

THE GREAT GATSBY

When discussing *The Great Gatsby*, it can be hard to explain why this book has been taught and studied for decades. But by looking at its themes, historical context, and lyrical prose, the novel remains necessary for the present day. Hopefully *The Great Gatsby* will remain relevant for another century, and many more generations will experience the rise and fall of Jay Gatsby and its warnings against societal influence and capitalism.

The prose of *The Great Gatsby* makes reading the novel a great experience almost a century after its publication. F. Scott Fitzgerald combined intense realism in the plot with a poetic approach to the novel's language. Though the novel has an undoubtable darkness to it, Fitzgerald never loses the beautiful and enticing nature of Gatsby's world. People and events are described in vivid terms, letting the reader feel just as entranced by Gatsby as Nick Carraway is. This use of language is often cited once the billboard of Dr. T.J. Eckleburg's eyes appears along with the green light at the end of Daisy's dock. The green light serves as a symbol of the vague hope that Gatsby has in his relationship with Daisy, which he will never be able to have. The eyes of Dr. T.J. Eckleburg, on the other hand, are the constant presence of capitalism, always watching the characters as their lives dissolve. These two beautiful symbols perfectly match Gatsby's timeless themes.

The Great Gatsby also depicts the cultural changes of the 1920s. As the decade progressed and class distinctions began to break down and change, social barriers also shifted, especially for women and African Americans. The flapper subculture offered a relief of societal expectations for women, as they began to party, smoke, dance, and dress in ways that previous generations would have considered unacceptable. Jazz proved to be the music of the era, allowing prominent African American musicians to rise to fame. Many of the characters in the novel, like Daisy and Jordan, struggle between their newfound freedom as women in the 1920s and the oppressive structures that still existed for them. All the while, jazz plays in the background of many events in the novel, literally steeping the novel in the jazz age. By commenting on these societal changes, the novel becomes timeless by providing a perspective on the 1920s while they were happening.

The novel's themes of excess, wealth, and the emotional turmoil of Jay Gatsby are timeless statements. Gatsby is newly wealthy and uses his new wealth to throw extravagant parties. This helps to distract him from his love, Daisy Miller, who has married the brutish Tom Buchanan. Gatsby is coincidentally beloved by those who cannot understand the difference between new rich and old rich, yet he is obsessed with gaining the acceptance of the old rich who will never adopt him as one of their own. With the character of Gatsby, Fitzgerald targets the part of many Americans that relies on wealth to hide genuine anxieties and insecurities. The promise of power and wealth is more important to Gatsby than accepting that his love has gone. Many people, especially those who are about to enter the job force and begin careers, may benefit from reading a story that warns about the pursuit of wealth above all.

Since its publication in 1925, F. Scott Fitzgerald's *The Great Gatsby* has sold millions of copies and has been adapted to film, the stage, and even dance! But every year, hundreds of thousands of high school students read this book for the first time and may wonder: *what is relevant about this Jazz-age novel in the modern day?* This book about the rise and fall of the mysterious Jay Gatsby from the perspective of Nick Carraway was written decades ago, so it can be difficult to see how it could connect to the very different world that current readers live in. But *The Great Gatsby* is relevant today due to the themes of extravagance and emotional turmoil, the context of its publication, and the incredible quality of the prose.

The novel also serves as a good example of how the 1920s were affected by World War I and its effects. First and foremost, the United States was able to celebrate the victory of World War I. After World War I, the United States experienced a massive amount of wealth flushed into the economy. Additionally, many people who had never been wealthy now experienced the upper class through bootlegging and other illegal means. The new wealth experienced during the 1920s brought a great amount of joy and excitement. Subsequently, the spirit of the war lingers throughout the novel. For example, Gatsby himself is a war hero, who lost his youthful love while he was overseas in Europe. Furthermore, Gatsby gains his wealth as a bootlegger and through organized crime figures. Just like the nation, Fitzgerald writes about a character who gained great wealth after World War I, possibly at the cost of his morals.
