

# The Great Gatsby : Review Questions & Solutions

1) Complete the following review questions for your test on Tuesday:

a) What issues in today's society can be seen in The Great Gatsby?

To answer this question, you have to see the corruption of the American Dream. Jay Gatsby looks up to "old money." He wants the rich, carefree lifestyle shown by Tom and Daisy. These people are shown to be royalty. However, what is underneath this facade? Are these people at heart good people, and are their choices something that should be admired? The answer to this, at least in the novel, is no. Although on the outside Tom and Daisy may seem elite, they are careless and selfish at heart. Admiring them, and wanting to be part of their world, leads to heartbreak and even disaster.

In today's world, who is the ideal that we are pressured to look up to? Think of the people on the red carpet at awards shows. Look at all those who are willing to exploit themselves on reality television, and shows like "American Idol". Those people are trying to reach this ideal of celebrity, but what is at the heart of this ideal? Is the ideal we're pressured into looking up to as golden as it seems, or is it corrupt as well? Have things really changed that much from the theme in The Great Gatsby that says the golden, rich lifestyle is corrupt and causes damage to those who aspire to it.

b) What do each of the following symbols represent? Explain each symbol fully.

i) The eyes of Doctor T.J. Eckleberg

Traditionally, literary criticism considers the eyes of Doctor T.J. Eckleberg to represent God. In many traditions, God is seen as a large figure observing humans from high above. So too is the billboard with the eyes of Doctor T.J. Eckleberg. It is large and high above those who live in the valley. The billboard also watches the actions of the characters. Just as God is seen to be omnipresent, so too is the sign of Doctor T.J. Eckleberg. In Chapter 2, Nick considers the billboard to have a "persistent stare."

The actions of the characters in The Great Gatsby show the moral superiority of this billboard:

1) In chapter 2, Tom shows his opinion of the Valley of Ashes in the following quotation: "Terrible place, isn't it," said Tom, exchanging a frown with Doctor Eckleburg." Tom, in taking a superior tone upon judging the valley, exchanges a glance with the sign. This emphasizes the superiority of the sign, because Tom is sharing a moral judgement with the sign. By sharing a glance with the sign, Tom also shows that he considers himself to be above the people in the valley. He is an equal to the powerful figure of the billboard by sharing judgement with it.

2) George Wilson, more explicitly, gives the billboard a status equal to that of God. In Chapter 8, Wilson looks at the sign and states that "God sees everything." Michaelis, who is with Wilson during this moment, is shocked that Wilson is looking at the billboard when he speaks of God. Perhaps Fitzgerald is showing that in this era, people are so confused that they even create their own God. The characters in the Great Gatsby are so blind to the truth that even what they choose to worship has no basis in reality. Although George Wilson looks to a sign for reassurance of divine justice, other characters bend to the pressure of prestige as though it were a figure to be worshipped. The characters in the Great Gatsby make gods out of things that are decaying. George Wilson literally makes a god out of a washed out billboard. Jay Gatsby makes a god out of a superficially luxurious lifestyle that is actually corrupt.

ii) The Valley of Ashes

The Valley of Ashes is located "half way between West Egg and New York" (Fitzgerald Chapter 2). The place is not only one of industrial remnants, but also of people and homes, all who take on the pale and delicate form of ashes. The valley is further described as a "solemn dumping ground" (Fitzgerald Chapter 2). Symbolically, the Valley of Ashes represents the waste caused by industrialization. It is outside of the wealthy centers of New York and East and West Egg, and ignored. It is industry that creates this waste in its

process of production. So too do the rich create waste. The rich turn people into remnants with their actions. Just like Daisy and Tom consume Gatsby and Myrtle, turning them into ghosts, so too does industry create ashes in its process of consumption. Just as Gatsby and Myrtle thrive under Daisy and Tom's attentions for a while, so too does industry create products that are eventually thrown away. The Valley of Ashes is the ignored consequence produced by a lifestyle of consumerism, a lifestyle that throws away both material goods and people when it is finished with them.

### iii) The green light

The green light is a beacon at the end of the Daisy's dock. At the end of Chapter 1, Nick sees Gatsby reach out, "trembling", towards this light. The green light represents Gatsby's American Dream. It does not merely represent Daisy, although Daisy is a part of this dream. The color green is the symbol of money, so the color of the light represents Gatsby's goal of financial luxury. The light is a beacon at the end of the dock. Its purpose is to guide boats to the house that Tom and Daisy now inhabit. Much like these boats are guided by the light, so too is Gatsby guided by his dream to world that Daisy inhabits.

The idea that the green light represents Gatsby's dream, and not just Daisy, is attested to at the end of Chapter 9. The reader is told that "Gatsby believed in the green light, the orgastic future. (Fitzgerald Chapter 9). The green light, then, represents a future at the peak of decadence.

### iv) The library in Gatsby's house

When Nick goes to a party of Gatsby's for the first time, he and Jordan decide to go looking for their host and stumble upon a real library with real books. It is not an imitation like the house Gatsby inhabits. The library is "panelled with carved English oak and probably transported complete from some ruin overseas" (Fitzgerald Chapter 3). The party guest they encounter, a "man, with enormous owl-eyed spectacles", asserts that the books are real. Therefore the reader is shown that deep within the imitation is a genuine, intelligent reality. This is also made apparent in the character of Gatsby. Although Gatsby puts on a show of luxury, he is considered by Nick to be "worth the whole damn bunch [of the elite] put together" (Fitzgerald Chapter 8). Gatsby, although a creation down to his name, at heart is genuine, with "an extraordinary gift for hope" and "romantic readiness" (Fitzgerald Chapter 1). The bespectacled guest who Nick and Jordan find in the library considers the realism of the books to be a testament to Gatsby's thoroughness, but even in this Gatsby is shown to have a thoughtfulness and attention to detail lacking in his "old money" counterparts.

### c) Find an example of sight and blindness in the novel, and describe the deeper meaning of this example in detail.

Fitzgerald shows us that sight can be corrected. In a deeper sense, the reader is shown that with correction, people can see the truth behind the American Dream. In Chapter 3, we meet the bespectacled man in the library who notices that the books are genuine. It is this same guest who alone comes to Gatsby's funeral, and displays disillusion at the lack of attendees, even though there were many who were willing to take advantage of Gatsby's hospitality.

At the end of Chapter 3, there is a car accident. The man in the glasses, known as "Owl Eyes", is assumed to be the driver, but it turns out he is merely the passenger. Owl Eyes admits that he knows "nothing whatever about mechanics" (Fitzgerald Chapter 3). The actual driver of the car is oblivious to the accident, and wants to drive away even though the wheel of the car is off (Fitzgerald Chapter 3). This situation parallels that of Gatsby and Daisy driving at the end of chapter 7. The driver parallels Daisy, and so too is Daisy blind in making responsible decisions. Gatsby, then, likened to the man in the glasses who does not drive and is mistaken as having caused the accident. The character of Gatsby is shown by this parallelism to have the correction of vision, and genuine sight.

In Chapter 9, after Gatsby's funeral, Nick claims that the East was "distorted beyond ... [his] eyes' power of correction." It is then that the reader sees the need for vision to be corrected, literally and figuratively. Owl Eyes, who is set apart from the other party guests by having corrected vision, not only sees the genuine nature of Gatsby's books, but also the importance of coming to his funeral. It is this guest that makes the responsible choice of not driving the car in Chapter 3. It is only by correcting one's vision, or one's initial instincts of judgement, that

moral observations can be made. The billboard for Doctor T.J. Eckleberg is not one of eyes, but of eyes with glasses, so even a symbolic moral authority has an element of aid in seeing how things truly are. Nick considers his own eyes to have a “power of correction”, but even they have a limit, since seeing the East clearly is not within this ability.

d) How are the houses of Gatsby and Daisy symbolic of their life situations?

Gatsby's house is a fantasy, much like his own persona. The house has Norman architecture, which is the architecture of fairy tale castles. It is “spanking new” and a “factual imitation of some Hotel de Ville in Normandy” (Fitzgerald Chapter 1). So too is Gatsby a new persona, and not an example of a rich tradition of riches. He is merely a rather detailed imitation of what it means to be rich. Upon first seeing Gatsby, Nick describes him as “an elegant young roughneck...whose formality of speech just ... [misses] being absurd” (Fitzgerald Chapter 3). Gatsby puts on a good show, but like his house, is only an imitation of an elite lifestyle.

Daisy's house is described as “a ... Georgian Colonial mansion, overlooking the bay” (Fitzgerald Chapter 1). There is no allusion to Daisy's house being an imitation. Rather, it is built with Colonial architecture, which is an early style of American architecture. Much like her house, Daisy is established in a tradition of wealthy American society. Daisy grew up with money. Her house had “the largest of the lawns”, and she has a “debut” in the style of old family's who are ready to display their daughters for marriage (Fitzgerald Chapter 4). Gatsby, upon first entering the young Daisy's house, “had never been in such a beautiful house before” (Fitzgerald Chapter 8).

e) How is the American Dream portrayed in The Great Gatsby? What is the author saying about the American Dream? See the answer to question 1 a.

f) What is Gatsby's flaw, and how does this flaw affect his life?

Like every question that involves analyzing literature, the answer to this question is debatable. However, there is evidence in the book that Gatsby's flaw is not seeing the truth, but rather seeing what he wants to be the truth. Gatsby convinces himself that Daisy totally and completely loves him, even though she is now married with a child. In Chapter 8, after Daisy has admitted to loving Tom, Gatsby still believes that Daisy “might have loved ... [Tom] for a minute, when they were first married - and loved me (Gatsby) more even then” (Fitzgerald Chapter 8). Gatsby is also enamored with the elite lifestyle of old money. However, this dream is not what it seems to be and at heart is the opposite of the glittering splendor that it portrays.

g) How is F. Scott Fitzgerald like Gatsby? How is he like Nick?

Like Gatsby, Fitzgerald had working class roots on behalf of his mother. Also like Gatsby, Fitzgerald initially could not marry Zelda because he did not have enough money. Once Fitzgerald and Zelda married, their lifestyle very much mirrored that of the people who would attend Gatsby's parties. In other words, Fitzgerald and Gatsby shared a lifestyle of excess.

Fitzgerald is like Nick because they are both observers of the Jazz Age lifestyle. Fitzgerald, by having ties to working class roots, can observe and analyze the Jazz Age lifestyle because he is an outsider. Nick Carraway, who comes from a wholesome midwestern tradition, where “dwellings are still called through decades by a family's name”, also takes the position of an observer by being an outsider. (Fitzgerald Chapter 9). Both Fitzgerald and Nick are on the fringes of the lavish lifestyle exemplified by Gatsby, Tom and Daisy. They are accepted enough to be made privy to the actions and motives of those around them, but are outside enough to be effective observers.

h) Why is it important for Gatsby, Daisy, Tom, Nick and Jordan to go to the hotel in New York? How does this scenario affect the plot? Why is it important for the plot to be affected in this way?

By going to New York, Myrtle is able to mistake Gatsby's car for Tom's. This is the reason that Myrtle runs in front of the car, and is killed. Myrtle being killed emphasizes many characteristics of other characters:

1) Myrtle's death brings out Tom and Daisy's carelessness. Daisy does not take responsibility for the action, and Tom immediately takes the blame off of himself when he first finds out about Myrtle's death. He insists that he was driving a “blue coupe” when talking to George at the gas station after finding that Myrtle has been killed (Fitzgerald

Chapter 7). Tom also tells George that Gatsby was driving the car, leading to Gatsby's death. Furthermore, had Myrtle not been killed, Tom and Daisy may have seen no need to conspire in Chapter 7, and may not have shown their further irresponsibility by leaving. It is by leaving Long Island in the face of this drama that Tom and Daisy show their reluctance in taking responsibility.

2) Myrtle's death leads to Gatsby and George's deaths. George shoots Gatsby in revenge for killing Myrtle. We see how truly alone and misused Gatsby is when so few people come to his funeral, and Daisy does not send flowers (Fitzgerald Chapter 9).

Gatsby could easily have told Tom about his affair with Daisy in East Egg, but then Myrtle would not have been killed, at least not by Gatsby's car. Myrtle's death is a plot device that serves to inform us of important character traits, including that of Jordan. Nick begins to view Jordan with contempt after she wants him to go into the house and take advantage of the evening, since "it's only half-past nine" (Fitzgerald Chapter 7). Nick and Jordan have just seen Myrtle, and have witnessed George's breakdown. Jordan shows her shallow nature by not being upset over this terrible incident. Only a truly disturbing situation would be able to show the extent of Jordan's callousness.

- i) Why is the novel called The Great Gatsby? Hint: The magician Houdini was often introduced as "The Great Houdini." Is Gatsby "great" due to the illusion he creates, or is he great in other terms?

The word "Great" has a double meaning in relation to Jay Gatsby. Gatsby is an illusionist. His home is an imitation. He has created a mysterious persona for himself. He came from humble roots, from "parents [who were] shiftless and unsuccessful farm people" (Fitzgerald Chapter 6). The people who come to his parties wonder who he is, and engage in "romantic speculation" regarding Gatsby's past (Fitzgerald Chapter 3). In part, therefore, the title of "great" refers to Gatsby as though it were the title of a great magician, a person who makes something out of nothing.

However, the title of "great" does not end with reference to Gatsby being a magician. Such an extent would not reveal the full nature of Jay Gatsby. Gatsby is further great because he is better than the crowd of elite, old money characters that he tries to become a part of. Nick considers Gatsby to be "worth the whole damn bunch put together" (Fitzgerald Chapter 8). There is a genuine nature to Gatsby, a nature of honest emotion, that makes him great, and certainly greater than that "foul dust [which] floated in the wake of his dreams" (Fitzgerald Chapter 1).

- j) What is the significance of almost nobody coming to Gatsby's funeral?

Gatsby's virtually desolate funeral gives credibility to the claim that the crowd of people at Gatsby's parties, and the elite who he so looked up to, are at heart shallow and ignorant. It also shows that true friendship is a rare quality in the Jazz Age, and that family is what endures in the end. It is only Gatsby's father that makes the long journey to bid goodbye to his son (Fitzgerald Chapter 9). Only Gatsby's father refers to Gatsby with affection by calling him "Jimmy" and mourning his loss (Fitzgerald Chapter 9). It is only Henry C. Gatz that cries at the death of Jay Gatsby (Fitzgerald Chapter 9). The Great Gatsby as a whole is designed to give credibility to the genuine solidity of family over that of friendships based on wealth and adventure. Nick, too, gravitates to the West at the end of the novel because he once again sees it as a place of family roots and nostalgia (Fitzgerald Chapter 9). Furthermore, the lack of Daisy's genuine love towards Gatsby is fully manifested by her lack of attention towards Gatsby's funeral. Nick "remember[s], without resentment, that Daisy hadn't sent a message or a flower" (Fitzgerald, Chapter 9). Nick does not respond to Daisy's ignorance of Gatsby's funeral with surprise. It is as if her carelessness towards Gatsby is obvious enough to be expected, and it is a rather grave carelessness if Daisy refuses one last moment with somebody she claimed to love.

- k) What do you think Tom and Daisy go on to do with their lives? Create a summary for a sequel to the The Great Gatsby based on Tom and Daisy's lives after Nick's meeting with Tom at the end. Use evidence from the novel to support the actions of these characters in the sequel. Don't go overboard here, just a brief summary and tie it to the novel.

Answers will vary here, but whatever events take place in Tom and Daisy's lives after the events of this novel, they should be supported with character traits established by textual evidence.