

WHAT TO KNOW ABOUT F. SCOTT FITZGERALD



Francis Scott Fitzgerald (1896–1940) was an American novelist best known for his vivid portrayal of America’s Jazz Age. Fitzgerald rose to fame with his novel *This Side of Paradise* (1920), which introduced his focus on discipline, ambition, the American Dream, loss, and romance. His major novels: *The Great Gatsby* (1925), *Tender is the Night* (1934), and *The Beautiful and Damned* (1922) were initially considered failures upon publication due to shifting literary tastes after the Great Depression. His personal life was similarly fraught with struggles around, alcohol, finances, and the mental health challenges of his wife, Zelda Sayre (1900–1948). Although he received little critical acclaim or major awards during his lifetime, critics now consider Fitzgerald one of the most important American writers of the 20th century and his works as masterpieces.



QUESTIONS: THE GREAT GATSBY (1925)

- Contemporary critics have questioned Nick’s sexuality. What aspects of Nick’s relationship with Gatsby invite speculation? How do you interpret Nick’s relationship with Mr. McKee?
- Every character carries something unspoken with them. What do these silences suggest about their characters, and how do they function within the text?
- Given Gatsby’s fixation on appearances and the portrayal of success, does this complicate his relationship with Daisy?
- Consider the rumors surrounding Gatsby alongside what his father says about him. How do both rumor and truth shape our perception of Gatsby?
- How might the story change if it were told through Gatsby’s perspective? What is lost or gained through the decision to make Nick the narrator?
- How are the characters shaped by their societies?

MAKING CONNECTIONS

- Consider Tom’s treatment of the people in New York. What does this reveal about how wealth and power affect the way people treat others, and where do you see similar patterns today?
- Gatsby carefully crafts an image of himself for others. How does this compare to how people today curate their identities on social media, and what does this say about the portrayal of success?
- Are people today more focused on appearances rather than authenticity? If so, how and why? What pressures from media or culture might contribute to this emphasis?
- What does this novel suggest about the nature of success and the failure of the American Dream? How has this aspect of the story aged? How do modern economic and social realities reinforce or challenge this idea?
- How can learning about the limitations of the American Dream help people redefine their definitions of success?

LITERATURE AS PRAXIS

- The novel highlights extreme wealth inequality. Where do such gaps still exist today? How does this inequality continue to shape our definitions of success?
- The Valley of Ashes represents communities largely neglected by the wealthy. How can modern society better support marginalized or underserved communities?
- How does the novel show the consequences of the privileged avoiding responsibility, and how can people today hold systems of power accountable?
- Throughout the novel, characters define themselves by their material possessions. How does modern consumer culture shape personal identity and social values, and can these perceptions change?
- Nick recognizes the problems around him but remains largely passive. How can individuals today move toward a more active role in creating change?

COMMUNITY RESOURCES

- [F. Scott Fitzgerald Society](#)
- [Unite Against Book Bans](#)
- [United Way](#)
- [Habitat for Humanity](#)
- [American Library Association](#)

ADDITIONAL READINGS

- Jillian Cantor, *Beautiful Little Fools* (2022)
- Ryan Douglass, *The Great Disillusionment of Nick and Jay* (2026)
- Arthur Miller, *Death of a Salesman* (1949)
- Mercè Rodoreda, *Garden by the Sea* (1967)
- Edith Wharton, *The Age of Innocence* (1920)