



<http://www.sparknotes.com/lit/gatsby>

**Video summary:** <http://www.sparknotes.com/sparknotes/video/gatsby>

**John Green explains the Great Gatsby**

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xw9Au9OoN88>

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cn0WZ8-0Z1Y>

**John Green explains the Roaring 20s**

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VfOR1XCMf7A>

**Symbolism:** <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0VhYMdnAsyM>

⇒

## Plot

Nick Carraway, a young man from Minnesota, moves to New York in the summer of 1922 to learn about the bond business. He rents a house in the West Egg district of Long Island, a wealthy but unfashionable area populated by the new rich, a group who have made their fortunes too recently to have established social connections and who are prone to garish displays of wealth. Nick's next-door neighbor in West Egg is a mysterious man named Jay Gatsby, who lives in a gigantic Gothic mansion and throws extravagant parties every Saturday night.

Nick is unlike the other inhabitants of West Egg—he was educated at Yale and has social connections in East Egg, a fashionable area of Long Island home to the established upper class. Nick drives out to East Egg one evening for dinner with his cousin, Daisy Buchanan, and her husband, Tom, an erstwhile classmate of Nick's at Yale. Daisy and Tom introduce Nick to Jordan Baker, a beautiful, cynical young woman with whom Nick begins a romantic relationship. Nick also learns a bit about Daisy and Tom's marriage: Jordan tells him that Tom has a lover, Myrtle Wilson, who lives in the valley of ashes, a gray industrial dumping ground between West Egg and New York City. Not long after this revelation, Nick travels to New York City with Tom and Myrtle. At a vulgar, gaudy party in the apartment that Tom keeps for the affair, Myrtle begins to taunt Tom about Daisy, and Tom responds by breaking her nose.

As the summer progresses, Nick eventually garners an invitation to one of Gatsby's legendary parties. He encounters Jordan Baker at the party, and they meet Gatsby himself, a surprisingly young man who affects an English accent, has a remarkable smile, and calls everyone "old sport." Gatsby asks to speak to Jordan alone, and, through Jordan, Nick later learns more about his mysterious neighbor. Gatsby tells Jordan that he knew Daisy in Louisville in 1917 and is deeply in love with her. He spends many nights staring at the green light at the end of her dock, across the bay from his mansion. Gatsby's extravagant lifestyle and wild parties are simply an attempt to impress Daisy. Gatsby now wants Nick to arrange a reunion between himself and Daisy, but he is afraid that Daisy will refuse to see him if she knows that he still loves her. Nick invites Daisy to have tea at his house, without telling her that Gatsby will also be there. After an initially awkward reunion, Gatsby and Daisy reestablish their connection. Their love rekindled, they begin an affair.

After a short time, Tom grows increasingly suspicious of his wife's relationship with Gatsby. At a luncheon at the Buchanans' house, Gatsby stares at Daisy with such undisguised passion that Tom realizes Gatsby is in love with her. Though Tom is himself involved in an extramarital affair, he is deeply outraged by the thought that his wife could be unfaithful to him. He forces the group to drive into New York City, where he confronts Gatsby in a suite at the Plaza Hotel. Tom asserts that he and Daisy have a history that Gatsby could never understand, and he announces to his wife that Gatsby is a criminal—his fortune comes from bootlegging alcohol and other illegal activities. Daisy realizes that her allegiance is to Tom, and Tom contemptuously sends her back to East Egg with Gatsby, attempting to prove that Gatsby cannot hurt him.

When Nick, Jordan, and Tom drive through the valley of ashes, however, they discover that Gatsby's car has struck and killed Myrtle, Tom's lover. They rush back to Long Island, where Nick learns from Gatsby that Daisy was driving the car when it struck Myrtle, but that Gatsby

intends to take the blame. The next day, Tom tells Myrtle's husband, George, that Gatsby was the driver of the car. George, who has leapt to the conclusion that the driver of the car that killed Myrtle must have been her lover, finds Gatsby in the pool at his mansion and shoots him dead. He then fatally shoots himself.

Nick stages a small funeral for Gatsby, ends his relationship with Jordan, and moves back to the Midwest to escape the disgust he feels for the people surrounding Gatsby's life and for the emptiness and moral decay of life among the wealthy on the East Coast. Nick reflects that just as Gatsby's dream of Daisy was corrupted by money and dishonesty, the American dream of happiness and individualism has disintegrated into the mere pursuit of wealth. Though Gatsby's power to transform his dreams into reality is what makes him "great," Nick reflects that the era of dreaming—both Gatsby's dream and the American dream—is over.

## Character List



**Nick Carraway** - The novel's narrator, Nick is a young man from Minnesota who, after being educated at Yale and fighting in World War I, goes to New York City to learn the bond business. Honest, tolerant, and inclined to reserve judgment, Nick often serves as a confidant for those with troubling secrets. After moving to West Egg, a fictional area of Long Island that is home to the newly rich, Nick quickly befriends his next-door neighbor, the mysterious Jay Gatsby. As Daisy Buchanan's cousin, he facilitates the rekindling of the romance between her and Gatsby. *The Great Gatsby* is told entirely through Nick's eyes; his thoughts and perceptions shape and color the story.

### **Nick Carraway**

If Gatsby represents one part of Fitzgerald's personality, the flashy celebrity who pursued and glorified wealth in order to impress the woman he loved, then Nick represents another part: the quiet, reflective Midwesterner adrift in the lurid East. A young man (he turns thirty during the course of the novel) from Minnesota, Nick travels to New York in 1922 to learn the bond business. He lives in the West Egg district of Long Island, next door to Gatsby. Nick is also Daisy's cousin, which enables him to observe and assist the resurgent love affair between Daisy and Gatsby. As a result of his relationship to these two characters, Nick is the perfect choice to narrate the novel, which functions as a personal memoir of his experiences with Gatsby in the summer of 1922.

Nick is also well suited to narrating *The Great Gatsby* because of his temperament. As he tells the reader in Chapter 1, he is tolerant, open-minded, quiet, and a good listener, and, as a result, others tend to talk to him and tell him their secrets. Gatsby, in particular, comes to trust him and treat him as a confidant. Nick generally assumes a secondary role throughout the novel, preferring to describe and comment on events rather than dominate the action. Often, however, he functions as Fitzgerald's voice, as in his extended meditation on time and the American dream at the end of Chapter 9.

Insofar as Nick plays a role inside the narrative, he evidences a strongly mixed reaction to life on the East Coast, one that creates a powerful internal conflict that he does not resolve until the end of the book. On the one hand, Nick is attracted to the fast-paced, fun-driven lifestyle of New York. On the other hand, he finds that lifestyle grotesque and damaging. This inner

conflict is symbolized throughout the book by Nick's romantic affair with Jordan Baker. He is attracted to her vivacity and her sophistication just as he is repelled by her dishonesty and her lack of consideration for other people.

Nick states that there is a "quality of distortion" to life in New York, and this lifestyle makes him lose his equilibrium, especially early in the novel, as when he gets drunk at Gatsby's party in Chapter 2. After witnessing the unraveling of Gatsby's dream and presiding over the appalling spectacle of Gatsby's funeral, Nick realizes that the fast life of revelry on the East Coast is a cover for the terrifying moral emptiness that the valley of ashes symbolizes. Having gained the maturity that this insight demonstrates, he returns to Minnesota in search of a quieter life structured by more traditional moral values.

**Jay Gatsby** - The title character and protagonist of the novel, Gatsby is a fabulously wealthy young man living in a Gothic mansion in West Egg. He is famous for the lavish parties he throws every Saturday night, but no one knows where he comes from, what he does, or how he made his fortune. As the novel progresses, Nick learns that Gatsby was born James Gatz on a farm in North Dakota; working for a millionaire made him dedicate his life to the achievement of wealth. When he met Daisy while training to be an officer in Louisville, he fell in love with her. Nick also learns that Gatsby made his fortune through criminal activity, as he was willing to do anything to gain the social position he thought necessary to win Daisy. Nick views Gatsby as a deeply flawed man, dishonest and vulgar, whose extraordinary optimism and power to transform his dreams into reality make him “great” nonetheless.

## **Jay Gatsby**

The title character of *The Great Gatsby* is a young man, around thirty years old, who rose from an impoverished childhood in rural North Dakota to become fabulously wealthy. However, he achieved this lofty goal by participating in organized crime, including distributing illegal alcohol and trading in stolen securities. From his early youth, Gatsby despised poverty and longed for wealth and sophistication—he dropped out of St. Olaf’s College after only two weeks because he could not bear the janitorial job with which he was paying his tuition. Though Gatsby has always wanted to be rich, his main motivation in acquiring his fortune was his love for Daisy Buchanan, whom he met as a young military officer in Louisville before leaving to fight in World War I in 1917. Gatsby immediately fell in love with Daisy’s aura of luxury, grace, and charm, and lied to her about his own background in order to convince her that he was good enough for her. Daisy promised to wait for him when he left for the war, but married Tom Buchanan in 1919, while Gatsby was studying at Oxford after the war in an attempt to gain an education. From that moment on, Gatsby dedicated himself to winning Daisy back, and his acquisition of millions of dollars, his purchase of a gaudy mansion on West Egg, and his lavish weekly parties are all merely means to that end.



Fitzgerald delays the introduction of most of this information until fairly late in the novel. Gatsby’s reputation precedes him—Gatsby himself does not appear in a speaking role until Chapter 3. Fitzgerald initially presents Gatsby as the aloof, enigmatic host of the unbelievably opulent parties thrown every week at his mansion. He appears surrounded by spectacular luxury, courted by powerful men and beautiful women. He is the subject of a whirlwind of gossip throughout New York and is already a kind of legendary celebrity before he is ever introduced to the reader. Fitzgerald propels the novel forward through the early chapters by shrouding Gatsby’s background and the source of his wealth in mystery (the reader learns about Gatsby’s childhood in Chapter 6 and receives definitive proof of his criminal dealings in Chapter 7). As a result, the reader’s first, distant impressions of Gatsby strike quite a different note from that of the lovesick, naive young man who emerges during the later part of the novel.

Fitzgerald uses this technique of delayed character revelation to emphasize the theatrical quality of Gatsby's approach to life, which is an important part of his personality. Gatsby has literally created his own character, even changing his name from James Gatz to Jay Gatsby to represent his reinvention of himself. As his relentless quest for Daisy demonstrates, Gatsby has an extraordinary ability to transform his hopes and dreams into reality; at the beginning of the novel, he appears to the reader just as he desires to appear to the world. This talent for self-invention is what gives Gatsby his quality of "greatness": indeed, the title "*The Great Gatsby*" is reminiscent of billings for such vaudeville magicians as "The Great Houdini" and "The Great Blackstone," suggesting that the persona of Jay Gatsby is a masterful illusion.

Gatsby believed in the green light, the orgastic future that year by year recedes before us.

(See [Important Quotations Explained](#)) (at the end of this file)

As the novel progresses and Fitzgerald deconstructs Gatsby's self-presentation, Gatsby reveals himself to be an innocent, hopeful young man who stakes everything on his dreams, not realizing that his dreams are unworthy of him. Gatsby invests Daisy with an idealistic perfection that she cannot possibly attain in reality and pursues her with a passionate zeal that blinds him to her limitations. His dream of her disintegrates, revealing the corruption that wealth causes and the unworthiness of the goal, much in the way Fitzgerald sees the American dream crumbling in the 1920s, as America's powerful optimism, vitality, and individualism become subordinated to the amoral pursuit of wealth.

Gatsby is contrasted most consistently with Nick. Critics point out that the former, passionate and active, and the latter, sober and reflective, seem to represent two sides of Fitzgerald's personality. Additionally, whereas Tom is a cold-hearted, aristocratic bully, Gatsby is a loyal and good-hearted man. Though his lifestyle and attitude differ greatly from those of George Wilson, Gatsby and Wilson share the fact that they both lose their love interest to Tom.

**Daisy Buchanan** - Nick's cousin, and the woman Gatsby loves. As a young woman in Louisville before the war, Daisy was courted by a number of officers, including Gatsby. She fell in love with Gatsby and promised to wait for him. However, Daisy harbors a deep need to be loved, and when a wealthy, powerful young man named Tom Buchanan asked her to marry him, Daisy decided not to wait for Gatsby after all. Now a beautiful socialite, Daisy lives with Tom across from Gatsby in the fashionable East Egg district of Long Island. She is sardonic and somewhat cynical, and behaves superficially to mask her pain at her husband's constant infidelity.

### **Daisy Buchanan**

Partially based on Fitzgerald's wife, Zelda, Daisy is a beautiful young woman from Louisville, Kentucky. She is Nick's cousin and the object of Gatsby's love. As a young debutante in Louisville, Daisy was extremely popular among the military officers stationed near her home, including Jay Gatsby. Gatsby lied about his background to Daisy, claiming to be from a wealthy family in order to convince her that he was worthy of her. Eventually, Gatsby won Daisy's heart, and they made love before Gatsby left to fight in the war. Daisy

promised to wait for Gatsby, but in 1919 she chose instead to marry Tom Buchanan, a young man from a solid, aristocratic family who could promise her a wealthy lifestyle and who had the support of her parents.

After 1919, Gatsby dedicated himself to winning Daisy back, making her the single goal of all of his dreams and the main motivation behind his acquisition of immense wealth through criminal activity. To Gatsby, Daisy represents the paragon of perfection—she has the aura of charm, wealth, sophistication, grace, and aristocracy that he longed for as a child in North Dakota and that first attracted him to her. In reality, however, Daisy falls far short of Gatsby's ideals. She is beautiful and charming, but also fickle, shallow, bored, and sardonic. Nick characterizes her as a careless person who smashes things up and then retreats behind her money. Daisy proves her real nature when she chooses Tom over Gatsby in Chapter 7, then allows Gatsby to take the blame for killing Myrtle Wilson even though she herself was driving the car. Finally, rather than attend Gatsby's funeral, Daisy and Tom move away, leaving no forwarding address.

Like Zelda Fitzgerald, Daisy is in love with money, ease, and material luxury. She is capable of affection (she seems genuinely fond of Nick and occasionally seems to love Gatsby sincerely), but not of sustained loyalty or care. She is indifferent even to her own infant daughter, never discussing her and treating her as an afterthought when she is introduced in Chapter 7. In Fitzgerald's conception of America in the 1920s, Daisy represents the amoral values of the aristocratic East Egg set.

**Tom Buchanan** - Daisy's immensely wealthy husband, once a member of Nick's social club at Yale. Powerfully built and hailing from a socially solid old family, Tom is an arrogant, hypocritical bully. His social attitudes are laced with racism and sexism, and he never even considers trying to live up to the moral standard he demands from those around him. He has no moral qualms about his own extramarital affair with Myrtle, but when he begins to suspect Daisy and Gatsby of having an affair, he becomes outraged and forces a confrontation.

**Jordan Baker** - Daisy's friend, a woman with whom Nick becomes romantically involved during the course of the novel. A competitive golfer, Jordan represents one of the "new women" of the 1920s—cynical, boyish, and self-centered. Jordan is beautiful, but also dishonest: she cheated in order to win her first golf tournament and continually bends the truth.

**Myrtle Wilson** - Tom's lover, whose lifeless husband George owns a run-down garage in the valley of ashes. Myrtle herself possesses a fierce vitality and desperately looks for a way to improve her situation. Unfortunately for her, she chooses Tom, who treats her as a mere object of his desire.

**George Wilson** - Myrtle's husband, the lifeless, exhausted owner of a run-down auto shop at the edge of the valley of ashes. George loves and idealizes Myrtle, and is devastated by her affair with Tom. George is consumed with grief when Myrtle is killed. George is comparable to Gatsby in that both are dreamers and both are ruined by their unrequited love for women who love Tom.

**Owl Eyes** - The eccentric, bespectacled drunk whom Nick meets at the first party he attends at Gatsby's mansion. Nick finds Owl Eyes looking through Gatsby's library, astonished that the books are real.

**Klipspringer** - The shallow freeloader who seems almost to live at Gatsby's mansion, taking advantage of his host's money. As soon as Gatsby dies, Klipspringer disappears—he does not

attend the funeral, but he does call Nick about a pair of tennis shoes that he left at Gatsby's mansion.

**Meyer Wolfsheim** - Gatsby's friend, a prominent figure in organized crime. Before the events of the novel take place, Wolfsheim helped Gatsby to make his fortune bootlegging illegal liquor. His continued acquaintance with Gatsby suggests that Gatsby is still involved in illegal business.

### The Decline of the American Dream in the 1920s

On the surface, *The Great Gatsby* is a story of the thwarted love between a man and a woman. The main theme of the novel, however, encompasses a much larger, less romantic scope. Though all of its action takes place over a mere few months during the summer of 1922 and is set in a circumscribed geographical area in the vicinity of Long Island, New York, *The Great Gatsby* is a highly symbolic meditation on 1920s America as a whole, in particular the disintegration of the American dream in an era of unprecedented prosperity and material excess.



Fitzgerald portrays the 1920s as an era of decayed social and moral values, evidenced in its overarching cynicism, greed, and empty pursuit of pleasure. The reckless jubilation that led to decadent parties and wild jazz music—epitomized in *The Great Gatsby* by the opulent parties that Gatsby throws every Saturday night—resulted ultimately in the corruption of the American dream, as the unrestrained desire for money and pleasure surpassed more noble goals. When World War I ended in 1918, the generation of young Americans who had fought the war became intensely disillusioned, as the brutal carnage that they had just faced made the Victorian social morality of early-twentieth-century America seem like stuffy, empty hypocrisy. The dizzying rise of the stock market in the aftermath of the war led to a sudden, sustained increase in the national wealth and a newfound materialism, as people began to spend and consume at unprecedented levels. A person from any social background could, potentially, make a fortune, but the American aristocracy—families with old wealth—scorned the newly rich industrialists and speculators. Additionally, the passage of the Eighteenth Amendment in 1919, which banned the sale of alcohol, created a thriving underworld designed to satisfy the massive demand for bootleg liquor among rich and poor alike.

Fitzgerald positions the characters of *The Great Gatsby* as emblems of these social trends. Nick and Gatsby, both of whom fought in World War I, exhibit the newfound cosmopolitanism and cynicism that resulted from the war. The various social climbers and ambitious speculators who attend Gatsby's parties evidence the greedy scramble for wealth. The clash between “old money” and “new money” manifests itself in the novel's symbolic geography: East Egg represents the established aristocracy, West Egg the self-made rich. Meyer Wolfsheim and Gatsby's fortune symbolize the rise of organized crime and bootlegging.

As Fitzgerald saw it (and as Nick explains in Chapter 9), the American dream was originally about discovery, individualism, and the pursuit of happiness. In the 1920s depicted in the novel, however, easy money and relaxed social values have corrupted this dream, especially

on the East Coast. The main plotline of the novel reflects this assessment, as Gatsby's dream of loving Daisy is ruined by the difference in their respective social statuses, his resorting to crime to make enough money to impress her, and the rampant materialism that characterizes her lifestyle. Additionally, places and objects in *The Great Gatsby* have meaning only because characters instill them with meaning: the eyes of Doctor T. J. Eckleburg best exemplify this idea. In Nick's mind, the ability to create meaningful symbols constitutes a central component of the American dream, as early Americans invested their new nation with their own ideals and values.

Nick compares the green bulk of America rising from the ocean to the green light at the end of Daisy's dock. Just as Americans have given America meaning through their dreams for their own lives, Gatsby instills Daisy with a kind of idealized perfection that she neither deserves nor possesses. Gatsby's dream is ruined by the unworthiness of its object, just as the American dream in the 1920s is ruined by the unworthiness of its object—money and pleasure. Like 1920s Americans in general, fruitlessly seeking a bygone era in which their dreams had value, Gatsby longs to re-create a vanished past—his time in Louisville with Daisy—but is incapable of doing so. When his dream crumbles, all that is left for Gatsby to do is die; all Nick can do is move back to Minnesota, where American values have not decayed.

#### The Hollowness of the Upper Class

One of the major topics explored in *The Great Gatsby* is the sociology of wealth, specifically, how the newly minted millionaires of the 1920s differ from and relate to the old aristocracy of the country's richest families. In the novel, West Egg and its denizens represent the newly rich, while East Egg and its denizens, especially Daisy and Tom, represent the old aristocracy. Fitzgerald portrays the newly rich as being vulgar, gaudy, ostentatious, and lacking in social graces and taste. Gatsby, for example, lives in a monstrously ornate mansion, wears a pink suit, drives a Rolls-Royce, and does not pick up on subtle social signals, such as the insincerity of the Sloanes' invitation to lunch. In contrast, the old aristocracy possesses grace, taste, subtlety, and elegance, epitomized by the Buchanans' tasteful home and the flowing white dresses of Daisy and Jordan Baker.



What the old aristocracy possesses in taste, however, it seems to lack in heart, as the East Eggers prove themselves careless, inconsiderate bullies who are so used to money's ability to ease their minds that they never worry about hurting others. The Buchanans exemplify this stereotype when, at the end of the novel, they simply move to a new house far away rather than condescend to attend Gatsby's funeral. Gatsby, on the other hand, whose recent wealth derives from criminal activity, has a sincere and loyal heart, remaining outside Daisy's window until four in the morning in Chapter 7 simply to make sure that Tom does not hurt her. Ironically, Gatsby's good qualities (loyalty and love) lead to his death, as he takes the blame for killing Myrtle rather than letting Daisy be punished, and the Buchanans' bad qualities (fickleness and selfishness) allow them to remove themselves from the tragedy not only physically but psychologically.

#### Motifs

Motifs are recurring structures, contrasts, and literary devices that can help to develop and inform the text's major themes.

### Geography

Throughout the novel, places and settings epitomize the various aspects of the 1920s American society that Fitzgerald depicts. East Egg represents the old aristocracy, West Egg the newly rich, the valley of ashes the moral and social decay of America, and New York City the uninhibited, amoral quest for money and pleasure. Additionally, the East is connected to the moral decay and social cynicism of New York, while the West (including Midwestern and northern areas such as Minnesota) is connected to more traditional social values and ideals. Nick's analysis in Chapter 9 of the story he has related reveals his sensitivity to this dichotomy: though it is set in the East, the story is really one of the West, as it tells how people originally from west of the Appalachians (as all of the main characters are) react to the pace and style of life on the East Coast.

### Weather

As in much of Shakespeare's work, the weather in *The Great Gatsby* unfailingly matches the emotional and narrative tone of the story. Gatsby and Daisy's reunion begins amid a pouring rain, proving awkward and melancholy; their love reawakens just as the sun begins to come out. Gatsby's climactic confrontation with Tom occurs on the hottest day of the summer, under the scorching sun (like the fatal encounter between Mercutio and Tybalt in *Romeo and Juliet*). Wilson kills Gatsby on the first day of autumn, as Gatsby floats in his pool despite a palpable chill in the air—a symbolic attempt to stop time and restore his relationship with Daisy to the way it was five years before, in 1917.

## Symbols

Symbols are objects, characters, figures, and colors used to represent abstract ideas or concepts.

### The Green Light

Situated at the end of Daisy's East Egg dock and barely visible from Gatsby's West Egg lawn, the green light represents Gatsby's hopes and dreams for the future. Gatsby associates it with Daisy, and in Chapter 1 he reaches toward it in the darkness as a guiding light to lead him to his goal. Because Gatsby's quest for Daisy is broadly associated with the American dream, the green light also symbolizes that more generalized ideal. In Chapter 9, Nick compares the green light to how America, rising out of the ocean, must have looked to early settlers of the new nation.

### The Valley of Ashes

First introduced in Chapter 2, the valley of ashes between West Egg and New York City consists of a long stretch of desolate land created by the dumping of industrial ashes. It represents the moral and social decay that results from the uninhibited pursuit of wealth, as the rich indulge themselves with regard for nothing but their own pleasure. The valley of ashes also symbolizes the plight of the poor, like George Wilson, who live among the dirty ashes and lose their vitality as a result.

## The Eyes of Doctor T. J. Eckleburg

The eyes of Doctor T. J. Eckleburg are a pair of fading, bespectacled eyes painted on an old advertising billboard over the valley of ashes. They may represent God staring down upon and judging American society as a moral wasteland, though the novel never makes this point explicitly. Instead, throughout the novel, Fitzgerald suggests that symbols only have meaning because characters instill them with meaning. The connection between the eyes of Doctor T. J. Eckleburg and God exists only in George Wilson's grief-stricken mind. This lack of concrete significance contributes to the unsettling nature of the image. Thus, the eyes also come to represent the essential meaninglessness of the world and the arbitrariness of the mental process by which people invest objects with meaning. Nick explores these ideas in Chapter 8, when he imagines Gatsby's final thoughts as a depressed consideration of the emptiness of symbols and dreams.

## Important Quotations Explained

⇒

1.

**I hope she'll be a fool—that's the best thing a girl can be in this world, a beautiful little fool.**

Daisy speaks these words in Chapter 1 as she describes to Nick and Jordan her hopes for her infant daughter. While not directly relevant to the novel's main themes, this quote offers a revealing glimpse into Daisy's character. Daisy is not a fool herself but is the product of a social environment that, to a great extent, does not value intelligence in women. The older generation values subservience and docility in females, and the younger generation values thoughtless giddiness and pleasure-seeking. Daisy's remark is somewhat sardonic: while she refers to the social values of her era, she does not seem to challenge them. Instead, she describes her own boredom with life and seems to imply that a girl can have more fun if she is beautiful and simplistic. Daisy herself often tries to act such a part. She conforms to the social standard of American femininity in the 1920s in order to avoid such tension-filled issues as her undying love for Gatsby.

2.

**He had one of those rare smiles with a quality of eternal reassurance in it, that you may come across four or five times in life. It faced, or seemed to face, the whole external world for an instant and then concentrated on you with an irresistible prejudice in your favor. It understood you just as far as you wanted to be understood, believed in you as you would like to believe in yourself.**

This passage occurs in Chapter 3 as part of Nick's first close examination of Gatsby's character and appearance. This description of Gatsby's smile captures both the theatrical quality of Gatsby's character and his charisma. Additionally, it encapsulates the manner in which Gatsby appears to the outside world, an image Fitzgerald slowly deconstructs as the novel progresses toward Gatsby's death in Chapter 8. One of the main facets of Gatsby's persona is that he acts out a role that he defined for himself when he was seventeen years old. His smile seems to be both an important part of the role and a result of the singular combination of hope and imagination that enables him to play it so effectively. Here, Nick describes Gatsby's rare focus—he has the ability to make anyone he smiles at feel as though

he has chosen that person out of “the whole external world,” reflecting that person’s most optimistic conception of him- or herself.

3.

**The truth was that 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. So he invented just the sort of Jay Gatsby that a seventeen year old boy would be likely to invent, and to this conception he was faithful to the end.**

In Chapter 6, when Nick finally describes Gatsby’s early history, he uses this striking comparison between Gatsby and Jesus Christ to illuminate Gatsby’s creation of his own identity. Fitzgerald was probably influenced in drawing this parallel by a nineteenth-century book by Ernest Renan entitled *The Life of Jesus*. This book presents Jesus as a figure who essentially decided to make himself the son of God, then brought himself to ruin by refusing to recognize the reality that denied his self-conception. Renan describes a Jesus who is “faithful to his self-created dream but scornful of the factual truth that finally crushes him and his dream”—a very appropriate description of Gatsby. Fitzgerald is known to have admired Renan’s work and seems to have drawn upon it in devising this metaphor. Though the parallel between Gatsby and Jesus is not an important motif in *The Great Gatsby*, it is nonetheless a suggestive comparison, as Gatsby transforms himself into the ideal that he envisioned for himself (a “Platonic conception of himself”) as a youngster and remains committed to that ideal, despite the obstacles that society presents to the fulfillment of his dream.

4.

**That’s my Middle West . . . the street lamps and sleigh bells in the frosty dark. . . . I see now that this has been a story of the West, after all—Tom and Gatsby, Daisy and Jordan and I, were all Westerners, and perhaps we possessed some deficiency in common which made us subtly unadaptable to Eastern life.**

This important quote from Nick’s lengthy meditation in Chapter 9 brings the motif of geography in *The Great Gatsby* to a conclusion. Throughout the novel, places are associated with themes, characters, and ideas. The East is associated with a fast-paced lifestyle, decadent parties, crumbling moral values, and the pursuit of wealth, while the West and the Midwest are associated with more traditional moral values. In this moment, Nick realizes for the first time that though his story is set on the East Coast, the western character of his acquaintances (“some deficiency in common”) is the source of the story’s tensions and attitudes. He considers each character’s behavior and value choices as a reaction to the wealth-obsessed culture of New York. This perspective contributes powerfully to Nick’s decision to leave the East Coast and return to Minnesota, as the infeasibility of Nick’s Midwestern values in New York society mirrors the impracticality of Gatsby’s dream.

5.

**Gatsby 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 then one fine morning—  
So we beat on, boats against the current, borne back ceaselessly into the past.**

These words conclude the novel and find Nick returning to the theme of the significance of the past to dreams of the future, here represented by the green light. He focuses on the struggle of human beings to achieve their goals by both transcending and re-creating the past. Yet humans prove themselves unable to move beyond the past: in the metaphoric language used here, the current draws them backward as they row forward toward the green light. This past functions as the source of their ideas about the future (epitomized by Gatsby's desire to re-create 1917 in his affair with Daisy) and they cannot escape it as they continue to struggle to transform their dreams into reality. While they never lose their optimism ("tomorrow we will run faster, stretch out our arms farther . . ."), they expend all of their energy in pursuit of a goal that moves ever farther away. This apt metaphor characterizes both Gatsby's struggle and the American dream itself. Nick's words register neither blind approval nor cynical disillusionment but rather the respectful melancholy that he ultimately brings to his study of Gatsby's life.

Yellow and Gold: Money, Money, Money. Oh, and Death.

First off, we've got **yellow**s and **gold**s, which we're thinking has something to do with...gold (in the cash money sense). Why gold and not green? Because we're talking about the real stuff, the authentic, traditional, "old money" – not these new-fangled dollar bills. So you've got your "**yellow** cocktail music" playing at Gatsby's party where the turkeys are "bewitched to dark **gold**" and Jordan and Nick sit with "two girls in **yellow**." It seems clear, then, that Gatsby is using these parties to try to fit in with the "old money" crowd. And it doesn't stop there; when Gatsby is finally going to see Daisy again at Nick's house, he wears a **gold** tie. Nick later mentions the "pale **gold** odor of kiss-me-at-the-gate," which may seem weird (since last we checked, colors didn't have a smell) until we remember Nick's description of New York as "a wish out of non-olfactory money." Odor then is associated with gold, and non-odor with money. The difference? Perhaps the same distinction as Daisy's upper class world and Gatsby's new-found wealth. While Gatsby buys a **yellow** car to further promote his facade, he's really not fooling anyone. Lastly, we've got Daisy, who is only called "the **golden** girl" once Gatsby realizes that her voice, her main feature, is "full of money." **Yellow** is not just the color of money, but also of destruction. **Yellow** is the color of the car that runs down Myrtle. The glasses of Eckleburg, looking over the wasteland of America, are **yellow**. This dual symbolism clearly associates money with destruction; the ash heaps are the filthy result of the decadent lifestyle led by the rich.

**Yellow** also represents corruptness. Gatsby's car is yellow, a product of his corrupt dealings, as are the spectacles of Dr. T.J. Eckleburg. It's probably not a coincidence that the novel's most impure character is named after a **yellow** flower. Gold has earned its place among the all time symbols of corruption and greed, although most wouldn't mind having more of it.

Daisy

Like her name suggests, is a flower with white petals and a **yellow** centre. It kind of shows that Daisy looks innocent and pure on the outside, like her petals, but is rotten on the inside, which is represented by the **yellow** part of the flower.

She ends up killing Myrtle even though she looks so harmless on the outside.

Yellow is a representation of falsity and corruption of events or characters in *The Great Gatsby*. The significance of yellow is to show through imagery that not everything is as it seems. In the beginning of the novel, Daisy and Jordan are wearing white dresses, giving the illusion of purity. With the progression of the storyline, Daisy and Jordan's clothes slowly change from white to a golden yellow as the characters' impurities are revealed. The color yellow is also present in descriptions of Myrtle. Myrtle's dress in the party scene is described by Nick as "cream colored" (35). "With the influence of the dress, her personality had also undergone a change" (35). When Myrtle wears the yellowish dress, every aspect about her person changes into something fake. In Myrtle, the color yellow is a clear representation of dishonesty because she pretends to be something she is not. The effect the color yellow has on the description of characters is to point out the dishonesty they have. Yellow is also a symbol of corruption. Gatsby's car is the car that killed Myrtle and is described as "a yellow car. A big yellow car" (147) and again on page 148: "It was a yellow car." The reason the word yellow is repeated is to accentuate corruption in the actions of Daisy after the accident. When Myrtle was struck, instead of stopping to see if she was alive, Daisy accelerated away from the scene. In this way, it seems fit that the car was yellow. It is true that yellow is associated with Daisy because the flower is surrounded by white petals, with a yellow center. The white petals represent her innocent and pure appearance, and the yellow center represents how at the core, she is dishonest.

Basically, F. Scott Fitzgerald used the color yellow to represent 3 things: moral decay, decadence and death.

Source(s): <http://www.echeat.com/essay.php?t=31832>

Jordan

Jordan's yellow side can be shown through her hair, which is 'autumn leaf yellow.'

Jordan can also be seen associated with the color of gold.

- "With Jordan's slender golden arm resting in mine..."

- "I put my arm around Jordan's golden shoulder..."

George Wilson

Yellow is the colour of depravity

- His house is made of yellow brick. It is the only place strictly referred to as yellow.

"The only building in sight was a small block of yellow brick..."

- The house contains individuals Myrtle and George Wilson, who eventually decided to kill Gatsby on the information presented to him by Tom inside the house, and he displays depravity when he tells Myrtle that "God sees everything".

“God knows what you’ve been doing, everything you’ve been doing. You may fool me, but you can’t fool God!”

- He actually believed that the billboard of Dr. T. J. Eckleburg is some kind of God who could see all the immorality around him. Such as Myrtle. Mrs. Wilson cheating on her husband and even regrets their marriage.

“The only crazy I was was when I married him...”

T.J. Eckleburg

Wilson sees the billboard as something like a God.

- T.J. Eckleburg is wearing **yellow** glasses, which represents the depravity of his “godliness”.

Each person who lives in the yellow brick house is corrupted and immoral. The billboard of T.J. Eckleburg is related to the Wilson’s home, as George views the billboard as a God . Not surprisingly, T.J. Eckleburg is wearing **yellow** glasses, representing the depravity of Eckleburg’s “godliness.” Corruption is distinctly represented by **yellow**, but death is also a key to **yellow’s** dark symbolism.

**Yellow** is usually seen around a tragic death.

- Myrtle was killed by Gatsby’s yellow Rolls Royce, in front of her **yellow** brick house under the **yellow** spectacled eyes of Dr. T.J. Eckleburg.

- The **yellow** colour of Gatsby’s car led to his death. If the colour of his car was black, like most of the cars during that time then he wouldn’t have been killed.

- Gatsby is seen walking through ‘**yellowing** trees’ just before he was murdered. “...but he shook his head and in a moment disappeared among the **yellowing** trees.”