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Book Club Kit Discussion Guide

The Great Gatsby
by
F. Scott Fitzgerald
(New York: Scribner, 2004)

Author:

F. Scott Fitzgerald was born in St. Paul, Minnesota, in 1896, attended Princeton University, and published his first novel, *This Side of Paradise* in 1920. That same year he married Zelda Sayre and the couple divided their time among New York, Paris and the Riviera, becoming a part of the American expatriate circle that included Gertrude Stein, Ernest Hemingway and John Dos Passos. Fitzgerald was a major new literary voice, and his masterpieces include *The Beautiful and Damned*, *The Great Gatsby* and *Tender is the Night*. He died of a heart attack in 1940 at the age of forty-four, while working on *The Love of the Last Tycoon*. For his sharp social insight and breathtaking lyricism, Fitzgerald stands out as one of the most important American writers of the twentieth century. [From the book jacket]

Summary:

The Great Gatsby may be the most popular classic in modern American fiction. Since its publication in 1925, Fitzgerald's masterpiece has become a touchstone for generations of readers and writers, many of whom reread it every few years as a ritual of imaginative renewal. The story of Jay Gatsby's desperate quest to win back his first love reverberates with themes at once characteristically American and universally human, among them the importance of honesty, the temptations of wealth, and the struggle to escape the past. Though *The Great Gatsby* runs to fewer than two hundred pages, there is no bigger read in American literature. [From the National Endowment for the Arts, *The Big Read* <http://www.neabigread.org/books/greatgatsby/>]

Questions:

1. The novel's action occurs in 1922 between June and September. How does Nick's nonchronological narration shape your response to the events surrounding the mystery of Jay Gatsby?
2. Nick believes he is an honest, nonjudgemental narrator. Do you agree?
3. Gatsby believes that the past can be repeated. Is he right?
4. Why does Daisy sob into the "thick folds" of Gatsby's beautiful shirts?

5. What do the faded eyes of Doctor T.J. Eckleburg symbolize? Is there a connection between this billboard and the green light at the end of Daisy's dock?
6. Perhaps the novel's climax occurs when Gatsby confronts Tom in New York. Did Daisy's ultimate choice surprise you? Is it consistent with her character?
7. Do you agree with Nick's final assertion that Gatsby is "worth the whole damn bunch put together"? Why or why not?
8. How does Fitzgerald foreshadow the tragedies at the end?
9. Does the novel critique or uphold the values of the Jazz Age and the fears of the Lost Generation?
10. Fitzgerald wrote, "You don't write because you want to say something, you write because you have something to say." What did he have to say in Gatsby?
11. Fitzgerald scholar Matthew J. Bruccoli claims: "*The Great Gatsby* does not proclaim the nobility of the human spirit; it is not politically correct; it does not reveal how to solve the problems of life; it delivers no fashionable or comforting messages. It is just a masterpiece." Do you agree?

[Questions from the National Endowment for the Arts, The Big Read
<http://www.neabigread.org/books/greatgatsby/>]

Further Reading:

Passos, John Dos. *The Big Money*. Larchmont, N.Y. : Queens House, [1988], c1937.

Kerouac, Jack. *On the Road*. New York : Penguin Books, 2003.

Hemingway Ernest. *In Our Time*. New York : Simon & Schuster, c1996.

Wharton, Edith. *The House of Mirth*. New York : Simon & Schuster, 1995, c1987.