In the summer of 1922, Nick Carraway moves from Minnesota to work as a bond salesman in New York. Nick rents a house in West Egg, a suburb of New York on Long Island full of money and social connections and "old" money live. One night Nick drives to East Egg to have dinner with his cousin, Daisy Buchanan, a beautiful and cynical professional golfer. Jordan tells Nick that Tom is having an affair. Upon returning home from dinner, Nick sees his mysterious neighbor Jay Gatsby holding out his arms toward the Long Island Sound. Nick looks out across the water, but sees only a green light blinking at the end of a dock on the far shore.

A few days later, Tom invites Nick to a party in New York City. On the way, Tom picks up his mistress, Myrtle Wilson, the wife of George Wilson, the owner of an auto shop an industrial area between West Egg and New York City called the Valley of Ashes. At the party, Myrtle gets drunk and makes a pass at Nick. Nick also attends one of Gatsby's extravagant Saturday night parties. He runs into Jordan there, and meets Gatsby for the first time. Gatsby privately tells Jordan a story she describes as the most "amazing thing." After going to lunch with Gatsby and a shady business partner of Gatsby's named Meyer Wolfshiem, Nick meets with Jordan and learns the "amazing" story: Gatsby met and fell in love with Daisy before World War I, and bought his West Egg mansion just to be near her and impress her. At Gatsby's request, Nick arranges a meeting between Gatsby and Daisy. The two soon rediscover their love.

Daisy invites Nick and Gatsby to lunch with her, Tom, and Jordan. During the lunch, Tom realizes Daisy and Gatsby are having an affair. He insists they all go to New York City. As soon as they gather at the Plaza Hotel, though, Tom and Gatsby get into an argument about Daisy. Gatsby tells Tom that Daisy never loved Tom and has only ever loved him. But Daisy can only admit that she loved them both, and Gatsby is stunned. Tom then reveals that Gatsby made his fortune by bootlegging alcohol and other illegal means. Tom then dismissively tells Gatsby to go home with Gatsby, since he knows Gatsby won't "bother" her anymore. They leave in Gatsby's car, while Tom, Nick, and Jordan follow sometime later. As they drive home, Tom, Nick, and Jordan come upon an accident: Myrtle has been hit and killed by a car. Tom realizes that it must have been Gatsby's car that struck Myrtle, and he curses Gatsby as a coward for driving off. But Nick learns from Gatsby later that night that Daisy was actually behind the wheel.

Another Failed Screenwriter. Fitzgerald was an alcoholic and his wife Zelda suffered from serious mental illness. In the final years of their marriage as their debts piled up, Zelda stayed in a series of mental institutions on the East coast while Fitzgerald tried, and largely failed, to make money writing movie scripts in Hollywood.

Nick Carraway – A young man from Minnesota who has come to New York after graduating Yale and fighting in World War I, Nick is the neighbor of Jay Gatsby and the cousin of Daisy Buchanan. The narrator of The Great Gatsby, Nick describes himself as "one of the few honest people that [he] has ever known." Nick views himself as a man of "infinite hope" who can see the best side of everyone he encountered. Nick sees past the veneer of Gatsby's wealth and is the only character in the novel who truly cares about Gatsby. In watching Gatsby's story unfold, Nick becomes a critic of the Roaring Twenties excess and carelessness that carries on all around him.

Daisy Buchanan – The love of Jay Gatsby's life, the cousin of Nick Carraway, and the wife of Tom Buchanan. She grew up in Louisville, Kentucky, where she met and fell in love with Gatsby. She describes herself as "sophisticated" and says the best thing a girl can be is a "beautiful little fool," which makes it unsurprising that she lacks conviction and sincerity, and values material things over all else. Yet Daisy isn't just a shallow gold digger. She's more tragic: a loving woman who has been corrupted by greed. She chooses the comfort and security of money over real love, but she does so knowingly. Daisy's tragedy conveys the alarming extent to which the lust for money captivated Americans during the Roaring Twenties.
In LitCharts, each theme gets its own corresponding color, which you can use to track where the themes occur in the work. There are two ways to track themes:

- Refer to the colored bars next to each plot point throughout the Summary and Analysis sections.
- Use the ThemeTracker section to get a quick overview of where the themes appear throughout the entire work.

### The Roaring Twenties

**F. Scott Fitzgerald** coined the term “jazz age” to describe the decade of decadence and prosperity that America enjoyed in the 1920s, which was also known as the Roaring Twenties. After World War I ended in 1918, the United States and much of the rest of the world experienced an unprecedented economic expansion. The surging economy turned the 1920s into a time of easy money, hard drinking (despite the Prohibition amendment to the Constitution), and lavish parties. Though the 1920s were a time of great optimism, Fitzgerald portrays the much bleaker side of the revelry by focusing on its indulgence, hypocrisy, shallowness, and its perilous—en even fatal—consequences.

### The American Dream

The American Dream—that hard work can lead one from rags to riches—has been a core facet of American identity since its inception. Settlers came west to America from Europe seeking wealth and freedom. The pioneers headed west for the same reason. **The Great Gatsby** shows the tide turning east, as hordes flock to New York City seeking stock market fortunes. The Great Gatsby portrays this shift as a symbol of the American Dream’s corruption. It’s no longer a vision of building a life; it’s just about getting rich.

**Gatsby** symbolizes both the corrupted Dream and the original uncorrupted Dream. He sees wealth as the solution to his problems, pursues money via shady schemes, and reinvents himself so much that he becomes hollow, disconnected from his past. Yet Gatsby’s corrupt dream of wealth is motivated by an incorruptible love for Daisy. Gatsby’s failure does not prove the folly of the American Dream—rather it proves the folly of short-cutting that dream by allowing corruption and materialism to prevail over hard work, integrity, and real love. And the dream of love that remains at Gatsby’s core endures nearly every other character in the novel, all of whom are empty beyond just their lust for money.

### Class (Old Money, New Money, No Money)

The Great Gatsby portrays three different social classes: “old money” (Tom and Daisy Buchanan); “new money” (Gatsby); and a class that might be called “no money” (George and Myrtle Wilson). “Old money” families have fortunes dating from the 19th century or before, have built up powerful and influential social connections, and tend to hide their wealth and superiority behind a veneer of civility. The “new money” class made their fortunes in the 1920s boom and therefore have no social connections and tend to overcompensate for this lack with lavish displays of wealth.

### The Eyes of Doctor T. J. Eckleburg

The eyes of Doctor T. J. Eckleburg on the billboard overlooking the Valley of Ashes represent many things at once: to **Nick** they seem to symbolize the haunting waste of the past, which lingers on though it is irretrievably vanished, much like Dr. Eckleburg’s medical practice. The eyes can also be linked to Gatsby, whose own eyes, once described as “vacant,” often stare out, blankly keeping “vigil” (as word Fitzgerald applies to both Dr. Eckleburg’s eyes and Gatsby’s) over Long Island sound and the green light. To **George Wilson**, Dr. Eckleburg’s eyes are the eyes of God, which he says see everything.

### The Valley of Ashes

An area halfway between New York City and West Egg, the Valley of Ashes is an industrial wasteland covered in ash and soot. If New York City represents all the “mystery and beauty in the world,” and West Egg represents the people who have gotten rich off the roaring economy of the Roaring Twenties, the Valley of Ashes stands for the dismal ruin of the people caught in between.

### East and West

**Nick** describes the novel as a book about Westerners, a “story of the West.” **Tom, Daisy, Jordan, Gatsby, and Nick** all hail from places other than the East. The romanticized American idea of going West to seek and make one’s fortune on the frontier turned on its ear in the 1920s’ stock boom; now those seeking their fortune headed back East to cash in. But while Gatsby suggests there was a kind of honor in the hard work of making a fortune and building a life on the frontier, the quest for money in the East is nothing more than that: a hollow quest for money. The split between the eastern and western regions of the United States is mirrored in Gatsby by the divide between East Egg and West Egg: once again the West is the frontier of people making their fortunes, but these “Westerners” are as hollow and corrupt inside as the “Easterners.”

### Gatsby’s Mansion

Gatsby’s mansion symbolizes two broader themes of the novel. First, it represents the grandness and emptiness of the 1920s boom: Gatsby justifies living in it all alone by filling the house weekly with “celebrated people.” Second, the house is the physical symbol of Gatsby’s love for Daisy. Gatsby used his “new money” to create a place that he thought rivaled the houses of the “old money” that had taken her away.
**Chapter 1**

**Nick Carraway**, the novel’s narrator and protagonist, begins *The Great Gatsby* by recounting a bit of advice his father taught him: don’t criticize others, because most people have not enjoyed the “advantages” that he has. Nick says that as a result of following this advice, he’s become a tolerant and forgiving person who resists making quick judgments of others.

For instance, Nick says that though he scorns everything Gatsby stood for, he withholds judgment entirely regarding him. Nick says Gatsby was a man of “gorgeous” personality and boundless hope. Nick views Gatsby as a victim, a man who fell prey to the “foul dust” that corrupted his dreams.

In the summer of 1922, Nick, a Yale graduate, moves from his hometown in Minnesota, where his family has lived for three generations, to live and work in New York. He has recently returned from military service in World War I, an experience that left him feeling restless in the dull Midwest.

Nick intends to become a bond salesman, a line of work he says that almost everyone he knew was entering. Nick hopes to find a taste of the excitement and sense of possibility that was sweeping the nation in the early 1920s. He says moving to New York offered him and everyone else the chance to discover or reinvent themselves.

Nick rents a house in West Egg, a Long Island suburb located directly across a bay from East Egg. Nick observes that the two communities differed greatly in every way but shape and size. West Egg is where the “new rich” live, people who have made their fortunes only recently and have neither the social connections nor the cultural refinement to be accepted among the “old money” families of East Egg.

The West Egg “new rich” are characterized by garish displays of wealth that the old money families find distasteful. For instance, Nick’s small house sits next to an “eyesore” of a mansion owned by Gatsby, a man Nick knows only by name. Gatsby’s mansion is a gigantic reproduction of a French hotel, covered in ivy and surrounded by forty acres of lush lawns and gardens.

The main story begins when Nick, who, though he lives in West Egg has East Egg connections, drives over to East Egg to have dinner at the Buchanans. *Daisy Buchanan* is Nick’s cousin, and Nick vaguely knew her husband Tom because Tom also attended Yale. When Nick arrives, Tom is dressed in riding clothes. Tom speaks to Nick politely but condescendingly. Nick remembers that plenty of people hated Tom at Yale, and notes that both Tom’s arrogance and imposing stature have changed little since those days.

At dinner Nick meets Jordan Baker, a young professional golfer, who is beautiful but also seems constantly bored by her surroundings.

Soon, Tom launches into a diatribe about the downfall of civilization as described in a book entitled *The Rise of the Colored Empires*. The book explains that the Nordic race, with which Tom identifies himself, created civilization and is now threatened by the rise of other, inferior races. Tom urges everyone to read the book. Daisy tries to make light of his suggestion.

Just then, Tom learns he has a phone call and leaves the room. Daisy follows quickly behind, and Jordan tells Nick that the call is from Tom’s mistress. The rest of dinner is awkward. As Nick is leaving, Daisy and Tom suggest he think about striking up a romance with Jordan.

Upon returning from dinner, Nick sees Jay Gatsby standing on his lawn and gazing out across Long Island sound. Nick considers calling out to Gatsby, but stops himself when he sees Gatsby extend his arms out toward the far side of the water. Nick looks across the water and sees only a tiny green light blinking at the end of a dock.

**Chapter 2**

Nick describes a “waste land” between West Egg and New York City where the ashes from the city are dumped. The ashes cover everything, including the men who live there. Above this bleak “Valley of Ashes” stare out two huge spectacular eyes from a billboard for an eye doctor’s defunct practice. These haunting, unblinking eyes of Doctor T. J. Eckleburg watch over everything in the Valley of Ashes.

One day, as Tom and Nick ride a train from Long Island into the city, Tom gets off at a stop in the Valley of Ashes and tells Nick to come along. Tom leads Nick to George Wilson’s auto garage, and Nick learns that Tom’s mistress is Wilson’s wife, Myrtle. Wilson is good-looking, but beaten-down and lifeless and has ashes in his hair, while Myrtle strikes Nick as vibrant and oddly sensuous. Tom talks with Wilson about selling a car. When Wilson goes to get some chairs, Tom whispers to Myrtle to meet him in a little while at the train station.

Tom, Myrtle, and Nick go to the apartment Tom keeps in New York City to conduct his affair. Myrtle’s sister Catherine soon shows up, as does another couple. Everyone gets very drunk, including Nick. He says the party is only the second time he’s been drunk.

The topic of conversation eventually turns to Nick’s neighbor Gatsby. Catherine says she’s afraid of Gatsby because she’s heard that he’s a relative of the German emperor, Kaiser Wilhelm, and everyone agrees that Gatsby is involved in some sort of shifty business.

As Myrtle gets more and more drunk she also gets increasingly loud. After Tom gives her a puppy as a gift, she starts talking about Daisy. Tom warns her that she doesn’t have the right to use Daisy’s name. But she starts to tease him by repeatedly calling out “Daisy! Daisy! Daisy!” Tom punches her in the nose, breaking it. The party ends, and Nick takes the train home alone.

Tom’s outburst shows that old money is insecure about the rise of new money, which makes old money feel as if the world was falling apart. Old money is also hypocritical, hiding hatred and corruption behind a veneer of taste and manners.

While Tom shows off his house and family and manners, he has a mistress on the side. Hypocrisy and notoriety are at the heart of old money in the 1920s boom.

Gatsby’s gesture is symbolic of his character: he is a hopeful seeker of unattainable dreams. It’s not clear at this point what the green light symbolizes, but it’s clear that to Gatsby it symbolizes some dream or hope.
Chapter 3

Every Saturday night, Gatsby throws incredibly luxurious parties at his mansion. Nick eventually receives an invitation. At the party, he feels out of place, and notes that the party is filled with people who haven’t been invited and who appear “agonizingly” aware of the “easy money” surrounding them. The main topic of conversation is rumors about Gatsby. Nick hears from various people that Gatsby is a German spy, an Oxford graduate, and someone even claims Gatsby once killed a man.

Nick runs into Jordan Baker at the party. While spending time with her, he observes all the amazing luxuries of the party: a live orchestra, a cornucopia of food and imported fruits, and endless reserves of alcohol.

Nick and Jordan decide to find their mysterious host, and wander into Gatsby’s library. There they meet a short, somewhat drunk man who wears owl-like glasses (and whom Nick refers to as Owl-Eyes). Owl Eyes is amazed by Gatsby’s books: the vastness and “realism” of Gatsby’s book collection astounds him.

Later, as Nick and Jordan sit outside watching the party, Nick strikes up a conversation with the man sitting next to him. The man thinks Nick looks familiar. The man introduces himself: he’s Jay Gatsby. Gatsby has a dazzling smile, and refers to everyone as “old sport.”

Gatsby also interests Nick because he remains apart from the party, as if his pleasure derives from observing the spectacle, not participating in it.

At almost two in the morning, a butler approaches Nick. He explains that his host has been called away (a fact which Nick later discovers to be a lie). The butler hands Nick a little card. The officer apologizes and lets him go.

After saying goodbye to Gatsby (who has to run off to receive a phone call from Philadelphia), Nick leaves the party. As he walks home, he sees a policeman pulls him over. Over Gatsby shows the officer a little card. The officer apologizes and lets him go.

For lunch they meet a business partner of Gatsby’s named Meyer Wolfshelm. Wolfshelm tells Nick that Gatsby is a man of “fine breeding” who would “never so much as look at a friend’s wife.” As for Wolfshelm, Gatsby tells Nick he’s the man behind the fixing of the 1919 World Series. Nick begins to think Gatsby’s might be involved in organized crime.

On the way out of the restaurant, Nick sees Tom Buchanan and introduces him to Gatsby. Gatsby appears embarrassed and leaves the scene without saying goodbye.

After lunch, Nick meets Jordan at the Plaza Hotel. She tells him the “amazing thing” that Gatsby had told her earlier: as a young man, Gatsby had a passionate romance with Daisy Fay, who is now Daisy Buchanan. During the war, when Daisy was not yet twenty, Gatsby met her while he was stationed in Louisville and the two of them fell in love. Her family prevented Daisy from leaving and marrying Gatsby, and one year later she married Tom Buchanan, a wealthy man from Chicago who gave her a string of pearls worth $350,000 and a three-month honeymoon to the South Seas.

Jordan finishes the story later in Central Park. She says Gatsby never fell out of love with Daisy and bought his giganto-mansion in West Egg to be across the bay from her. He had hoped that the magnificent house would impress her and win back her love. Nick realizes that the green light he saw Gatsby gazing at sits at the end of Daisy’s dock. Finally, Jordan adds that Gatsby has requested that Nick invite Daisy over to his house for tea. Then Gatsby will show up so that Daisy will have to see him, even if, as Gatsby fears, she doesn’t want to.

Nick then describes accompanying Gatsby on a trip into the city for lunch. They ride to the city in Gatsby’s monstrous cream-colored car. While he drives, Gatsby tells Nick about his past. Gatsby claims to be the son of wealthy parents from the “Midwest” town of San Francisco, to have graduated from Oxford, been a noted jewel collector in Europe and a decorated hero in the war. He even shows Nick a war medal, and then tells Nick to expect to hear a very sad story about him in the later in the afternoon.

Gatsby pays little attention to the speed limit, and a policeman pulls him over. Gatsby shows the officer a little card. The officer apologizes and lets him go.

Wolfsheim’s connection to Gatsby is a sign of the corruption of the American Dream, “new money,” and the Roaring Twenties. Wolfsheim equates wealth with “fine breeding,” which is a very “new money” way of thinking.

Now Gatsby’s purpose is clear. He has achieved the Roaring Twenties version of the American Dream by becoming very rich. To achieve that wealth he reinvented himself, possibly became involved in criminal activities, and sacrificed his past. But he did it all in service of a purer, more traditional American Dream: real love.

Gatsby chose the security of money over love. So Gatsby made himself rich he thinks that money will win her back. Now his mansion, the symbol of “new money,” is directly across the bay from her house, symbolic of “old money.” The green light represents both Gatsby’s dream of recreating his past with Daisy and the corrupt American Dream of extreme wealth.

Chapter 4

Nick observes some drunken women on Gatsby’s lawn discussing Gatsby’s mysterious identity, which includes all the usual rumors. Nick then lists a few of the prominent guests who attended Gatsby’s parties that summer, none of whom knew anything about their host.

Another damning portrayal of the Roaring Twenties. Nick’s list of Gatsby’s guests reads like a who’s who of ’22, but they’re all just using Gatsby for his hospitality.

Chapter 5

After returning from the city, Nick encounters Gatsby late at night on his front lawn. Gatsby seems nervous, and asks if Nick would like to take a swim in his pool. Nick realizes that Gatsby’s is trying to convince him to set up the meeting with Daisy. Nick tells Gatsby he’ll do it. Gatsby then offers Nick the chance to join a “confidential,” probably illegal, business venture. Nick is offended at Gatsby trying to buy him off, but continues to discuss with Gatsby the plans for how and when to arrange the meeting.

Gatsby is nervous on the day of the meeting. Though it’s raining he sends a man to cut Nick’s grass, and also makes sure Nick’s house is full of flowers. Gatsby disappears just as Daisy arrives. When Gatsby arrives at Nick’s front door, he looks pale and deathlike, and knocks over a clock by mistake.

Gatsby acts like a superstitious, above the law and the police.
Gatsby and Daisy treat each other formally at first, and Gatsby’s nerves threaten to overwhelm him. Nick leaves them alone for half an hour. When he returns, they are blissfully happy. Gatsby then takes them on a tour of his mansion. In Gatsby’s bedroom, as he tells Daisy about staring at the green light on her dock, Daisy breaks down crying while looking through Gatsby’s vast collection of luxurious English shirts.

Nick, meanwhile, privately wonders how Daisy can possibly fulfill Gatsby’s idealized vision of her. Nick reflects that over the years Gatsby has remained faithful to their love, while Daisy has given herself to another man she never loved in exchange for the security of wealth.

They move from the house to Gatsby’s well-manicured grounds. Gatsby remarks that mist on the bay blocks his view of Daisy’s house and the single blinking green light on its dock.

Next, Gatsby gets one of his hangers-on, Ewing Klipspringer, to play the piano for the three of them. Gatsby holds Daisy’s hand and she whispers something to him that seems to stir his emotions. Nick, sensing that they no longer realize he’s there, leaves them, walking out alone into the rain.

Chapter 6

Nick notes that newspaper reporters soon started to appear at Gatsby’s home to try to interview him. He then gives Gatsby’s biographical details, the truth behind both the public rumors and Gatsby’s own claims: born Jay Gatz on a farm in North Dakota around 1900; changed his name to Jay Gatsby at age seventeen; spends more than a year on the south shore of Lake Superior clamming and fishing; attends and drops out of St. Olaf College in southern Minnesota after two weeks; meets Dan Cody, a fifty-year-old multimillionaire expert in mining and precious metals, and ends up as his assistant for five years aboard the Tuohomy, Cody’s boat; Cody dies and leaves Gatsby $25,000, which he never receives due to a legal technicality; Gatsby dedicates himself to appearing at parties to become rich and successful.

For a few weeks, Nick doesn’t see Gatsby. Then, one afternoon, Gatsby turns up at his house. A few moments later, Tom Buchanan also shows up unexpectedly with some friends, the Sloanes. Gatsby tells Tom that he knows his wife, and invites Tom and his friends to stay for dinner. They say they can’t stay, but invite Gatsby to dinner. Daisy doesn’t realize that the invitation was just to be polite, and accepts.

The next Saturday night, Tom and Daisy come to a party at Gatsby’s. The party strikes Nick as particularly unpleasant. Tom is disdainful of the party, and though Daisy and Gatsby dance together she also seems to have a bad time. As Tom and Daisy are leaving, Tom says he suspects Gatsby’s fortune comes from bootlegging, which Nick denies. Daisy says Gatsby made his money from drug stores that he built up himself.

After the party, Gatsby is depressed. He suspects that Daisy neither enjoyed the party nor understands the depth of his feelings for her. Nick reminds him that the past is impossible to repeat, but Gatsby disagrees. He says he will return everything to the way it was before.

Two ways to view Daisy's breakdown: 1) she realizes that Gatsby could have given her the life she chose by marrying Tom or 2) she realizes that she's most in love with money. Either way, she misses Gatsby describing his love for her.

Once Gatsby achieves his dream, he becomes absorbed in the idea, forgetting Nick. A critique of “new money” values.

The light has no significance to Gatsby.

For a few weeks, Nick adds that he has “wised up” recently and become physically ill upon discovering that his wife has been living a double life. Nick realizes that Wilson has figured out his wife is having an affair but doesn’t know that Tom is the other man. He also thinks that Wilson and Tom are identical, except that Tom is healthy and Wilson sick.

Gatsby believes in the future and the American Dream, and believes that money can buy both.

Chapter 7

Gatsby’s house becomes much quieter, and his party’s come to an end. Nick visits, and learns that Gatsby ended the parties because he no longer needed them to attract Daisy. He also learns that Gatsby also fired all of his servants because Daisy thought they might gossip about their relationship (she now visits often during the afternoon). He replaced the servants with some of Wolfsheim’s men.

On the hottest day of the summer, Daisy invites Nick and Gatsby to lunch with her, Tom, and Jordan. At one point, while Tom is out of the room, Daisy kisses Gatsby on the lips and says she loves him. But the next instant the nurse leads in her young daughter, Pammy. Daisy basically ignores the child, but Gatsby keeps glancing at the little girl in surprise.

When Tom and Gatsby take a tour around the house, Gatsby points out that his house is directly across the sound from Tom’s house.

The lunch is awkward, at least in part because of the intense heat. At one point Daisy asks what they should do with the rest of the day and the next thirty years of their lives. She cries out that she wants them all to go to the city. Daisy and Gatsby lock eyes, and Daisy comments that Gatsby always looks like an advertisement. Tom can see in Daisy’s eyes that Daisy and Gatsby are in love. He suddenly agrees that they should all go to the city.

Before they leave for the city, Nick and Daisy have a moment alone, in which they agree that Daisy is indiscreet. Gatsby comments that Daisy’s voice is “full of money.”

Nick calls Gatsby’s sentimental agony appalling because it has made Daisy into a symbol of perfection, an idealized vision to which Gatsby has sacrificed his identity.

Nick recalls a memory that Gatsby once shared with him about the first time Gatsby kissed Daisy. Nick calls Gatsby’s sentimentality about history “appalling” and reflects that in that kiss Gatsby’s dreams of success focused solely on Daisy. She became an idealized dream for Gatsby and the center of his life.

As soon as he gets Daisy, Gatsby no longer needs “new money” parties. But Gatsby can’t escape the way he corrupted himself in his quest to become rich enough to win Daisy, as the presence of Wolfsheim’s men shows.

When Daisy kisses Gatsby it seems that he’s won. But even Gatsby senses that Daisy’s daughter symbolizes a shared past between Daisy and Tom that Gatsby can’t teach.

The opaqueness of the houses shows the rivalry between Gatsby and Tom.

The conflict between Gatsby and Tom, new money and old money continues to build. Here, Gatsby fails to understand the “old money” behavior of inescapable pretentiousness; he mistakes it for actual prettiness. “Old Money” hides its cruelty, and calls it good manners.

Nick has clearly come to sympathize with Gatsby against Tom. Tom’s disdain for the party is to be expected. But that Daisy has a bad time suggests that Gatsby might not so easily be able to recreate their love. There may be too many obstacles.

The car swap is a crucial plot point, and comes about through Tom and Gatsby’s conflict, old money versus new.

Wilson has his own dream of moving west. With Daisy’s affair and Myrtle about to go west with Wilson, Tom’s world now really is falling apart.

Nick sees across class lines to the fundamental similarity between Tom and Wilson. Wealth does not make Tom any better than Wilson, it just keeps him healthier and stronger.

Myrtle seeing Tom with Gatsby’s car is another crucial plot point. Myrtle’s despair at seeing Tom with his “wife” is linked to T.J. Eckleburg’s dead eyes.
Nick visits Gatsby for breakfast the next morning. Gatsby tells Nick that Daisy never came outside the previous night, but rejects Nick’s advice to forget Daisy and leave Long Island. He tells Nick about the early days of his relationship with Daisy. He remembers how taken he was by her wealth, her enormous house, and even by the fact that other men had loved her. To be with her he let her believe he was of the same class as her. One night they slept together, and he felt he had married her. Then he left for World War I. Daisy waited for a while and then drifted away from him and into marriage with Tom Buchanan.

Gatsby and Nick finish breakfast. As they walk together, the gardener tells Gatsby he’s going to drain the pool. But Gatsby tells him to wait. He says he hasn’t used it once all summer, and would like to. His thirtieth birthday. He says that a “menacing” story185 that the newspaper that was printed in the morning. The point of view shifts to that of Michaelis, theonlywitness in the police investigation: that afternoon, Wilson saw Michaelis’s car. Nick observes that unlike Daisy, Wilson was near dawn at this point, and Wilson was staring at the dead body is close by lying Wilson tried to make his dream of a new life with Myrtle a reality. (The shift in point of view makes sense in the novel because Nick can recreate Michaelis’s experience by reading or viewing Michaelis’s testimony.)

Next, Nick relates what happened at Wilson’s garage after Myrtle’s death. Wilson spent all night talking to Michaelis about Myrtle, revealing that she had a lover and his suspicion that the man driving the car must have been her lover because she ran out to meet it. He told Michaelis how he had confronted her and told her she was sinning in the eyes of God. It was near dawn at this point, and Wilson was staring into the eyes of T. J. Eckleburg when he mentioned God. Wilson says he has a way of finding out who was driving the car and later that morning disappeared from the garage.

At two, Gatsby went for a swim, leaving word that he was to be alerted if any phone call came. None came. Later that afternoon, Nick and some of Wolfsheim’s men working at Gatsby’s house discover Gatsby, shot dead in his pool. Wilson’s dead body is close by lying in the grass.

The confrontation between Tom and Gatsby, old money and new money comes out into the open. Daisy does not want the confrontation to happen. She likes things the way they are.

Gatsby’s sacrifice appears to have been worth it.

Gatsby considers Daisy’s only past to be the single month she shared with him.

Gatsby corrupted himself and his dream to win Daisy’s heart. Now that corruption scars her away, Tom sends Daisy off with Gatsby as a final result.

Nick envious those not haunted by the past (though he’s wrong about Jordan). Nick’s wariness about the future and his comment about the car headed toward death foreshadow a death in the novel and the end of the Roaring Twenties.

Near every character’s “Dream” dies with Myrtle’s death.

Tom realizes that Myrtle saw Gatsby’s car and thought it was Tom’s car because he had been driving it earlier.

Daisy caused the crash, but just as old money hides its corruption behind a veneer of good manners, Daisy behind Gatsby. Gatsby dedicated his life to winning Daisy’s heart. Now he only cares about her and ignores Myrtle’s death.

Daisy chooses the security of Tom over Gatsby’s love, just as she did while Gatsby was away at war.

Gatsby can’t give up his dream, even though it’s dead.
Gatsby’s funeral takes place the next day. In an effort to assemble more people to attend the service, Nick goes to New York to try to retrieve Wolfsheim in person. At his sketchy office, Wolfsheim discusses memories of his early days of friendship with Gatsby, whom he claims to have raised up “out of nothing.” Nick tries to convince him to attend the funeral, but he refuses, citing a policy he has of not getting mixed up with murdered men.

Nick returns to Gatsby’s house for the funeral, only Nick, Henry Gatz, and, to Nick’s surprise, Owl Eyes show up. Owl Eyes pities Gatsby as a “poor son-of-a-bitch.”

Nick goes to Jordan Baker’s house to set things straight with her. She tells him she is engaged to another man, though Nick doesn’t really believe her. Then she accuses Nick of being dishonest with her. Nick leaves, feeling angry and sorry.

Later that October, Nick runs into Tom Buchanan on Fifth Avenue in New York. He refuses to shake Tom’s hand, and learns that Tom was the one who told George Wilson that Gatsby ran over Myrtle. Tom adds also that he cried when he gave up the apartment in which he conducted his affair with Myrtle. Nick doesn’t tell Tom that Daisy was at the wheel. He describes Tom and Daisy as careless people who destroy things and then retreat back into their money.

On his last night in West Egg before moving back home to Minnesota, Nick walks down to Gatsby’s beach and looks out over Long Island sound. He wonders how the first settlers to America must have felt staring out at the “green” breast of the new continent, and imagines Gatsby’s similar wonder when he realized that tiny blinking green light across the bay belonged to Daisy Buchanan.

Nick connects Gatsby’s American Dream of winning Daisy’s love to the American Dream of the first settlers coming to America. Both dreams were noble, and ultimately much more complicated and dangerous than anyone could have predicted.

Important Quotes

Chapter 1 Quotes

In my younger and more vulnerable years my father gave me some advice that I’ve been turning over in my mind ever since. “Whenever you feel like criticizing any one,” he told me, “just remember that all the people in this world haven’t had the advantages that you’ve had.”

“He smiled understandingly—much more than understandingly. It was one of those rare smiles with a quality of eternal reassurance in it, that you may come across four or five times in life. It faced—or seemed to face—the whole external world for an instant, and then concentrated on you with an irresistible prejudice in your favor. It understood you just as far as you wanted to be understood, believed in you as you would like to believe in yourself, and assured you that it had put together.”

“I wouldn’t ask too much of her,” I ventured. “You can’t repeat the past.” “Can’t repeat the past?” he cried incredulously. “Why of course you can!”

“Their eyes are pure gold,” he [Gatsby] said suddenly. That was it. I’d never understood before. It was full of money—that was the inexhaustible charm that rose and fell in it, the jingle of it, the cymbals’ song of it.

Chapter 2 Quotes

This is a Valley of Ashes—a fantastic farm where ashes grow like wheat into ridges and hills and grotesque gardens; where ashes take the forms of houses and chimneys and rising smoke and, finally, with a transcendent effort, of men who move dimly and already crumbling through the powdery air. Occasionally a line of gray cars crawls along an invisible track, gives out a ghastly creak, and comes to rest, and immediately the ash-gray men swarm up with laden spades and stir up an impenetrable cloud, which screens their obscure operations from your sight.

Chapter 3 Quotes

“Wolfsheim exhibits the worst qualities of the “new money” class: he is corrupt, selfish, and callous. By claiming to have raised Gatsby up from nothing, Wolfsheim essentially claims that money is everything.”

“You and I are going to be remembered, aren’t we?” he asked. “My dear boy, we are. We are going to be remembered.”

Chapter 4 Quotes

“They’re a rotten crowd,” I shouted across the lawn. “You’re worth the whole damn bunch put together.”

“I’ve always been glad I said that. It was the only compliment I ever gave him, because I disapproved of him from beginning to end. First he nodded politely, and then his face broke into that radiant and understanding smile, as if we’d been in ecstatic cahoots on that fact all the time.”

Chapter 5 Quotes

“Without that green light I’d never have got there...”

Chapter 6 Quotes

“The truth was that Jay Gatsby, of West Egg, Long Island, sprang from his Platonic conception of himself. He was a son of God—a phrase which, if it means anything, means just that—and he must be about His Father’s business, the service of a vast, vulgar, and meretricious beauty. So he invented just the sort of Jay Gatsby that a seventeen year old boy would be likely to invent, and to this conception he was faithful to the end.”

Chapter 7 Quotes

It eluded us then, but that’s no matter—tomorrow we will run faster, stretch out our arms farther.... And then one fine morning—So we beat on, boats against the current, looking to the future but searching for a lost past.

Chapter 8 Quotes

And as the moon rose higher the inessential houses began to melt away until gradually I became aware of the old island here that flowered once for Dutch sailors’ eyes—a fresh, green breast of the new world.... And as I sat there, brooding on the old, unknown world, I thought of Gatsby’s wonder when he first picked out Daisy’s light at the end of his dock. He had come such a long way to this blue lawn, and his dream must have seemed so close he could hardly fail to grasp it. But what he did not know was that it was already behind him, somewhere in the vast obscurity beyond the city, where the dark fields of the republic rolled on under the night.

Gatsby believed in the green light, the orgastic future that year by year recedes before us. It eluded us then, but that’s no matter—tomorrow we will run faster, stretch out our arms farther.... And then one fine morning—So we beat on, boats against the current, borne back ceaselessly into the past.
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**The Roaring Twenties**

**The American Dream**

**Class**

**Past and Future**

- **Backstory**
  - Jay Gatsby is born on a farm in North Dakota.
  - Gatsby charms and becomes an assistant to Dan Cody, a multimillionaire.
  - Gatsby and Daisy fall in love in Louisville while Gatsby trains as a soldier.
  - Gatsby is a hero in the war and attends Oxford. Daisy marries Tom Buchanan.
  - Gatsby returns to America penniless. He meets and goes into business with Meyer Wolfsheim.

- In the summer of 1922, Nick Carraway moves to New York. He rents a house in new money West Egg, across the bay from old money East Egg.
  - Nick goes to dinner at his cousin Daisy Buchanan's house in East Egg. He also knows Daisy's husband Tom, vaguely, from their time together at Yale.
  - At dinner, he meets Jordan Baker, endures Tom's racist rants, and learns that Tom is having an affair.
  - Nick spots his neighbor Gatsby gazing across Long Island Sound at a tiny green light.

- Nick meets Tom's mistress, Myrtle Wilson, who is the wife of George Wilson, a mechanic in the Valley of Ashes.
  - Myrtle goes with Tom and Nick to the apartment Tom keeps in New York City. The gathering becomes a drunken party at which guests swap rumors about Gatsby. At one point, Myrtle teases Tom by repeating Daisy's name. Nick breaks Myrtle's nose.

- Nick attends one of the extravagant Saturday night parties Gatsby throws at his mansion. Nick runs into Jordan at the party.
  - As Nick and Jordan explore the mansion, they meet Owl Eyes in Gatsby's library. Owl Eyes admires the "realism" of Gatsby's unread book collection.
  - Nick meets Gatsby at the party and the two realize that they knew each other in the army. Later, Gatsby tells Jordan a secret, remarkable story about his past.
  - Nick and Jordan start to date.

- Nick travels into the city with Gatsby. Gatsby gets pulled over for speeding, but shows a little card to the policeman and is not given a ticket.
  - Nick meets Gatsby's business partner Meyer Wolfsheim. Later they run into Tom Buchanan. Gatsby appears embarrassed and leaves without saying goodbye.
  - Jordan tells Nick the story of how Gatsby and Daisy fell in love but did not marry, and explains that Gatsby bought his mansion because it is directly across from Daisy's house in East Egg. Nick realizes the green light must be on Daisy's dock. Finally, Jordan relays Gatsby's request that Nick engineer a meeting between him and Daisy.

- Nick arranges the meeting between Daisy and Gatsby. Though at first it is awkward, soon Daisy and Gatsby are blissfully happy.
  - Gatsby gives them a tour of his mansion. Daisy cries over Gatsby's beautiful English shirts. Nick leaves the two of them alone.

- Tom and Daisy attend a party at Gatsby's mansion. But Daisy seems to have a bad time. After the party, Gatsby suspects Daisy doesn't understand the depth of his feelings for her.
  - Nick reminds Gatsby that the past is impossible to repeat. Gatsby disagrees.

- Gatsby ceases throwing parties now that he has Daisy. He fires his servants, so they can't gossip about Daisy's afternoon visits to the mansion.
  - Daisy invites Nick and Gatsby to lunch with Jordan and Tom. Before lunch, Daisy kisses Gatsby when Tom is out of the room. A moment later, Gatsby sees Daisy's daughter, and seems surprised.
  - During lunch, Tom can tell from Daisy's behavior that she and Gatsby are having an affair. Gatsby and Nick agree that Daisy is indiscreet. Gatsby comments that Daisy's voice is "full of money."

- The group goes to New York City. Tom drives Gatsby's car, while Gatsby drives Tom's coupe. They stop at Wilson's garage to get gas, and Tom learns of Wilson's plans to move west with Myrtle.
  - At Tom's apartment, Gatsby and Tom argue over Daisy. Daisy says she loves only Gatsby. But a moment later, Daisy takes it back. Gatsby is shocked. Tom, victorious, tells the defeated Gatsby to drive Daisy home.
  - On the ride home, Gatsby's car hits and kills Myrtle (who thought that the car was Tom's, since Tom had been driving it earlier). Daisy is secretly at the wheel.
  - Nick remembers that it's his thirtieth birthday. Gatsby hides outside of the Buchanans' house out of concern for Daisy, though it's clear that she's fine.

- Nick advises Gatsby to forget about Daisy, but he dismisses the advice. Then he tells Nick about how he first fell in love with Daisy.
  - Nick and Jordan have a fight over the phone. Nick finds that he doesn't care.
  - George Wilson thinks the driver of the car is Myrtle's lover, and somehow figures out that the car was Gatsby's. Wilson shoots Gatsby, then kills himself.

- Besides Nick and Gatsby's father, only Owl Eyes attends Gatsby's funeral.
  - Nick and Jordan end their relationship. Jordan accuses Nick of being dishonest with her.
  - Nick learns that Tom told Wilson that Gatsby had run over Myrtle, and describes Tom and Daisy as careless people who destroy things.

- On his last night in West Egg before returning to Minnesota for good, Nick compares how the first settlers to America must have felt looking out at the great forests of the New World to how Gatsby must have felt when he realized that the green light was on Daisy's dock.