

The Great Gatsby: Family Guide

As students continue to experience a mixture of school settings, the following guide helps families and guardians support them as they read and analyze complex texts and topics.

Unit Overview

How we understand experiences or ideas, and the stories we read, depends on the way we view them. Our perceptions, and the perceptions of the author or narrator who presents a story to us, strongly shape our sense of meaning. To what extent do we trust our own view, or the view of someone telling us a story? Are things we believe to be true merely illusions? In this unit, we will read F. Scott Fitzgerald's novel *The Great Gatsby* and a series of related critical essays to explore the Central Question: *How do perceptions, illusions, and dreams influence our lives?* In considering the unit's Central Question, we will examine what the novel seems to say thematically about perceptions and dreams—including the American Dream and the desire to recapture the past. We will also examine Fitzgerald's use of a first-person narrator to tell the story and whether his perceptions of Gatsby's world are reliable or unreliable. To demonstrate our understanding of the novel and of Fitzgerald's craft, we will write a literary analysis that takes a critical position and defends it, using evidence from the novel and other texts from the unit.

Questions Students Will Explore

1. How do perceptions, illusions, and dreams influence our lives?
2. What does *The Great Gatsby* suggest about the American Dream?
3. How does Fitzgerald tell the story and develop characters in *The Great Gatsby*?
4. How does Fitzgerald use literary devices in *The Great Gatsby*?
5. How do literary critics variously view and interpret *The Great Gatsby*?

Knowledge Students Will Gain

- The American Dream
- The American novel
- Literary criticism of *The Great Gatsby*
- The Roaring Twenties

Texts Students Will Read, Analyze, and Discuss

Text Title	Author	Genre/Format	Use
<i>The Great Gatsby</i>	F. Scott Fitzgerald	Fiction novel	Core
"American Dream Faces Harsh New Reality"	Ari Shapiro	Audio Recording	Core
"F. Scott Fitzgerald - Mini Biography"	Editors at Biography.com	Educational Video	Core
"I, Too," excerpt from <i>The Collected Poems of Langston Hughes</i>	Langston Hughes	Poem	Core
"Why the Americans Are so Restless in the Midst of Their Prosperity," excerpt from <i>Democracy in America</i>	Alexis de Tocqueville	Book Chapter	Core
"Jay Gatsby: A Dreamer Doomed to Be Excluded. The Novelist Jesmyn Ward Explains."	Jesmyn Ward	Essay	Core
"The Trouble With Nick: Reading <i>Gatsby</i> Closely," excerpt from <i>Fitzgerald and Hemingway: Works and Days</i>	Scott Donaldson	Book Chapter (excerpted)	Core
"Interpretive Claims," excerpt from <i>Fitzgerald and Hemingway: Works and Days</i>	Scott Donaldson	Book Chapter (excerpted)	Core
Excerpt from "Unreliable Narration in <i>The Great Gatsby</i> "	Thomas E. Boyle	Literary Analysis Journal Article	Core
"Counterpoint as Technique in <i>The Great Gatsby</i> "	James M. Mellard	Literary Analysis Journal Article	Core
"Celestial Eyes: From Metamorphosis to Masterpiece"	Charles Scribner III	Essay	Optional
"F. Scott Fitzgerald to His 11-Year-Old Daughter in Camp," excerpt from <i>A Life in Letters</i>	F. Scott Fitzgerald	Letter	Optional
"Faults"	Sara Teasdale	Poem	Optional
"The Man Who Rigged the World Series"	John Ealer	Video	Optional
Central Claims and Conclusions, excerpt from "Counterpoint as Technique in <i>The Great Gatsby</i> "	James M. Mellard	Literary Analysis Journal Article	Core

Section Overviews

The unit is broken down into main sections, each of which contains several lessons (days of instruction). Students work on the Culminating Task during the final section of the unit. For more information on activity sequences and to download materials, visit the unit at texaselars-students.odelleducation.com.

Section	Section Overview
1	<p>Exposition and Narrative Perspective</p> <p>We will begin reading Chapter 1 of <i>The Great Gatsby</i>, focusing our attention on the narrator's reliability, the development of the central characters, and the author's use of descriptive language to set the groundwork for a close study of the novel. As background, we will read and watch supplemental materials to further our understanding of the relationship of <i>The Great Gatsby</i> to the American Dream and American culture in the 1920s.</p>
2	<p>Complication and Counterpoint</p> <p>We will read Chapters 2-4 of the novel, in which the narrative is further developed and complicated. As we attend to Fitzgerald's depiction of settings, scenes, and characters, we will study his use of literary devices, specifically imagery, symbolism, and motif. We will also begin to address themes of the novel, considering how Fitzgerald may be portraying the American Dream in relation to others' ideas about America. We will begin to study the portrayal and idealization of the past as related by several of the novel's characters and analyze how Nick's narration affects the reader's interpretation of the novel.</p>
3	<p>Rising Action and Climax</p> <p>We will study the rising action of the novel presented through a series of dramatic scenes and vignettes in Chapters 5-7. We will examine how Fitzgerald—through Nick's narration—develops conflicts, tension, suspense, and thematic threads in these chapters, leading to the novel's climactic events at the end of Chapter 7.</p>
4	<p>Critical Views of <i>The Great Gatsby</i></p> <p>We will read Chapters 8-9 and the resolution of the novel's story, study examples of literary criticism, and compare four interpretations of the novel. We will analyze the arguments presented in these literary analyses, the ways in which their authors present interpretive claims and support them with evidence cited from the text, and how they respond to others' critical interpretations. We will demonstrate our understanding through a formal fishbowl discussion in which we take a position on whether Gatsby or Nick is the novel's central character and present claims about each character's meaning and importance in the novel.</p>
5	<p>Culminating Task</p> <p>We will review what we have learned from our study of <i>The Great Gatsby</i> and demonstrate our understanding by writing a literary analysis essay. To find models for our own writing, we will study how literary critics develop their analyses. We will take a position in response to a literary analysis question, develop claims, gather evidence that supports our analysis, then draft, revise, peer edit, and edit our Culminating Task essays. Finally, we will publish our essays, reflect on our accomplishments, and discuss how to extend our learning based on what we have studied, experienced, and discovered in this unit.</p>

Unit Assessments

Consider discussing these questions at home.

Product	Description	Questions to Consider
Section 1 Diagnostic	Students use their notes and materials to form interpretive claims in response to questions about how Fitzgerald chooses to tell the story and develop characters.	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. How does Fitzgerald choose to tell the story and develop characters in Chapter 1 of <i>The Great Gatsby</i>? 2. What seems to be the narrator's view of the characters and of himself in Chapter 1, and how does this influence the reader's experience? Analyze Nick Carraway's perceptions and descriptions and the effects they have on your understanding of the story. 3. What do the characters' actions, reactions, words, and interactions reveal about them and their desires, dreams, or goals? Select one character introduced in Chapter 1 and analyze that character's presentation and development.
Section 2 Diagnostic	Students use their notes and materials to form interpretive claims in response to questions about Fitzgerald's use of contrasting elements, imagery, and symbolism in developing themes.	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. How does Fitzgerald use description, contrast, imagery, and symbolism to develop scenes, characters, and themes in <i>The Great Gatsby</i>? 2. How does Fitzgerald describe and contrast characters, settings, and scenes in Chapters 2-4? Analyze a set of contrasting characters or settings and scenes to explain the impact on your reading and your understanding of the novel. 3. How does Fitzgerald use description, imagery, and symbolism in a scene from Chapters 2-4 to develop a theme of the novel? Analyze a specific scene and explain how literary devices are used by the author to develop a key theme.
Section 3 Diagnostic	Students write a multiparagraph essay that analyzes a key scene from the novel, focusing on its presentation, development, meaning, and significance. The essay should be organized by a thesis about the significance of the scene, and developed through a series of evidence-based claims that present and explain an analysis. It should include specific references to the text.	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. How does Fitzgerald develop, contrast, and sequence scenes to complicate the plot of <i>The Great Gatsby</i> and build toward the novel's climax and resolution?

Product	Description	Questions to Consider
Section 4 Diagnostic	Students participate in formal fishbowl discussions. Before these discussions, students decide if they believe that the novel is primarily Gatsby's story or primarily Nick's story. Then, they develop a claim that takes a position about one of the two characters and his significance in <i>The Great Gatsby</i> . In discussions, students communicate and explain their positions about the character, then engage in a civil debate with other students who might have taken different positions about that character.	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. How have literary scholars and critics analyzed Fitzgerald's development of point of view, characters, and themes in <i>The Great Gatsby</i>? 2. How do they support their positions about the importance of their chosen character in the novel?
Culminating Task	Students write a multiparagraph literary analysis.	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. What does <i>The Great Gatsby</i> ultimately suggest about human perception, illusions, and dreams—and potentially about the American Dream? 2. As a narrator, is Nick Carraway the novel's "most important character" (Mellard), a judgmental "snob" (Donaldson), or an "unreliable" voice (Boyle)? What is your own reading of Nick's character and role in the novel?

Homework Expectations

Students read much of the novel and several pieces of literary criticism outside of class. Students might also either finish writing products such as graphic organizers and paragraphs they begin in class, or be assigned writing outside of class.