

Great Books: *The Great Gatsby*: Teacher's Guide

Grade Level: 9-12

Curriculum Focus: Literature

Lesson Duration: Two class periods

Program Description

The most widely read American novel of this century, *The Great Gatsby* explores the uniquely American possibilities for remaking oneself. You'll learn how Fitzgerald, through Gatsby, defined for millions the era known as the Jazz Age.

Lesson Plan

Student Objectives

- Adapt part of the novel to a dramatic reading.
- Create various oral interpretations of a novel.

Materials

- *The Great Gatsby*, by F. Scott Fitzgerald
- Paper and pens

Procedures

1. Introduce or review the technique called oral interpretation or readers' theater. Both terms refer to reading non-dramatic literature aloud as if it were drama. Those performing the readers' theater should read the narration of a novel and the dialogue, including the tag lines such as "he said" and "she exclaimed."
2. Divide students into groups, and assign each group to a scene. Parts of the novel that lend themselves especially well to readers' theater are the following:
 - The dinner party
 - Gatsby's and Daisy's meeting before he went off to war
 - The rendezvous between Daisy and Gatsby at his mansion
 - The hotel scene

3. Before each group begins, review the rules of creating a readers' theater:
 - Every scene that you've selected for students to enact has a major climax and some smaller ones. The group must figure out which parts of the scene are the high points and how to emphasize them in a reading.
 - The students in each group must come up with a performance concept. They must determine how many individual voices the scene requires, how these voices should blend, and how they should contrast. For example, is there a separate voice for each character, or will one person read the lines of more than one character? Similarly, the students must decide how to handle the narrator: Will just one student read Nick's narration, or will several? Or should the narrator's voice be read by voices in unison? How will the group treat the characters' tag lines? Will they let the person reading the character say them, give them to the narrator or someone else, or leave them out altogether?
 - Next the students must prepare a script based on the novel, deciding who will read which words, sentences, and paragraphs and how the lines should sound.
 - Performers in such events usually stand or sit rather than move around a stage. As students work out their scripts, they may want to indicate gestures and sound effects. For example, in the dinner party scene, we do not hear Daisy and Nick laugh; we only hear Nick report that Daisy and he laugh. The script can call for the sound of a woman's laughter and then a man's, as the narrator says the words, "...then she laughed, an absurd, charming little laugh, and I laughed too and came forward into the room."
 - Readers are not acting, but they must pay attention to characterization and remain aware of a character's major traits to figure out how to communicate through tone, pacing of speech, and pausing.
 - Connection with the audience is important also. Students will be reading from their scripts, but whenever possible, each reader should establish eye contact with some members of the audience. In telling the story, there should be some signs of intimacy between storytellers and audience.
 - Someone in the group must introduce the oral interpretation, by setting the stage.
4. Students in each group will need time to produce their script and rehearse; they'll need rehearsal space.
5. When students in a group are ready, make sure they have enough time to perform. Encourage audience members to take notes about each oral interpretation, commenting on some or all of the following points:
 - Division of script into narrator's parts and characters' parts
 - Performer's eye contact
 - Speaking voices: slow enough? loud enough? varied enough?
 - Particularly strong parts and particularly weak parts of the presentation

Notes will help the audience to give constructive feedback to each group after each performance.

6. If time permits, give groups an opportunity to rework their scripts and perform a second time after taking the audience's comments into consideration.

Assessment

Use the following three-point rubric to evaluate students' work during this lesson.

- **3 points:** Students displayed exemplary efforts in class discussions, group work, creation of skit, and participation in performance.
- **2 points:** Students displayed average effort in class discussions, group work, creation of skit, and participation in performance.
- **1 point:** Students displayed minimal effort in class discussions, group work, creation of skit, and participation in performance.

Vocabulary

decadent

Definition: Characterized by or appealing to self-indulgence; marked by decay or decline

Context: The East Coast represents wealth, decadence, and corruption.

disillusion

Definition: The condition of being disenchanting; disappointed

Context: We are caught between hope and disillusion.

distraught

Definition: Agitated with doubt or mental conflict

Context: His distraught eyes stared down at Daisy.

pastoral

Definition: Of or relating to the countryside, not urban; pleasingly peaceful and innocent

Context: The city ends and the pastoral green dream of *Gatsby's* begins.

sardonic

Definition: Disdainfully or skeptically humorous; derisively mocking

Context: Nick Carraway is sardonic and quiet.

swindle

Definition: To obtain money or property by fraud or deceit

Context: I would not give her up to a common swindler who would have to steal a ring to put on her finger.

Academic Standards

Mid-continent Research for Education and Learning (McREL)

McREL's Content Knowledge: A Compendium of Standards and Benchmarks for K-12 Education addresses 14 content areas. To view the standards and benchmarks, visit link:

<http://www.mcrel.org/compendium/browse.asp>

This lesson plan addresses the following national standards:

- Language Arts – Reading: Uses reading skills and strategies to understand and interpret a variety of literary texts; Listening and Speaking: Uses listening and speaking strategies for different purposes

The National Council of Teachers of English (NCTE)

The National Council of Teachers of English (NCTE) and the International Reading Association have developed national standards to provide guidelines for teaching the English language arts. To view the standards online, go to <http://www.ncte.org/about/over/standards/110846.htm>

This lesson plan addresses the following NCTE standards:

- Students read a wide range of print and non-print texts to build an understanding of texts, of themselves, and of the cultures of the United States and the world; to acquire new information; to respond to the needs and demands of society and the workplace; and for personal fulfillment. Among these texts are fiction and nonfiction, classic and contemporary works.
 - Students adjust their use of spoken, written, and visual language (e.g., conventions, style, vocabulary) to communicate effectively with a variety of audiences and for different purposes. Students conduct research on issues and interests by generating ideas and questions, and by posing problems. They gather, evaluate, and synthesize data from a variety of sources (e.g., print and non-print texts, artifacts, people) to communicate their discoveries in ways that suit their purpose and audience.
 - Students apply a wide range of strategies to comprehend, interpret, evaluate, and appreciate texts. They draw on their prior experience, their interactions with other readers and writers, their knowledge of word meaning and of other texts, their word identification strategies, and their understanding of textual features (e.g., sound-letter correspondence, sentence structure, context, graphics).
 - Students participate as knowledgeable, reflective, creative, and critical members of a variety of literacy communities. Students use spoken, written, and visual language to accomplish their own purposes (e.g., for learning, enjoyment, persuasion, and the exchange of information).
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Support Materials

Develop custom worksheets, educational puzzles, online quizzes, and more with the free teaching tools offered on the Discoveryschool.com Web site. Create and print support materials, or save them to a Custom Classroom account for future use. To learn more, visit

- <http://school.discovery.com/teachingtools/teachingtools.html>
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DVD Content

This program is available in an interactive DVD format. The following information and activities are specific to the DVD version.

How To Use the DVD

The DVD starting screen has the following options:

Play Video – This plays the video from start to finish. There are no programmed stops, except by using a remote control. With a computer, depending on the particular software player, a pause button is included with the other video controls.

Video Index – Here the video is divided into four parts (see below), indicated by video thumbnail icons. Watching all parts in sequence is similar to watching the video from start to finish. Brief descriptions and total running times are noted for each part. To play a particular segment, press Enter on the remote for TV playback; on a computer, click once to highlight a thumbnail and read the accompanying text description and click again to start the video.

Curriculum Units – These are specially edited video segments pulled from different sections of the video (see below). These nonlinear segments align with key ideas in the unit of instruction. They include onscreen pre- and post-viewing questions, reproduced below in this Teacher's Guide. Total running times for these segments are noted. To play a particular segment, press Enter on the TV remote or click once on the Curriculum Unit title on a computer.

Standards Link – Selecting this option displays a single screen that lists the national academic standards the video addresses.

Teacher Resources – This screen gives the technical support number and Web site address.

Video Index

Part I (13 min.)

F. Scott Fitzgerald's novel *The Great Gatsby* focuses on how the American dream may be unattainable, as seen through Jay Gatsby's desire for Daisy Buchanan.



Part II (14 min.)

Fitzgerald and his character Gatsby have similar family backgrounds and love lives. The novel takes place during the 1920s, when Fitzgerald was working his way into high society.

Part III (13 min.)

The extravagance and imagery portrayed in *The Great Gatsby* has been the basis for advertising campaigns, and the novel's popularity has inspired several film adaptations.

Part IV (11 min.)

The deaths of Myrtle Wilson and Jay Gatsby illustrate the cruelty of the established upper class. Both characters fiercely believed they could achieve their goals of wealth and acceptance.

Curriculum Units

1. Purchasing Power

Pre-viewing question

Q: What is "consumerism"?

A: According to Merriam-Webster, consumerism is "the theory that an increasing consumption of goods is economically desirable; also a preoccupation with and an inclination toward the buying of consumer goods."

Post-viewing question

Q: How does F. Scott Fitzgerald feel about the advertising business?

A: He does not trust the advertising business. Fitzgerald does not think an advertisement can be truthful and nothing more, as the purpose of advertising is to make money. This is symbolized through Dr. T.J. Eckelburg's billboard. His glasses illustrate the blindness and inability to see reality clearly.

2. Achieving the American Dream

Pre-viewing question

Q: What determines a person's social class?

A: Answers may include occupation, education, clothing, car, social relationships, etc.

Post-viewing question

Q: What types of rich people existed in the society of *The Great Gatsby*?

A: The book portrays two classes of rich people: old money, family fortunes passed down through generations, and new money, which is earned through hard work.

3. Welcome to West Egg

Pre-viewing question

Q: Where is Long Island?

A: Long Island is to the east of New York City, bordering the borough of Queens, New York.



Post-viewing question

Q: What is the setting for *The Great Gatsby*?

A: The novel is set in the summer of 1922 in West Egg, Long Island.

4. The Roaring 20s

Pre-viewing question

Q: What is Prohibition?

A: The term "Prohibition" refers to the forbidding by law of the manufacture, transportation, and sale of alcoholic liquors except for medicinal and sacramental purposes. In the United States, Prohibition was instated with the 18th Amendment and repealed with the 21st Amendment..

Post-viewing question

Q: What characterizes the 1920s in the United States?

A: The 1920s in the United States was a time of peace, prosperity, and economic stability that followed World War I. People spent money on lavish consumer items and entertainment.

5. Meet F. Scott Fitzgerald

Pre-viewing question

Q: Where might an author get inspiration for characters?

A: Answers may include himself or herself, other people they know, etc.

Post-viewing question

Q: How are Jay Gatsby and F. Scott Fitzgerald alike?

A: Both men were born in the Midwest and moved to New York City. They felt out of place in high society, but tried very hard to fit in. Gatsby and Fitzgerald are determined to be successful and get the prettiest, most popular girl. For Gatsby, it was Daisy; for Fitzgerald, Zelda.

6. Nostalgia

Pre-viewing question

Q: Why do most young people believe the world is full of choices and opportunity?

A: Answers will vary.

Post-viewing question

Q: What does *The Great Gatsby* illustrate about opportunity?

A: Answers may include the idea that opportunities aren't always there; that the desire to achieve something isn't always possible, no matter how much you have and how hard you believe in your ability to achieve that goal.