

Great Gatsby: Knowledge Organiser

Character		Chapter summary
Gatsby	An ambiguous figure. At once the embodiment of the <b>American dream</b> , he is also a criminal and regularly presents selective truths about his past. His unique capacity to dream and create are both inspiring and suspicious. Does Nick simply add further embellishment to an already mythologised narrative or is he an exceptional individual, one of the Myth and Symbol school's <b>American Adam</b> .	Nick Carraway reveals he is narrating a story of the previous summer. This begins with him arriving in New York. Invited to his cousin Daisy's for dinner, he finds out her husband is having an affair and meets Jordan Baker. Ends with Nick witnessing Gatsby alone on his dock. Nick travels, via the Valley of Ashes, to New York with Tom to attend a party hosted by Myrtle, his mistress, at an apartment he pays for. Tom breaks her nose when she taunts him about Daisy whilst Nick gets very drunk.
Nick	The narrator of the book, Nick can either be read as a naive but likeable individual who latches on to individuals who do not care about him and provides a moral core to the text or a deluded hypocrite with no self-awareness.	As the summer progresses, Nick eventually gets an invite to one of his mysterious neighbour's parties. Here he meets Gatsby and Jordan. Gatsby speaks with Jordan alone and requests more of Nick's company. The chapter ends with Nick narrating details of his everyday life.
Daisy	The object of Gatsby's affection, Daisy is a cynical individual who seems apathetic and ambivalent about her wealth and status. Is she simply vacuous, or the product of patriarchal society that places women on a pedestal?	Gatsby invites Nick to lunch and introduces him to Meyer Wolfsheim. During this time, he learns lots about Gatsby's past, some of it true. Afterwards, he bumps into Jordan who tells him about Gatsby and Daisy's past and asks him to arrange a meeting.
Tom	The embodiment of old money, an athletic patrician with a "supercilious" manner, Tom nonetheless worries about his position in the world and dreams of the unreachable romance of the college football field.	Gatsby nervously talks to Nick, offering to pay to sort out the meeting. It rains on the day of the reunion, which is an awkward affair culminating in Gatsby throwing shirts as Daisy cries and them staring at the green light together.
Jordan	Whilst she deviates from society's expectations with a fulfilling career, and seemingly embodies the freewheeling spirit of the era's <b>flappers</b> , Jordan is cynical and cheats. What does this say about female independence and male attitudes towards it?	Rumours spread about Gatsby, and a reporter turns up at his house. Here, Nick decides to narrate Gatsby's past in Dakota, and how he gained and lost his fortune through meeting Dan Cody. Having not seen either G or D for weeks, Nick bumps into Tom at Gatsby's house. Tom is highly critical of Gatsby. Later, at another one of G's parties Tom reveals to D that G's wealth is made through bootlegging.
Myrtle	Myrtle's attempts to transcend her station are ultimately futile. Tom will no more grant her access to the <b>Jazz Age's</b> glamour than her attempts at mimicking the fashions of the elite will.	G fires all his staff now the parties have served their purpose. On the hottest day of the year, they all meet for a drink in New York. G can hardly believe that D's daughter is real. Tom's suspicions of an affair are confirmed and a confrontation ensues. G and D drive off together, and on the way home, Nick, Tom and Jordan learn that Myrtle has been stuck and killed. Back at the Buchanan house, Nick sees G in the bushes who tells him D hit Myrtle.
Wilson	A hard working embodiment of the middle-class, Wilson's life is destroyed by forces outside of his control as he is manipulated and exploited by Tom Buchanan.	Nick meets G at his house, who tells him of his idolization of D. Later, Nick learns from Michaelis, what happened at the garage after the death. Wilson finds Tom who hints that it was Gatsby. Wilson kills Gatsby who and himself. Nick rushes back but finds Gatsby dead and then imagines Gatsby's final thoughts.
Owl Eyes	A symbolic figure who is able to pierce the unreality of Gatsby's mansion, Owl Eyes' symbolic glasses tie him to the idea of perception and question our ability to see what is truly real	Writing two years on, Nick narrates the details of G's funeral. Few came, although G's father did, and he tells Nick of G's boyhood. Nick meets Tom in NY who tells him it was him who told Wilson that it was Gatsby. All westerners, Nick muses that the east might have corrupted him and his friends. Sitting on the beach outside Gatsby's house, he imagines the East before it was settled.
Wolfsheim	A gangster and gambler moulded on <b>Arnold Rothstein</b> , Wolfsheim's acquaintance with <b>Gatsby</b> calls the hero's character into question, whilst also acting as a tool to reveal Gatsby's history and also inadvertently illustrating Nick's biased narration.	<b>Technique/context</b>
<b>Symbols and Motifs</b>		Fitzgerald uses <b>selective details</b> to describe his characters, typifying them with one feature, such as Daisy's voice. For Gatsby in particular, this adds to his elusive mystique and comments upon our inability to truly perceive reality.
Colour	<b>Green</b> is clearly associated with Gatsby's dream, but also with the new world, exploration and discovery. <b>White</b> is most closely associated with Daisy, could this be ironic? <b>Yellow</b> is associated with money and death, like the car, Jordan's arms, and . <b>Blue</b> is closely associated with Gatsby and his parties, perhaps signifying their illusory nature. <b>Grey</b> is associated with lifelessness and death often in the Valley of Ashes and with Wilson.	Fitzgerald uses <b>romantic</b> and <b>modernist</b> language at the same time. <b>Romantic language</b> shows the beauty in nature, and the transcendental power of human imagination. The <b>modernist</b> imagery is closely tied with the technological innovation of the <b>Jazz age</b> . Does Fitzgerald debate the romantic ideal via association with the superficiality of the jazz age, or does he show us the beauty in the jazz age itself? In its more modernist moments, the book is a highly experimental text.
Glasses	Both T.J Eckleberg and Owl eyes wear glasses. Both seem to have unique powers of perception. Eckleberg oversees the Valley of Ashes and inspires Wilson to murder Gatsby, perhaps representing some kind of omnipotence? Owl Eyes is able to see through Gatsby's facade.	Fitzgerald's structure is a <b>disrupted chronology</b> that has many <b>filters and layers</b> . Firstly, we have the <b>unreliable</b> viewpoint of its <b>participant narrator</b> who regularly shows both his inadequacy as an impartial observer. Secondly, many of the vignettes of Gatsby's life are repeated to Nick second hand, most tellingly is Jordan revealing Gatsby and Daisy's past. This shows that there is no 'true' account of the story, and that reality is always <b>mediated</b> .
The Valley of Ashes	The Valley of Ashes represents the impact of capitalist excess. Its denizens are dull and lifeless, almost inhuman, and as such, it is closely tied to the idea of class.	Initial reviewers, especially <b>H.L Mencken</b> were highly critical of the text, seeing it as a reflection of the Jazz Age's superficiality. Later, it was seen as a visionary critique of the Age's superficial, greedy and consumerist ethic, prescient in light of the 1929 <b>Wall Street Crash</b> .
Gatsby's mansion	Gatsby's mansion and parties represent the excess and glamour of the Jazz age. Yet they are also clearly superficial and pretentious, representing the binary of glamour and repulsion Fitzgerald felt towards the <b>Jazz Age</b> .	<b>Myth and Symbol scholars</b> highlighted three common tropes in early American literature: <b>The machine in the garden, The American Adam, and the Virgin Land</b> . As a text regularly regarded as one of America's true literary masterpieces, <i>Gatsby</i> can be seen to explore and subvert all these tropes.
Geography	East vs West, old money vs new, establishment vs progress. Gatsby is a novel about the American frontier.	A period of many contradictions, the 1920s, commonly known as <b>the Jazz Age</b> , were a period of glamour and affluence for some, and prejudice and disenfranchisement for others. Whilst women got the vote, African Americans were still denied it.. Whilst the middle-class boomed, industrialisation and urbanisation meant the working class were exploited with poor working conditions. Whilst high cultural forms such as Jazz and modernism proliferated, the era witnessed the first mass-media in the form of paperbacks, radio and cinema. Alcohol became illegal, but this simply fuelled mass illegality and made gangsters billionaires. Cars and money liberated many young people, whilst advertising increasingly homogenised them into consumers.
The green light	For Gatsby, this is initially a <b>metonymic</b> representation of Daisy. Later, it embodies the paradoxical nature of Gatsby's desire, and shows how our dreams are always out of reach.	
<b>Themes</b>	<i>Gatsby</i> shows how <b>dreams and desire</b> are always paradoxical; we pine for what we cannot have and if we get what we want, we lose desire itself. <b>The American dream</b> is equally debauched in the book; glamour and wealth with excess and pretense all at the same time	
<i>Gatsby</i> explores many of the <b>myths of America</b> . The east draws people away from the <b>western frontier</b> and corrupts them; <b>the American Dream</b> is debauched by excess; America as a place of <b>creation and exploration</b> is shown to be false.		
In its exploration of <b>class</b> , <i>Gatsby</i> shows the supercilious and elitist nature of old money America, challenging the country's <b>meritocratic</b> ideals. The working poor are exploited to the point of ruination, and those who try enter the elite are judged on their manners and style by a new <b>aristocracy</b> .		
<i>Gatsby's gender roles</i> are rigid. Women are to look pretty, be subservient to men, and to embody masculine desires. Whether Fitzgerald's characterization of Daisy and Jordan is reflective or critical of its time is open to interpretation. Even the men, however, are unfulfilled.		
With all aspects of the text open to interpretation, all of its characters putting up facades and most of the narrative filtered through many lenses, <i>Gatsby</i> questions our ability to truly <b>perceive</b> , and explores the binary between <b>illusion</b> and reality.		
<i>Gatsby's</i> world is an <b>amoral</b> and <b>secular</b> one. The only hint towards <b>religion</b> is the mock omnipotence of Eckleberg. Does Fitzgerald believe that America has become debased in a more <b>secular</b> age, or does the period simply lack a <b>moral</b> core?		

