The American Dream

THEME

The Great Gatsby introduces us to the mysteriously wealthy Jay Gatsby, whose parties represent all that is decadent and superficial in 1920s America. As the story progresses, we uncover Gatsby’s humble beginnings and his transformation to an affluent sophisticate.

The main characters in Gatsby each represent a theme that’s central to the story and how their relationships reveal the themes at the novel’s core.

Revealing Relationships

Author

F. Scott Fitzgerald 1925 English

Overview

The Great Gatsby

Context

Commonly misread as a doomed love story or a display of the excess that led to the Great Depression, The Great Gatsby has at its core a deeper, more complex theme: “the enduring American drive to transcend who we are…”

Coexisting and competing are the American Dream and dehumanizing disillusionment. Gatsby’s love for Daisy is almost a joke, and decadence and pretentiousness are rampant.

The American Dream

Nick Carraway

Jay Gatsby

Daisy Buchanan

Tom Buchanan

Myrtle Wilson

Jordan Baker

The Eyes of Dr. T.J. Eckleburg

Symbolizes judgment, the transience of advertising, and meaninglessness

The Valley of Ashes

Symbolizes the gulf between rich and poor, a broken, desolate state of society and morality

Weather

Rain, sunlight, and heat frame scenes of reunion and confrontation

The Green Light

A symbol for desire, illusion, and our quest for the unattainable

Motifs

The Great Gatsby by the Numbers

1925

Published review in the New York World reads, “F. Scott Fitzgerald’s Latest a Dud”

155,000

Copies shipped to soldiers during WWII

$105M

Cost of 2013 film version starring Leonardo DiCaprio

>25M

Copies sold worldwide

The Great Gatsby

Romance

Married

Affair

Nick Carraway

Jay Gatsby

Daisy Buchanan

Tom Buchanan

Myrtle Wilson

Jordan Baker

Gatsby's love interest

Daisy's husband

Tom's lover

Daisy's friend

FRIENDS

Married

Affair

Romance

The American Dream

Debauchery

Privilege

Desire

Disillusionment

Sex

Myrtle

Tom

Daisy

Gatsby

Nick

Jordan

Upper-Class Entitlement

Ambition

American Values

Superficiality

The main characters in Gatsby each represent a theme that’s central to the story and how their relationships reveal the themes at the novel’s core.

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Nick Carraway, Chapter 9

atsby believed in the green light, the orgastic future that year by year recedes before us. It eluded us then, but that’s no matter—tomorrow we will run faster, stretch out our arms farther. . . . And one fine morning—— So we beat on, boats against the current, borne back ceaselessly into the past.

Nick Carraway, The Great Gatsby


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