

AP English Language and Composition
Study questions for *The Great Gatsby*

Chapter 1

1. Discuss the narrator's **tone** as the book opens.
2. Explain the following passage: "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" (2). What does this passage's presence in Chapter 1 **foreshadow**?
3. How does the **theme** of hope emerge and develop over the course of Chapter 1? What ideas and images are associated with hope?
4. What sort of family does Nick come from? How do you know?
5. Nick asserts: "He found the house, a weather-beaten cardboard bungalow at eighty a month" (3). Is the bungalow really cardboard? What literary device is at work here? What does it tell us about Nick as narrator? How do you think he will tell the story?
6. Read the description of Tom and Daisy's house on the bottom of p. 6. What image patterns are prominent in the description? What colors are associated with their house?
7. Describe in your own words the room in which Daisy and Jordan sit when Nick enters.
8. What is the role of restlessness and motion in the chapter? Which characters are restless? Where does this restlessness come from? What does it mean?
9. Nick introduces Daisy's voice (9). How does he describe it? Throughout the chapter, how would you describe not only Daisy's voice but also the kinds of statements she makes. What is Daisy like?
10. What do we learn in this chapter about the character of Tom Buchanan? About his personality, his psychology, his politics?
11. Nick introduces Gatsby early in the chapter, mentions him in conjunction with his house, says his name to Daisy, and then sees him in the chapter's final scene. What predictions do you have for this character?
12. In this chapter, certain color symbolism emerges. Choose a color you see as prominent. Look up the traditional symbolism for the color (citing your reputable sources). How do the colors seem to be used in the text?

literary terms

tone

foreshadowing
theme
hyperbole
unreliable narrator
color symbolism
setting
character

Chapter 2

1. Describe the Valley of Ashes, including all prominent features of the place. Who lives there? How's the view?
2. Draw the billboard featuring Dr. T.J. Eckleburg in its Valley of Ashes context. Which elements of your picture seem symbolic? How?
3. What words and images in this chapter are associated with the theme of blindness and sight? Collect as many examples as you can, including puns or other indirect
4. Describe George Wilson. Complete a character sketch: What does he say? What does he do? What do others say about him?
5. Describe Myrtle Wilson. Complete a character sketch: What does she say? What does she do? What do others say about her? Choose a passage she says that seems most characteristic of her personality. Explain how it fits.
6. How is marriage regarded by the attendees of the McKees' party?
7. Myrtle says, "All I kept thinking about, over and over, was 'You can't live forever; you can't live forever'" (36). What does Myrtle mean by this? What, do you think, is the meaning of life for Myrtle?
8. Read through the last part of the chapter, from "Then there were bloody towels..." (37) to the end. What strange details do you notice? What do they mean? Most readers, on their first read, don't appreciate how very strange this chapter end is. What features of Fitzgerald's style might cause readers to miss the strangeness?

literary terms
character sketch

from class
"The Philosophy of Composition" by E.A. Poe

Chapter 3

1. Describe the juxtaposition of Chapters 2 and 3. What shifts in tone and **mood** do you notice?

2. Find as many water-related words as you can on pages 39. What do you make of this abundance?
3. Choose 3–4 **similes** and/or **metaphors** from the first few pages of the chapter. What are the effects of these **figures of speech**?
4. This chapter features many images of luxury, consumption, and waste. What can you tell about Nick's attitude toward these elements?
5. What do the party-goers think of Gatsby? Why?
6. What does the man in "owl-eyed spectacles" (45) have to say about Gatsby's library? What do you make of his ideas?
7. Finally, Nick meets Gatsby. What is Nick's first impression of his host?
8. Jordan says she enjoys Gatsby's parties because large parties are "so intimate" (49). Explain this **paradox** and what it says about Jordan.
9. Toward the end of the chapter (57–59), Nick shifts his topic to a theme of truth and lies. At the very end, he says that he is "one of the few honest people that I have ever known (59). Do you believe him? Why or why not?

literary terms

mood
simile
metaphor
figure of speech
paradox

Chapter 4

(The list of names on Nick's timetable is the basis of an in-class activity. As you read along, note patterns you see in the names as well as the names' **denotations** and **connotations**.)

1. The rumors continue about Gatsby. Why do you think people imagine him as a criminal or a spy?
2. What do you think about the condemnation of Gatsby as a bootlegger by people who visit his house and drink his liquor, which presumably has been bootlegged? Get beyond pointing out the surface hypocrisy of this condemnation to a deeper idea about the separation of beautiful objects and their production in the text. Find examples to support your view.
3. Do you have clothes that have probably been produced in a sweatshop? Do you have a smartphone? How do you feel when you consider the probable production of these objects you

enjoy? How do you process this feeling? The goal of this question is not to suggest that you should feel guilty—the use of these objects is ubiquitous in mainstream American life—but to explore how people think about the products they consume and their origins, as the characters in the novel do. What connections to the lifestyles of novel’s characters do you make? Consider Tom/Daisy/Gatsby as well as Myrtle/Wilson.

4. Describe Gatsby’s car. Be specific; include color, style, and Gatsby’s and Nick’s attitudes toward it. You may draw it if you’d like. How is it important?
5. What do you think of Gatsby’s story of his life over the course of “that disconcerting ride”? (64). Do you believe him? Why or why not?
6. “‘Anything can happen now that we’ve slid over this bridge,’ I thought; ‘anything at all’” (69). What is Nick responding to when he says this? What are the implications of his statement; what norms does he expect to be violated in the city? Is it about class mobility, self-invention, both, something else?
7. Describe Meyer Wolfshiem. What significant details are associated with him? What do you think of him? (The stereotyped description of Wolfshiem is widely considered a flaw in the novel, which was written in 1925. Please discuss Wolfshiem as he’s important to the novel.)
8. Gatsby’s introduction to Tom Buchanan is the occasion for a flashback that provides the backstory (**exposition**) for Gatsby and Daisy’s relationship.
9. What does the flashback tell you about Daisy’s character? Make a main assertion and support your idea with evidence from the text.
10. Compare Jordan’s justification for re-introducing Gatsby and Daisy (“She ought to have something in her life” [79]) with Catherine’s justification for Myrtle and Tom (around p. 35). On what basis is such an argument made? Using what rhetorical appeal? Is it valid?

literary terms

denotation

connotation

exposition

rhetorical appeal: ethos, logos, pathos

kairos

Chapter 5

1. Count words that relate to time in Chapter V. What do you make of this abundance?
2. How does Gatsby dress for the tea party? How does he appear at the beginning of the chapter? Trace Gatsby’s mood an appearance across the chapter.

3. Interpret the scene with the “defunct mantelpiece clock” (86). What does it have to do with the theme of time in the chapter?
4. In moments where aspects of Gatsby’s house are described, the text sometimes slides into **synesthesia**: “the sparkling odor of jonquils and the frothy odor of hawthorn and plum blossoms and the pale gold odor of kiss-me-at-the-gate” (90). Explain these examples; include any others you find; and make clear the effect of the literary device.
5. Describe the effect of the following passage, and explain as specifically as you can how Fitzgerald achieves the effect:

He took out a pile of shirts and began throwing them, one by one, before us, shirts of sheer linen and thick silk and fine flannel, which lost their folds as they fell and covered the table in many-colored disarray. While we admired he brought more and the soft rich heap mounted higher—shirts with stripes and scrolls and plaids in coral and apple-green and lavender and faint orange, with monograms of Indian blue. Suddenly, with a strained sound, Daisy bent her head into the shirts and began to cry stormily.

“‘They’re such beautiful shirts,’ she sobbed, her voice muffled in the thick folds. ‘It makes me sad because I’ve never seen such—such beautiful shirts before.’” (92)

6. Explain the diminishment of the “significance of that [green] light” on the end of Daisy’s dock (93).

literary term

synesthesia

Chapter 6

1. Describe James Gatz’s family and background, and Jay Gatsby’s early education.
2. Explain this passage: “Jay Gatsby of West Egg, Long Island, sprang from his Platonic conception of himself. He was a son of God—a phrase which, if it means anything, means just that—and he must be about His Father’s business, the service of a vast, vulgar, and meretricious beauty” (98).
3. Describe Dan Cody and explain his relationship to Gatsby.
4. Explain the scene with Mrs. Sloane, Tom, and Gatsby. What is the source of awkwardness, what do the different participants think, and how does the scene resolve? What is the knowable purpose of the scene? (That is, why do you think Fitzgerald includes it?)
5. Daisy attends one of Gatsby’s parties. Does she enjoy it? Why or why not? Is there a miscalculation or an asynchrony on the part of Gatsby?

6. Nick says, Gatsby “wanted nothing less of Daisy than that she should go to Tom and say: ‘I never loved you’ (108). Discuss what Daisy’s saying this means for Gatsby and also what it reveals about Gatsby’s idea of time in general, self-invention, and the past.

7. Nick writes: “[Gatsby] knew that when he kissed this girl, and forever wed his unutterable visions to her perishable breath, his mind would never romp again like the mind of God” (110). In the same paragraph, he writes, “At [Gatsby’s] lips’ touch she blossomed for him like a flower and the incarnation was complete” (111). Explain these passages, including their religious overtones, and how they operate in the novel.

8. Compare and contrast Nick’s relationship with Jordan to Gatsby’s relationship with Daisy.

literary terms

knowable purpose

allusion

Chapter 7

1. Explain the reference to Trimalchio, p. 113.

2. Explain why Gatsby has dismissed his servants and shut down his parties.

3. Discuss the way the text sets forth the weather (115 and elsewhere). Include the particular literary devices used and their effects.

4. To whom is Tom speaking on the phone, p. 116? How do you know?

5. Daisy’s daughter, Pammy, appears in the scene (117). How does Gatsby react to the physical presence of the daughter? How does Daisy treat her? What knowable purposes does having Pammy in the scene serve for the novel?

6. “You always look so cool,” Daisy says to Gatsby (119). Is this statement significant for its content, the way it is said, or something else?

7. Daisy’s voice is full of _____. Fill in the blank and then explain how this is so.

8. Explain who is in which car when the group stops at Wilson’s station on the way into town. What does Tom tell Wilson about Gatsby’s car? (123). Why does Tom say what he does? From up above, Myrtle looks out the window and makes some inferences of her own. What does she think of Jordan? (125).

9. Wilson’s face is described as “green” (123). Given the green light on the end of Daisy’s dock, the grass in Nick’s and Gatsby’s lawns, the green upholstery in Gatsby’s car, and other green objects you can find, update your ideas about the symbolism of the color green in the novel.

10. Wilson explains to Tom that he wants to take his wife West. Codify your ideas about the uses of east and west in the novel, as touched upon in class, and update your ideas.
11. How do Tom's and Wilson's situations parallel each other by the middle of Chapter 7?
12. Summarize and explain the significance of the conversation about Biloxi (128-9).
13. What does Gatsby say about his Oxford status? How does Nick feel about what Gatsby says?
14. Tom talks more about the modern world and its relationship to his current situation. How can you understand Tom's fear? Where does his thinking go wrong?
15. Daisy resolves the question of whether she can fulfill Gatsby's wish set forth in Chapter 6. Can she? Is it that she's never loved Tom? How does this come out? As a reader, how do you feel about these revelations?
16. Tom alleges a source for Gatsby's money. What does he say? Do you think Tom is right? Why or why not?
17. What is the effect of Fitzgerald's setting this scene in a hotel room in the city? What is the knowable purpose of this move?
18. As they set out for Long Island, who is in which car? Does the arrangement surprise you, given the revelations of the day? Why or why not?
19. Amid all this, Nick has a surprising and seemingly random realization: "I just remembered that today's my birthday" (135). How is this revelation fitting, given the themes of the novel so far, the nature of the scene, and what's about to happen?
20. What has happened to Myrtle? What does she think she is doing, and what really happens? As a reader, how do you respond emotionally to what's happened? How is this a suitable end to this character?
21. What is the relationship of the theme of blindness and sight to the death of Myrtle and surrounding events?
22. How does the scene with the removal of the body correspond to the bloody towel scene in Chapter 2? In light of this, how do you characterize that earlier scene?
23. What does Tom infer about the death of Myrtle? Is he right?
24. How does Nick respond emotionally to the events of the evening? What does he realize? How does Gatsby respond? Does his response seem fitting?
25. Nick looks in the window and sees Daisy and Tom eating cold chicken. How would you characterize the mood of the scene?

26. Gatsby's staying outside the Buchanans' house is referred to in terms of its "sacredness" and called a "vigil" (145). How so? Is Nick being ironic? Why or why not?

Chapter 8

1. At the beginning of Chapter 8, Nick feels he has something he needs to tell Gatsby, because "morning would be too late" (147). What is it that he has to tell Gatsby?

2. Gatsby's house has become dusty (147) as a result of the departure of his servants. Connect this dust to the theme of consumption, fire, and ash that pervades the novel.

3. In their shared past, how did Gatsby's relationship with Daisy become the "following of a grail"? (149).

4. Daisy appears, "gleaming like silver, safe and proud above the hot struggles of the poor" (150). Explain this statement in light of the heat-and-cool theme that pervades the novel.

5. As Gatsby faces the end of his relationship, he says, "In any case...it was just personal" (152). How do you make sense of this statement, in light of Gatsby's character?

6. Explain Gatsby's pilgrimage (153).

7. How does Nick feel about Gatsby as he leaves his house? (154).

8. What are Wilson's problems as he faces his wife's death? Where does he look for God?

9. Explore the theme of mistaken identity (sight and blindness) as it affects Myrtle and then Tom in Chapter 7 and Wilson in Chapter 8. What are the larger implications of these misses?

10. Consider the following passage:

I have an idea that Gatsby himself didn't believe it would come, and perhaps he no longer cared. If that was true he must have felt that he had lost the old warm world, paid a high price for living too long with a single dream. He must have looked up at an unfamiliar sky through frightening leaves and shivered as he found what a grotesque thing a rose is and how raw the sunlight was upon the scarcely created grass. A new world, material without being real, where poor ghosts, breathing dreams like air, drifted fortuitously about... (161)

Explain the passage in your own words.

11. Explore the symbolism of Gatsby's death in the swimming pool; explore the scene specifically, too, thinking about color symbolism (red, blue) and any other elements that feel important.

Chapter 9

1. What is the overall emotional effect of the flurry of arrangements for Gatsby's funeral? Consider Wolfsheim's reply and the appearance of Henry Gatz.
2. Compare the schedule in Gatsby's book with the schedule featured in Ben Franklin's *Autobiography*. What seems to be the purpose of the **allusion**?
3. Explain the symbolism of the rain at Gatsby's funeral, in light of the rain in the meeting between Gatsby and Daisy in Chapter 5.
4. What do you make of the re-appearance of the man with the owl-eyed spectacles? Explore his relationship to the theme of sight and blindness.
5. How is the Midwest depicted as Nick returns to it? How has this story been "of the West, after all" (176). Get beyond the origins of the characters to make a meaningful answer.
6. As he makes gestures toward **denouement**, Nick considers his ideas about West Egg in terms of a painting and discusses the sense of distortion. First, find the references to distortion. Then, make inferences about what the key or central distortion of the novel is and how the novel points to that central idea.
7. Discuss the end of Nick and Jordan's relationship. Why do they break up? How do you, as a reader, feel about their break-up?
8. When Nick encounters Tom in October and they discuss Wilson, what suspicion of Nick's does Tom confirm?
9. The long paragraph that begins "Most of the big shore places..." contains some of the most beautiful language in American literature and posits *Gatsby's* theme as occurring in relation to the American dream. Discuss the meaning of the passage and the centrality of landscape to the notions of self-invention crucial to the novel.
10. "So we beat on, boats against the current, borne back ceaselessly into the past" (180). Diagram boat and current directions and discuss the relationship of the people to the past. When we take this sentence seriously, what does it say?

literary terms

allusion

denouement