage, frightening dreams” (147). What do you think this beginning means for the rest of the novel? Are good things going to happen?

Reading Purposefully

Activity 42: Annotating and Questioning the Text – True and False (and In-between) Statements

As before, skim the following statements before you read the chapter. After reading, go back and put an X or a checkmark in the box that you think best describes the truthfulness of the statement.

Chapter VIII	Implied	True	Exaggerated	False
1. Daisy doesn't love Gatsby anymore.				
2. When Gatsby first met Daisy, he pretended to be rich.				
3. Gatsby is obsessed with Daisy.				
4. Nick is Gatsby's friend.				
5. Nick breaks up with Jordan.				
6. Wilson thinks that Myrtle was having an affair with the man who owned the yellow car.				
7. Wilson goes to Tom to find out who owned the yellow car.				
8. Wilson thinks the eyes of Dr. T. J. Eckleburg are the eyes of God.				
9. Michaelis is Wilson's friend.				
10. The chauffeur killed Gatsby.				
Chapter IX				
11. Myrtle's sister Catherine tells the police the whole story.				
12. Daisy cries at Gatsby's funeral.				
13. Other than Nick, Gatsby had no friends.				
14. Wolfsheim was afraid to come to Gatsby's funeral.				
15. Gatsby's father was ashamed of him.				
16. More than 100 people came to Gatsby's funeral.				
17. Nick is still half in love with Jordan.				
18. Jordan thinks Nick is a bad driver.				

	Implied	True	Exaggerated	False
19. Tom told Wilson the truth about what had happened.				
20. The new owners of Gatsby's house started throwing parties again.				

Activity 43: Analyzing Stylistic Choices – The Holy Grail

After Gatsby “takes” Daisy one night, he is changed. Nick summarizes the change in this way:

He had intended, probably, to take what he could and go—but now he found that he had committed himself to the following of a grail. He knew that Daisy was extraordinary, but he didn't realize just how extraordinary a “nice” girl could be. She vanished into her rich house, into her rich, full life, leaving Gatsby—nothing. He felt married to her, that was all. (149)

The “grail” is a reference to the Holy Grail, the cup used by Jesus at the last supper, later sought by King Arthur (and by Indiana Jones in *The Last Crusade*). Do you think that Daisy is a kind of Holy Grail for Gatsby? Did he really feel married to her? Why or why not?

Questioning the Text

Activity 44: Summarizing and Responding - Summarizing the Novel

Now you have read the whole novel. Imagine that a friend has asked you, “What is the Great Gatsby about anyway? Why do teachers think it is so great?” Write a paragraph summarizing the plot of the novel and answering this question.

Activity 45: Thinking Critically – What Makes Gatsby Great?

Gatsby almost, but not quite, achieves his dream. Nick has doubts about him throughout, but in the end, seems to respect him. Does Gatsby deserve to be called “the great Gatsby”? Why or why not?

Activity 46: Synthesizing Multiple Perspectives – Assessing Strengths and Weaknesses

The Great Gatsby was not a big seller when it was first published. It was only after Fitzgerald's death that people started talking about it as perhaps “the great American novel.”

A wide range of opinions is possible. (This module writer must admit that when he read *The Great Gatsby* in high school, he didn't like it at all, but over time his opinion changed dramatically.)

When we talk about whether a novel is good or not, we usually end up talking about several different elements: characters, plot, setting, style, point of view, and themes. We might also talk

about our own interpretation of these elements and what the novel means to us. Even if we don't like a novel, we can still learn something from it.

Fill out the chart below. You may have more examples than one for each category, but for now, choose just one so that you will have something to contribute to the discussion. The row for "character" is filled out as an example, but you should fill in the second "character" row with your own views.

Novel Evaluation Chart

Strength or Weakness: 1=Weak, 2=Average, 3=Good, 4=Excellent			
Element	Strength or Weakness	Argument	Evidence in Text (Page and Paragraph)
Characters	4	Though none of the characters are likable, Gatsby's single-minded love for Daisy is unique and interesting.	There are many examples, but on page 143, in the last paragraph, Gatsby takes the blame for killing Myrtle, when Daisy was the driver.
Characters			
Plot			
Style			
Setting			
Theme			
Other			

After you have filled out your chart, get together in a group of four or five to discuss your evaluation of the novel. Share your scores, your arguments, and your examples. Try to persuade the others to change their scores to match yours, but if they have convincing arguments and evidence, you may want to change your own. Try to come up with a consensus score for each category, a score that you all can agree on.

In the end, the groups will all share their scores to see if the class can come to a consensus.

Activity 47: Reflecting on Your Reading Process – What Did You Learn?

What did you learn about your own reading process from reading this novel? How will this influence your reading of other books? What advice would you give future readers of *The Great Gatsby*?

Preparing to Respond

Discovering What You Think

Activity 48: Considering Your Task and Your Rhetorical Situation – The Writing Task

It is common after reading a novel to write a literary analysis essay, often on one of the themes of the book, or one of the characters, or on symbols and metaphors and another figurative language. However, at this point in the module, you have already done a lot of that type of thinking. Instead, we are going to ask a very broad general question that will allow you to give an honest response to the book:

How has the experience of reading *The Great Gatsby* changed your attitude toward literature and/or life?

One of these starter phrases may get you thinking:

Reading *The Great Gatsby*

Made me pay more attention to . . .

Made me realize . . .

Made me interested in . . .

Or perhaps you want to focus more narrowly on a particular scene:

Reading a particular scene (one of the parties, the scene in the apartment that Tom keeps to meet with Myrtle, Myrtle's death, one of the scenes with cars, the funeral with no friends, the last scene, etc.) in *The Great Gatsby*

Made me think about . . .

Reminded me of something that happened to me when . . .

Reminded me of my (uncle, aunt, friend, etc.) . . .

There are many possibilities. Undoubtedly, finishing the novel left you with a certain feeling, perhaps even a negative one. Whatever that feeling is, you can write about it. In your response, analyze why the novel made you feel that way. Quote or paraphrase specific words or passages in the novel. As you explain how and why the novel made you feel this way, you will cause your reader to see the novel in a new way too.

Activity 49: Developing a Position – Writing a Thesis Statement

You should begin with some context for the reader who may not have read the novel. Then you should state as precisely as you can what effect the novel had on you. How did it make you feel? What did it make you think about or reconsider?

Activity 50: Gathering Relevant Ideas and Materials – Gathering Evidence

You have already worked on this novel a lot. Here is a list of some of the major activities you have done:

Activity 1: Getting Ready to Read – **Impostors**

Activity 2: Exploring Key Concepts – **The American Dream**

Activity 6: Understanding Key Vocabulary – **Guessing the Meaning**

Activity 7: **Setting Your Learning Goals**

Activity 8: Reading for Understanding – **Reading the Characters**

Activity 9: Annotating and Questioning the Text – **True and False (and In-between) Statements**

Activity 10: Negotiating Meaning – **Creating a Difficulty Chart**

Activity 11: Examining the Structure of the Text – **Tracking Shifts in Time and Place**

Activity 13: Analyzing Stylistic Choices – **Noticing Style**

Activity 17: Considering Your Task and Your Rhetorical Situation – **Writing Topic (Letter about your neighborhood to Nick Carraway)**

Activity 22: Reading for Understanding – **Finding Gatsby**

Activity 29: Considering Your Task and Your Rhetorical Situation – **Writing Topic (Was Gatsby a phony?)**

Activity 35: Analyzing Stylistic Choices – **Words and Voices**

Activity 37: Thinking Critically – **Inside Daisy’s Mind**

Activity 38: Considering Your Task and Your Rhetorical Situation – **Writing Topic (How do the characters define “love”?)**

Activity 43: Analyzing Stylistic Choices – **The Holy Grail**

Activity 45: Thinking Critically – **What Makes Gatsby Great?**

Activity 46: Synthesizing Multiple Perspectives – **Assessing Strengths and Weaknesses**

Now that you have a thesis, go back to the writing and notes that you produced in these activities to see if there is material you can use in your essay. If you can’t mark in your copy of the novel, you can use sticky notes to mark the places you want to quote or paraphrase. If you write notes down on the sticky notes, make sure you write down the page numbers so that you can cite passages correctly.

Activity 51: Writing an Introduction

Reading your notes and gathering information from the text may have given you some new ideas for your thesis. It is ok to change it at this point. Now it is time to try writing the introduction. You may end up changing the thesis and the introduction at a later point, but it is helpful to get started with one before you write the rest of the paper.

Some writers find that they write a paragraph about not very useful stuff when they try to get started and the second paragraph turns out to be the real introduction. If that happens, just delete the first paragraph.

Your introduction should do the following:

1. Provide some context for the thesis statement. For example
F. Scott Fitzgerald's novel, *The Great Gatsby*, is one of the most widely read novels published in the United States. The title character, Jay Gatsby, is a crook from a poor background pretending to be rich.
2. State the thesis. For example
I found the automobiles in *Gatsby* to be very interesting. In the 1920s, cars are just beginning to be popular. It made me think about how advanced our cars are today.
3. Give the reader an idea about how the paper will be developed. For example
There are many interesting scenes where cars and problems with cars are described.

Writing Rhetorically

Composing a Draft

Activity 52: Composing a Draft (You may want to skip to Activity 53)

At this point, some writers just start writing to see what comes naturally. Others need a structure (see next section). You have an introduction. What should the first body paragraph be about? Decide, and start writing. By the time you finish that paragraph, you may know what the next one will be about, or you may have to stop and think for a while.

Activity 53: Considering and Planning the Structure

For some writers, the natural process described above does not work so well. These writers like to create a scratch outline or other organizing device first. You could make a list like this one:

- Introduction: Context, Thesis, How I am going to investigate it.
- Paragraph 1: Topic, arguments, supporting evidence
- Paragraph 2: Topic, arguments, supporting evidence
- And so on
- At some point, you may want to consider counter-arguments from people who might feel differently about the novel.

Of course, a lot of students are used to the five-paragraph essay format, with a thesis and three reasons, a body paragraph about each “reason” and a conclusion. You could use this format for this essay, but you probably have more material that can be covered in three paragraphs. It is not true that an essay can only have five paragraphs.

You also need to think about the order of your arguments. Your goal is to persuade your reader that your reading of the novel is a valid and interesting one. What is your strongest point? Do you want to lead with your strongest point, or leave it to the last? Both ways can be effective.

Activity 54: Negotiating Voices – Quoting and Paraphrasing

Your evidence to support your arguments will come mostly from the novel. The assignments don’t require you to read journal articles about the novel and use other writer’s arguments and opinions to support your own, so documenting your sources should be easy. If you quote a sentence from the novel, put it in quotation marks and include the page number.

Nick says, “When I came home to West Egg that night I was afraid for a moment that my house was on fire” (81).

If you quote a longer passage, you should indent it and set it off as a blockquote. Block quotes need to be introduced and then interpreted or analyzed. They do not speak for themselves. You need to make it clear to the reader why the blockquote is there.

Nick has strict standards for human behavior. He says

Conduct may be founded on the hard rock or the wet marshes, but after a certain point, I don’t care what it’s founded on. 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; I wanted no more riotous excursions with privileged glimpses into the human heart. (2)

However, he says that Gatsby was exempt from this reaction.

Note that the blockquote has no quotation marks. Also note that the page number goes in parentheses outside the period, not inside as it does in a regular in-text quotation.

If you paraphrase something from the novel in your own words, you still need to give a page number. For example

Nick thinks that it doesn’t matter much if a woman is dishonest (58).

About plagiarism: Plagiarism is when you take the words and ideas of someone else and present them as your own. Note that that includes ideas, not just words. Some people believe if you take a passage from an essay and change a few words, that makes it your own. This is completely untrue. There is a tremendous amount of material on *The Great Gatsby* on the internet, some of it interesting and some of it nonsense. If you use any of it—words or ideas—in your own essay, you need to cite it using MLA documentation.

This includes the “notes” publications. If you consult SparkNotes or Cliff’s Notes (which we recommend you do not do) and use their ideas, you need to cite the publication. However, you don’t need any of this. All you need is the novel, and your own interpretation, which you support with evidence from the novel. The paper is about your own ideas about the novel, not what SparkNotes thinks.

Read through your draft to make sure that you have used quotations and paraphrases correctly.

Revising Rhetorically

Activity 55: Analyzing Your Draft Rhetorically – Thinking about Readers

Once you have finished a draft of your essay, if possible, put it away for a day or so. Then reread it, thinking about your audience. Will another student understand your arguments? Will they be persuaded by your evidence? How about your teacher's response?

Make any changes you think will improve your reader's response to your essay.

Activity 56: Considering Stylistic Choices

How about the style and readability of your sentences? Are any sentences too long or confusing? Could any short sentences be combined together? Do you have any slang words or informal language that could be replaced by something more formal? (However, do not use a thesaurus to find fancy words just to be fancy.)

Activity 57: Gathering and Responding to Feedback

If your teacher has time, he or she will give you feedback and allow you to revise your paper. Your teacher may also give you a chance to get feedback from a partner, or in a group. Pay close attention to the comments about your writing. This is the only way to improve, to get feedback from actual readers.

Editing

Activity 58: Editing Your Draft - Thinking about Grammar and Punctuation

What grammatical errors do you often make? Read your draft with these in mind to see if you can find any examples. Underline possible problems. Ask your teacher or a tutor if you are unsure.

At this point, you are ready to turn in the draft.

Activity 59: Reflecting on Your Reading and Writing Process

How has reading *The Great Gatsby* and writing this paper changed your reading and writing strategies? Will you use the preparing, understanding, questioning, selecting, writing, revising process in the future? Why or why not?

Activity 60: Reflecting on Your Learning Goals

Look back at the learning goals you set for yourself in Activity 6. How did you do? Write a short paragraph about what you learned.