## The Great Gatsby Study Guide

The Great Gatsby, published in 1925, is widely considered to be F. Scott Fitzergerald's greatest novel. It is also considered a seminal work on the fallibility of the American dream. It focuses on a young man, Jay Gatsby, who, after falling in love with a woman from the social elite, makes a lot of money in an effort to win her love. She marries a man from her own social strata and he dies disillusioned with the concept of a self-made man. Fitzgerald seems to argue that the possibility of social mobility in America is an illusion, and that the social hierarchies of the "New World" are just as rigid as those of Europe.

The novel is also famous as a description of the "Jazz Age," a phrase which Fitzgerald himself coined. After the shock of moving from a policy of isolationism to involvement in World War I, America prospered in what are termed the "Roaring Twenties." The Eighteenth Amendment to the American Constitution, passed in 1919, prohibited the sale and consumption of alcohol in America "Prohibition" made millionaires out of bootleggers like Gatsby and owners of underground salons, called "speakeasies." Fitzgerald glamorizes the noveau riche of this period to a certain extent in his Jazz Age novel. He describes their beautiful clothing and lavish parties with great attention to detail and wonderful use of color. However, the author was uncomfortable with the excesses of the period, and his novel sounds many warning notes against excessive love of money and material success.

Fitzgerald's The Great Gatsby was not a great success during his lifetime, but became a smash hit after his death, especially after World War II. It has since become a staple of the canon of American literature, and is taught at many high schools and universities across the country and the world. Four films, an opera, and a play have been made from the text.

## The Great Gatsby Summary

While The Great Gatsby is a highly specific portrait of American society during the Roaring Twenties, its story is also one that has been told hundreds of times, and is perhaps as old as America itself: a man claws his way from rags to riches, only to find that his wealth cannot afford him the privileges enjoyed by those born into the upper class. The central character is Jay Gatsby, a wealthy New Yorker of indeterminate occupation. Gatsby is primarily known for the lavish parties he throws each weekend at his ostentatious Gothic mansion in West Egg. He is suspected of being involved in illegal bootlegging and other underworld activities.

The narrator, Nick Carraway, is Gatsby's neighbor in West Egg. Nick is a young man from a prominent Midwestern family. Educated at Yale, he has come to New York to enter the bond business. In some sense, the novel is Nick's memoir, his unique view of the events of the summer of 1922; as such, his impressions and observations necessarily color the narrative as a

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