

Outline for Discussion of *The Great Gatsby*

I. Rhetorical Questions (to be raised in class):

Would you think *Gatsby* was a best seller when it first appeared in April 1925? Was it still in print when Fitzgerald died in 1940?

Since it is a relatively short novel, would you imagine that Fitzgerald wrote it quickly—and in one or two drafts?

Would you assume/imagine that Fitzgerald had an experience either (a) of observing a *Gatsby* in real life or (b) of having a *Gatsby*-like experience with someone like Daisy?

Do you imagine that Daisy, *Gatsby*, Nick, Tom (and others in the novel) had real-life prototypes?

Do you think that the age of 28 or 29 Fitzgerald likely had knowledge of the intricacies of writing a “near-perfect novel” informed by a knowledge of the historical development of the genre?

Would you assume that when he wrote the novel (in 1923-1925) Fitzgerald was closer to being a romantic, a cynic, an idealist, or a realist?

II. Individual, personal questions related to the novel (specific or general that you would like to know the answer to)

Example (specific): What is the effect, thematic or artistic, of Fitzgerald’s (or Nick’s) having the dog seller in Chapter II bear “an absurd resemblance to John D. Rockefeller?”

Example (general): What does the novel suggest about the state of the American Dream in 1925?

III. Three Levels of Story

- A. Love Story
- B. American Dream
- C. Ideal Quest

IV. Two Aesthetic Principles

- A. Double Vision
- B. Golden Moment

V. Motifs/Images

- A. East/West
- B. Good Driving/Bad Driving
- C. Vision/Seeing
- D. Clocks/Time; Past/Present
- E. Colors: e.g., green, white

VI. Discussion of the Text:

9 Chapters (structural); 3 levels of the story (thematic); patterns of development from exposition to dramatic high point to turn through falling action to denouement: looking at anchor scenes for each and the intricate way the three levels of story unfold to reveal as Fitzgerald states his intention to Maxwell Perkins, “something *new*--something extraordinary and beautiful and simple + intricately patterned.”