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THE JAZZ AGE

The Great Gatsby has a prominent place in both American literature and identity, and it is widely regarded as one of the greatest American novels of the twentieth century. Jay Gatsby, the main character, is one of the major American literary characters of the last century, and is a very central presence in American national mythology. It has been said that there are few Americans who do not have something of Gatsby in them. Indeed the novel contains some of the most evocative symbols of American literature, especially Gatsby's idealistic and romantic image of a love that remains unchanged by time or events, and his ambition can be seen as an expression of the American Dream.

- **austerity:** hard times
- **evocative:** that brings to mind
- **fulfillment:** complete success
- **idealizes:** thinks of something as being perfect
- **mainstream:** available and appreciated by the majority of people
- **policy:** (here) set of rules
- **prominent:** important
- **prosperity:** wealth and success

THE ROARING TWENTIES

The book centres around a series of events that take place in the summer of 1922, and it can be considered as a fictional analysis of a particular period in American history, a period that Fitzgerald simultaneously idealizes and criticizes.

The novel, however, can also be seen as a metaphor for the 'Roaring Twenties' and the 'Jazz Age'. The Roaring Twenties refers to the decade of the 1920s in the United States and Western Europe which enjoyed economic prosperity after World War I. It was a period of great artistic and cultural energy, of new



THE JAZZ AGE

technology and rapid industrial growth. It was marked by great hope and optimism and people genuinely believed in the possibility of personal and material fulfillment[•]. American society, especially the younger generations, was starting to break with tradition. People turned away from nineteenth century values and the austerity[•] of the recent past in search of pleasure and modernity.

At the same time, jazz music and dance became very popular, moving out of the African American communities in New Orleans where they originated and into the mainstream[•] 'whites-only' clubs of New York, Chicago and San Francisco. One of the most famous was the **Cotton Club** in New York, and many of the most popular African American musicians of the time, including Duke Ellington and Louis Armstrong, performed there. Francis Scott Fitzgerald was the first person to use the term 'the Jazz Age' when he used it for the title of his short story collection *Tales of the Jazz Age*, published in 1922.

THE COTTON CLUB

Like many nightclubs of the time, the Cotton Club had a 'whites-only' policy[•], although nearly all of the performers were black. The club opened its doors to people of all races in 1935, after harsh criticism from many leading artists and musicians of the time.

THE GREAT GATSBY



JAY GATSBY



NICK CARRAWAY



DAISY BUCHANAN



TOM BUCHANAN



JORDAN BAKER



GEORGE WILSON




MYRTLE WILSON





MEYER WOLFSHEIM

BEFORE READING


- 1  Work with a partner. Look at this scene from *The Great Gatsby*. Make a list of the key words that you could use to describe it.



- 2  Write a paragraph with your partner to describe the picture. Use the key words in your list. Compare your description with those of other pairs in the class.
- 3  Look at the picture again. Would you like to be there? Why/why not? Explain your ideas to a partner.




- 4** Read the things that different people say about Jay Gatsby's past. Remember the story takes place in 1922, and World War I was 1914-18.
- a** 'They say he's one of Kaiser Wilhelm's nephews. That's where all his money comes from.'
 - b** 'Somebody told me he had killed a man once.'
 - c** 'He was a German spy during the war.'
 - d** 'He was in the American army during the war.'
 - e** 'He told me once he was an Oxford man... however I don't believe him.'
 - f** 'A handsome man, and a perfect gentleman, isn't he? He went to Oxford College in England. It's one of the most famous colleges in the world.'
 - g** 'Young men didn't arrive from nowhere to buy a palace on Long Island Sound.'
 - h** 'He owned a lot of drugstores.'

 Do you think it is possible that all these things are true? Why/why not? What does it tell you about Gatsby that people have such different ideas about his past? Discuss your ideas with a partner.



CHAPTER ONE

 The Carraways have been a respected family for three generations in the Midwestern city where we live. My father runs a hardware business that has been in the family since 1851.

I graduated from Yale University in 1915, and then fought in World War I. After that I decided to go to New York to work in the finance business. It was 1922.

I rented a small, ugly house on Long Island. It was on one of a pair of large egg-shaped pieces of land that faced Long Island Sound. My house was at the end of West Egg, the less fashionable of the two 'eggs', and only 50 metres from the sea. It was between two huge houses that were rented for fifteen thousand dollars a year. The one on my right was especially grand and had 40 acres of garden. A gentleman called Gatsby lived there.

The story of the summer really begins on the evening I went to have dinner with the Buchanans. Daisy was my second cousin, and I'd known Tom at university. He was an athletic type and had played in the football team at Yale. His family was extremely rich. The couple had spent a year in France, and then had drifted here and there, always mixing with rich people. This was a permanent move, Daisy said to me on the telephone, but I didn't believe her. Tom wasn't the kind of person to stay in one place for very long.

- **drifted:** moved from place to place without a plan
- **graduated:** got a university diploma
- **grand:** impressive
- **hardware business:** shops selling things for the house and garden
- **rented:** paid money to use a house
- **runs:** manages
- **second cousin:** child of one's parent's cousin
- **sound:** long wide area of water

Anyway I drove to East Egg to see two people that I didn't really know very well. Their house was grander than I imagined – a red and white mansion• with a lawn• that stretched all the way down to the beach.

Tom had changed since I last saw him. He looked hard and arrogant now. The body under his riding clothes was muscular and powerful. It was a body that could hurt people, I thought.

We talked for a while on the porch• and then we went inside. Two young women were sitting on a couch•. I didn't recognise the younger one but Daisy got up and came over to greet me. She held my hand and looked into my face.

'I'm so happy to see you,' she said.

She told me that the other girl's surname was Baker and that she was staying with them. Daisy's face was sad and lovely, with bright eyes and a passionate mouth.

'You must see the baby,' she said.

'I'd like to.'

'She's asleep. She's three years old.'

'What do you do, Nick?' asked Tom.

'I'm in finance.'

'Which bank?'

I told him.

'Never heard of it,' he remarked•.

'You will,' I answered. 'If you stay in the East.'

'Oh, I'll stay in the East,' he said looking at Daisy. 'I'd be a fool• to live anywhere else.'

- **couch:** sofa
- **fool:** stupid person
- **lawn:** area of short grass, usually in a garden

- **mansion:** beautiful large house
- **porch:** covered area in front of a house
- **remarked:** said

At this point Miss Baker said, 'Absolutely!' It was the first word she had said since I came into the room. I looked at her. She was very slim• and she stood very straight. Her grey eyes looked out of a pale, charming, discontented face. I thought that I had seen her somewhere before.

'You live in West Egg, don't you?' she said. 'I know somebody there.'

'Really? I don't know anybody.'

'You must know Gatsby.'

'Gatsby?' demanded Daisy. 'Who's Gatsby?'

Before I could reply that he was my neighbour, dinner was announced and we moved onto the porch.

During dinner, Daisy and Miss Baker talked in a way that was as cool as their summer dresses.

'You make me feel uncivilized, Daisy,' I confessed later. 'Can't you talk about crops• or something?'

Suddenly the phone rang and the butler• went to answer it. He returned a minute later and whispered something in Tom's ear. Tom frowned• and, without a word, went inside. Daisy threw her napkin• on the table and followed him into the house.

I was about to speak when Miss Baker said 'Sh!' Quiet but passionate speech could be heard from the next room. Miss Baker leaned• forward trying to hear.

'This Mr Gatsby you spoke about is my neighbour...,' I began.

'Don't talk. I want to hear what happens.'

'Is something happening?'

I enquired• innocently.

- **butler:** senior male servant
- **crops:** plants grown for food e.g. wheat, maize
- **enquired:** asked
- **frowned:** expressed annoyance

- **leaned:** (here) moved closer
- **napkin:** piece of cloth used for protecting one's clothes when eating
- **slim:** thin

‘Don’t you know?’ said Miss Baker, surprised. ‘Tom’s got a woman in New York.’

‘Got a woman?’ I repeated.

‘It’s really very insensitive of her to phone him at dinnertime!’

Almost before I really understood what she was saying, Tom and Daisy were back at the table.

After dinner, Miss Baker and Tom went into the library, and I followed Daisy onto the porch. We sat down side by side and talked for a while[•] about her daughter.

Then she said, ‘We don’t know each other very well, Nick, even if we are cousins. Well, I’ve had a very bad time. Everything’s terrible. Everybody thinks so, and I know. I’ve been everywhere and seen everything and done everything.’

Her eyes were shining with emotion.

‘I’ve become so sophisticated,’ she said and laughed bitterly[•].

I wasn’t convinced by her words. She wasn’t being sincere. I felt uneasy[•].

We went to join Tom and Miss Baker in the library but when we got there, Miss Baker stood up and said: ‘Ten o’clock. Time to go to bed.’

‘Jordan’s playing in a golf tournament[•] tomorrow,’ explained Daisy.

‘Oh – you’re Jordan Baker,’ I said.

I knew now why her face was familiar.

‘Good night,’ she said. ‘Wake me at eight, please?’ Good night, Mr Carraway. See you soon.’

‘Of course you will,’ confirmed[•] Daisy. ‘Come over often, Nick. I want you and Jordan to get to know each other.’

• **bitterly:** sadly and angrily

• **confirmed:** agreed

• **tournament:** sports competition

• **uneasy:** a little nervous and uncomfortable

• **while:** short time



After she'd left, Tom said, 'She's a nice girl.'

'Is she from New York?' I asked.

'From Louisville. We grew up there together,' said Daisy.

'Did you and Nick have a heart-to-heart talk• on the porch?' Tom asked her suddenly.

'Did we?' Daisy said. 'I don't remember.'

'Don't believe everything you hear, Nick,' he advised me.

As I was leaving, Daisy said, 'Oh, Nick! I forgot to ask you something important. We heard you were engaged• to a girl out West.'

'I'm too poor to think about marriage,' I replied.

I knew what she was talking about. There had been rumours• of marriage but this kind of gossip was one of the reasons I'd come East.

I was confused and a little disgusted as I drove away. I thought that Daisy should leave the house and take her baby with her – but she seemed to have no intention of doing that. As for Tom, I wasn't very surprised that he 'had a woman in New York'.

JAY GATSBY

Nick says that Tom 'looked hard and arrogant'.

Is there anything in Tom's behaviour that shows Nick is right to think this?

- **dock:** (US) small platform where boats can tie up on the edge of water
- **engaged:** formally agreed to marry
- **heart-to-heart talk:** private conversation, often about personal feelings
- **rumours:** unofficial information

It was a beautiful summer night, and I sat in my garden when I got home. Something in the distance moved and I realised that I wasn't alone. My neighbour was in his garden too. He was standing with his arms stretching out towards the water. I looked out to sea but I could only see a small green light. Perhaps it was the end of a dock. When I looked back, Mr Gatsby had vanished, and I was alone again in the darkness.



AFTER READING VOCABULARY

1 Use five of the words in the box to complete the sentences.

stuck rumors copper bare misty
 upset mattress small

- a 'Waterbed' is another name for a water
- b Much of what people knew about Gatsby were just, that is, information passed from person to person but not necessarily true.
- c An informal conversation about superficial things can be called talk .
- d If you get, it means you are unable to move further.
- e is a kind of red-brown metal.

2  **In pairs, create three sentences with the words left out in Exercise 1.**

3 Write new sentences as similar as possible in the meaning to the original ones but using the words given in capitals.

- a I turned towards Gatsby, but he was no longer there. **GONE**

- b It was the first word she had said since I came into the room. **SILENT**

- c 'It's really very insensitive of her to phone him at dinnertime.' **HOW**

- d Daisy was not a Catholic and I was shocked at this lie. **ME**

- e I felt that something was wrong between her and Gatsby. **FEELING**

- f 'My wife's locked in. She's going to stay there till we move away.' **BEFORE**

P B1 Preliminary English Test Reading Part 5**1** Complete the sentences below by choosing the correct answer (A, B, C or D).

- 1 They were sitting opposite each other. of them seemed happy or unhappy.
A Neither **B** Each **C** Nobody **D** Both
- 2 I wasn't convinced by her words. She wasn't sincere.
A saying **B** being **C** acting **D** speaking
- 3 'I want you and Jordan to get to know '
A each one **B** you both **C** one other **D** each other
- 4 Michaelis was a young Greek man who the café next to Wilson's garage.
A had **B** ran **C** held **D** got
- 5 'I am delighted that you decided to me a visit.'
A make **B** give **C** do **D** pay
- 6 'What's the matter, Nick? Do you to shaking hands with me?'
A mind **B** refuse **C** object **D** disapprove
- 7 - There was nothing I could say, that it wasn't true.
A apart **B** excluding **C** expecting **D** except
- 8 'You make me feel uncivilized, Daisy. Can't you talk about crops or?'
A anything **B** nothing **C** something **D** everything
- 9 I thought that Daisy leave the house and take her baby with her. But she seemed to have no intention of doing that.
A had to **B** could **C** couldn't **D** should
- 10 'Get some chairs so we can sit down,' she said to her husband, without turning
A over **B** around **C** him **D** up