

The Great Gatsby Revision Notes

Thomas Vanderstichele's Great Gatsby Revision Notes

The Great Gatsby

Nick Carraway

Narrative Stance- 'life is more successful looked at from a single window, after all', 'I was within and without, simultaneously enchanted and repelled', 'they had forgotten me', 'Looked back at me, remotely'

- Narrative stance throughout the novel is mixture of involvement and withdrawal
- Self-effacing
- Presenting eye witness accounts and he's not saying much about himself
- Do we trust him? Is he a reliable narrator?
- Nick seems to move on the edge of other people's lives at their whim or command

Moral Consciousness

- Sensitive observes what's going on
- Judges people where appropriate, and learns from his experiences
- Ends the novel a sadder but wiser man
- He's a reliable narrator that undergoes a process of moral growth and therefore in a sense he is the hero of the novel
- Ambiguous presence in the novel

Obtuse and Priggish- 'I'm one of the few honest people I know', 'I'm slow thinking and full of interior rules that act as brakes on my desires'

- Obtuse, priggish and self-satisfied
- Unperceptive character who shows no real insight into his own motives and who at the end of the novel is as clueless as he was at the beginning
- Hasn't learnt anything

Ambivalence- 'I'm inclined to reserve all judgement', 'unaffected scorn', 'something gorgeous about him'

- He is quite perceptive, he does learn a bit, but in other ways he is rather obtuse and there are things he doesn't understand
- Intriguing, ambivalent and complex character

Jay Gatsby

Isolation- 'Figure emerged from the shadows', 'a dim background started to form', 'threw dust in your eyes', 'Mr Nobody from Nowhere', 'skimming hastily through a dozen magazines'

- Makes him a memorable character
- Patchy, hazy by selective deletion
- Shadowy, elusive figure
- 5% of novel is Gatsby's own words

The Great Gatsby revision notes are essential for anyone looking to deepen their understanding of F. Scott Fitzgerald's iconic novel. Published in 1925, "The Great Gatsby" explores themes of wealth, love, and the American Dream set against the backdrop of the Jazz Age. This article aims to provide comprehensive revision notes that will help students and literature enthusiasts analyze the book's key elements, characters, themes, and symbols, ensuring a well-rounded grasp of this literary classic.

Overview of The Great Gatsby

"The Great Gatsby" is narrated by Nick Carraway, a Yale graduate and World War I veteran who moves to Long Island and becomes entangled in the lives of his wealthy neighbors, particularly Jay Gatsby. The novel critiques the American Dream, illustrating how the pursuit of wealth can lead to moral decay.

Key Characters

Understanding the characters in "The Great Gatsby" is crucial for any revision notes. Here are the primary characters and their roles:

- **Jay Gatsby:** A mysterious millionaire known for his lavish parties, Gatsby is deeply in love with Daisy Buchanan and represents the unattainable American Dream.
- **Nick Carraway:** The novel's narrator, Nick provides a unique perspective on the events and characters, often serving as a moral compass.
- **Daisy Buchanan:** The beautiful but shallow object of Gatsby's affections, Daisy represents the allure and emptiness of wealth.
- **Tom Buchanan:** Daisy's arrogant and aggressive husband, Tom embodies the old money elite, showcasing the moral decay hidden behind wealth.
- **Jordan Baker:** A professional golfer and friend of Daisy's, Jordan represents the modern woman of the 1920s, embodying both independence and moral ambiguity.
- **George and Myrtle Wilson:** Representing the working class, George is a mechanic who owns a garage, while Myrtle is Tom's mistress, seeking to escape her mundane life.

Major Themes

"The Great Gatsby" is rich in themes that resonate with readers. Here are some of the most significant:

The American Dream

The novel scrutinizes the concept of the American Dream, showcasing how it can lead to disillusionment. Gatsby's rise from humble beginnings to immense wealth illustrates the dream's seductive power. However, his ultimate failure emphasizes its hollow nature.

Love and Relationships

Love is a central theme, particularly the idealized love Gatsby has for Daisy. However, the novel reveals the complexities of love through the characters' relationships, highlighting issues of infidelity, obsession, and the superficiality of romantic ideals.

Social Class and Inequality

Fitzgerald contrasts the lifestyles of the wealthy elite with those of the working class, emphasizing the disparities and moral decay within society. The division between East Egg (old money) and West Egg (new money) serves as a critical backdrop for the characters' interactions.

Identity and Self-Invention

Gatsby's transformation from James Gatz to Jay Gatsby illustrates themes of identity and self-invention. The novel poses questions about the authenticity of one's identity and the extent to which it can be shaped by external circumstances.

Symbols in The Great Gatsby

Symbols enrich the narrative, adding layers of meaning to the text. Here are some key symbols to consider:

The Green Light

The green light at the end of Daisy's dock symbolizes Gatsby's unreachable dreams and aspirations. It represents hope and the pursuit of the American Dream, yet it also signifies the ultimate futility of those dreams.

The Valley of Ashes

This desolate wasteland between West Egg and New York City symbolizes the moral and social decay resulting from the uninhibited pursuit of wealth. It serves as a stark contrast to the opulence of Gatsby's parties and the lives of the wealthy.

The Eyes of Doctor T.J. Eckleburg

The billboard featuring the eyes of Doctor T.J. Eckleburg symbolizes the idea of a higher moral authority watching over the characters. Many interpret it as a representation of God or a judgment on the characters' actions.

Key Quotes for Revision

Familiarity with key quotes can enhance understanding and provide insight into the novel's themes and characters. Here are some important quotes to remember:

1. "In my younger and more vulnerable years, my father gave me some advice that I've been turning over in my mind ever since."
2. "So we beat on, boats against the current, borne back ceaselessly into the past."
3. "Gatsby believed in the green light, the orgastic future that year by year recedes before us."
4. "I hope she'll be a fool—that's the best thing a girl can be in this world, a beautiful little fool."

Important Contextual Information

Understanding the historical and social context in which "The Great Gatsby" was written can enhance your analysis. Here are some key points:

The Jazz Age

The novel is set during the Jazz Age, a period characterized by economic prosperity, cultural change, and a break from traditional values. This context is essential for understanding the characters' behaviors and the societal norms depicted in the book.

Prohibition

The 1920s was marked by Prohibition, leading to the rise of speakeasies and organized crime. Gatsby's wealth, often associated with illegal activities, reflects the moral ambiguity of the time.

Feminism and Gender Roles

The portrayal of women in "The Great Gatsby" reflects the changing roles and expectations of women in the 1920s. Characters like Daisy and Jordan navigate these new societal norms, often with complex results.

Conclusion

In summary, **The Great Gatsby revision notes** encompass a wealth of information on the novel's characters, themes, symbols, and historical context. By understanding these elements, readers can appreciate Fitzgerald's critique of the American Dream and the intricacies of human relationships. Whether you're preparing for an exam, writing a paper, or simply seeking to deepen your understanding of this literary masterpiece, these notes will serve as a valuable resource in your study of "The Great Gatsby."

Frequently Asked Questions

What are the main themes explored in 'The Great Gatsby'?

The main themes include the American Dream, class struggle, love and relationships, the illusion of wealth, and the impact of the past on the present.

How does Fitzgerald use symbolism in 'The Great Gatsby'?

Fitzgerald employs symbolism extensively, with the green light representing Gatsby's hopes and dreams, the valley of ashes symbolizing moral decay, and the eyes of Dr. T.J. Eckleburg reflecting the loss of spiritual values.

What is the significance of the character of Jay Gatsby?

Jay Gatsby embodies the American Dream's corruption and the idea of reinvention, as he rises from humble beginnings to immense wealth, but ultimately his pursuit of love and acceptance leads to his downfall.

How does the narrative perspective influence 'The Great Gatsby'?

The story is narrated by Nick Carraway, whose perspective shapes the reader's understanding of the events and characters, adding layers of bias and social commentary on the world of the East Egg elite.

What role does social class play in 'The Great Gatsby'?

Social class is a central theme that drives the characters' interactions and conflicts, highlighting the divide between old money (East Egg) and new money (West Egg), and illustrating the rigid class structures of 1920s America.

What is the significance of the novel's setting in the 1920s?

The 1920s setting reflects a period of economic prosperity and cultural change in America, marked by jazz music, prohibition, and a booming stock market, which serves as a backdrop for the characters' pursuits of wealth and pleasure.

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