

THE GREAT GATSBY

OVERALL OBJECTIVE: To provide teachers with instructional materials that will enhance their students' understanding of F. Scott Fitzgerald's *The Great Gatsby* through development of skills in the areas of vocabulary, literary analysis, writing, reading comprehension, and appreciation of the novel through a multi-level instructional approach.

SPECIFIC OBJECTIVES OF THIS PACKET: To help students

1. build vocabulary based on the words in the novel.
2. develop the reading comprehension skills in determining tone and theme, locating apt documentation, literal sequencing, and comparing values.
3. develop the literary analysis skills in characterization, symbolism, and figurative language.
4. practice writing skills for creating a mood and story/conversation.

APPROACHES TO THE GREAT GATSBY

More than half a century after its publication, *The Great Gatsby*, its author, and its characters are famous even among those not usually given to reading novels. The film version of the book, for all its weaknesses, was the subject of intense interest even before it reached the theaters, and it is revived regularly. Restaurants, discos, bars, and nightclubs across the country call themselves "Gatsby's," "Daisy Buchanan's," or "F. Scott's," and almost everyone knows what you mean when you talk about "Gatsby clothes" or a "Daisy Buchanan-type." Fortunately, at the heart of these legends stands a novel that as literature and as social commentary is fully worth the attention given to it.

Literarily, *Gatsby* is an ideal text for introducing students to the various elements of fiction: plot, character, theme, setting, and style. Jay Gatsby's story is told with economy of detail and vividness of action. Its events are both sensational and recognizable, its plot structure taut and filled with suspense and irony. Students first can enjoy reading it for its story line and can examine more closely its intertwined threads: the many parties and social moments in which the action takes place, the multiple ironies surrounding Myrtle's accidental death at the hands of her lover's wife, and Wilson's doubly misguided revenge.

To enact his narrative, Fitzgerald creates a set of memorable characters, both major and minor. Gatsby himself is an entrancing figure, with his mysterious background, his romantic dreams, his ostentatious wealth, and his dubious "gongnegtions." The teacher can lead discussions of Gatsby's emerging character at numerous points in the novel by asking students their reactions to the various theories proposed about the man and testing these against later disclosures. After completing the novel, students can be asked to write or talk about whether they share Nick's opinion of Gatsby.

Nick Carraway is himself a remarkable creation, a recessive narrator who, as he explains, inspires the confidence of "wild, unknown men." The class may study Nick as a first-person narrator, comparing him, for example, to Lockwood in *Wuthering Heights*,

Jake Barnes in *The Sun Also Rises*, or Marlowe in Conrad's novels. The teacher may also wish to consider the influences on Nick — the War, his Yale years, his business — and to assign students the task of writing other episodes about these parts of Nick's life.

Students will be equally eager to debate the merits and faults of the novel's upper-class characters — Tom and Daisy, Jordan Baker — and of its more humble figures. They can also learn from Fitzgerald the art of creating a character in a brief vignette. Fitzgerald's lesser actors — Wolfsheim, Mr. Gatz, the man in the library, and others — are captured with a precision and brevity that present ideal models for student writing.

Controlling this wealth of concentrated detail is Fitzgerald's masterful style. It offers innumerable literary lessons in the use of metaphor and symbolism, the art of sentence variety, and the writing of accurate dialogue. From the novel's epigraph to its spate of such carefully placed details as the Buchanans' green light, the valley of ashes, and the eyes of Dr. Eckleberg (which appeared on the book's original dust jacket and on the cover of the current paperback), *Gatsby* challenges the student to read closely. Fitzgerald's sentence structures provide in addition many opportunities for exercises in imitation and sentence expansion or scrambling.

Thematically, *The Great Gatsby* lends itself to a discussion of wealth, ambition, and love as both personal and literary concerns. The book is a classic critique of the American rags-to-riches dream, as well as a specific commentary on the mores of the Jazz Age. Teachers interested in a biographical approach to literature will find ample research and discussion possibilities in *Gatsby*: the Midwesterner who dreams of the East as a place of success and fortune, the young soldier who falls in love with a Southern belle, and the wild parties on Long Island.

Although it provides ample material for extensive study by itself, *The Great Gatsby* can also serve as a central text in units on the Twenties or on Romanticism. Students can be asked to compare the characters and contrast the style of this book to Hemingway's *The Sun Also Rises* or to read Thomas Wolfe's *Look Homeward, Angel* for another portrait of the era's romantic youth. The many points of similarity to *Wuthering Heights* make *Gatsby* a helpful introduction to an earlier time's concept of tragic romance. Whatever the use to which the book is put, one result is certain — the recruitment of new enthusiasts for the ever-growing Gatsby cult.

WHAT IS THE GREAT GATSBY ABOUT?

After World War I, Nick Carraway, the novel's narrator, leaves his Midwestern home to seek his fortune in New York. Not wishing to live in the city, he rents in the Long Island shore town of East Egg a modest house next to the mansion of a lavish party-giver, Jay Gatsby. One night he is invited to dinner at the home of his cousin Daisy Buchanan and her husband Tom, who live in the more fashionable West Egg, directly across the harbor. During the evening he notes a strain of cynicism in Daisy and discovers that Tom has a mistress. Returning home, he for