

# CliffsNotes.com® At a Glance for THE GREAT GATSBY

F. Scott Fitzgerald's novel, *The Great Gatsby*, follows Jay Gatsby. Published in 1925, *The Great Gatsby* is a classic piece of American fiction. It is a novel of triumph and tragedy, noted for the remarkable way Fitzgerald captured a cross-section of American society.

Set in the summer of 1922, Midwesterner Nick Carraway has just moved to West Egg, Long Island to work as a bond salesman. He visits his cousin Daisy Buchanan and her husband Tom in the more fashionable East Egg and meets the professional golfer Jordan Baker there. At home later, Nick notices his neighbor Jay Gatsby on the lawn of Gatsby's mansion, looking toward a green light in the distance.

Nick meets Tom's mistress Myrtle Wilson, whose husband runs a garage; later that day, Tom breaks Myrtle's nose. Meanwhile, Gatsby has been holding lavish parties for hundreds of celebrated guests. Nick encounters Jordan at one of Gatsby's parties, as well as Gatsby himself. Nick begins dating Jordan, who tells Nick that Gatsby has been in love with Daisy since years earlier, when Gatsby and Daisy were unable to marry because Gatsby lacked wealth. Since then, Gatsby has made a vast fortune in the hope of winning Daisy back. The green light that Gatsby gazes at is on the Buchanans' dock in East Egg.

Gatsby and Daisy become secretly involved. One afternoon Nick, Jordan, Gatsby and the Buchanans drive to New York in two cars. Tom has just discovered the affair between Gatsby and Daisy, and Myrtle's husband has learned that Myrtle is having an affair, but not the identity of Myrtle's lover. Daisy, driving Gatsby home from New York City in Gatsby's car, hits and kills Myrtle inadvertently. Nick breaks up with Jordan. With Tom's help, Wilson tracks down Gatsby, who Wilson thinks was Myrtle's lover and her killer, and murders him, then commits suicide.

**Written by:** F. Scott Fitzgerald

**Type of Work:** novel

**Genres:** social commentary; American fiction; Jazz Age

**First Published:** 1925

**Setting:** 1920s in West Egg, Long Island

**Main Characters:** Nick Carraway; Jay Gatsby; Daisy Buchanan

**Major Thematic Topics:** decline of the 1920s; social issues; prohibition; displaced spirituality

**Motifs:** weather; geography; types of money

**Major Symbols:** eyes; Gatsby's parties

**Movie Versions:** *The Great Gatsby* (1974); *The Great Gatsby* (2000)

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## **The three most important aspects of *The Great Gatsby*:**

- Nick Carraway is the narrator, or storyteller, of *The Great Gatsby*, but he is not the story's protagonist, or main character. Instead, Jay Gatsby is the protagonist of the novel that bears his name. Tom Buchanan is the book's antagonist, opposing Gatsby's attempts to get what he wants: Tom's wife Daisy.
- From the gold hat mentioned in the novel's epigram to the green light at the end of Daisy's dock, *The Great Gatsby* is filled with things that are gold and green: the colors of money.
- There are two kinds of wealth in *The Great Gatsby*: the inherited wealth of Daisy and Tom Buchanan, and the newly acquired wealth of Gatsby. The first kind comes with social standing and protects the Buchanans from punishment, as Daisy literally gets away with murder. Gatsby's kind of wealth, though considerable, leaves its owner vulnerable.