

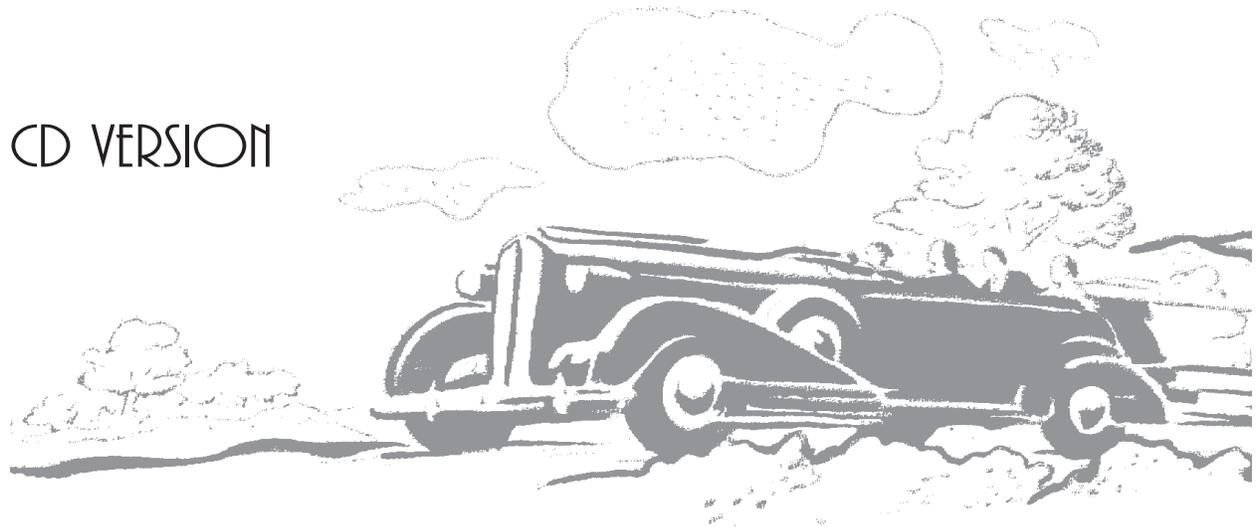
THE GREAT GATSBY

STUDY GUIDE

BY CALVIN ROSO

FOR THE NOVEL BY
F. SCOTT FITZGERALD

CD VERSION



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The Great Gatsby Study Guide
A Progeny Press Study Guide
by Calvin Roso
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Synopsis

“Yet when I surveyed all that my hands had done and what I had toiled to achieve, everything was meaningless, a chasing after the wind; nothing was gained under the sun. . . . And I saw that all labor and all achievement spring from man’s envy of his neighbor. This too is meaningless, a chasing after the wind.”

—*Ecclesiastes 2:11, 4:4*

Having recently returned from military duty overseas during the Great War, Nick Carraway is restless and tired of his provincial life in the Midwest. He moves East to get into the bond market and soon finds himself living among the wealthy on Long Island.

Nick reacquaints himself with his cousin Daisy Buchanan and her husband Tom, and through them he meets the “incurably dishonest” Jordan Baker, for whom he begins to develop a romantic interest. Nick soon learns of Daisy’s deep unhappiness and Tom’s affair with Myrtle Wilson, a married woman. Before long, Nick is drawn inextricably into their lives.

Nick’s next-door neighbor is the extravagantly wealthy, but mysterious, Jay Gatsby. Even at his own lavish parties, Gatsby is the subject of rumors and speculation. Nick learns that Gatsby’s single dream, for which he has amassed all his wealth and possessions, is to win back the love of Daisy Buchanan, with whom he had a relationship some years earlier. Gatsby enlists Nick’s help in reuniting with Daisy, but Gatsby’s single-mindedness becomes his undoing as he seeks to relive the past.

The Great Gatsby is considered a masterpiece of American literature, filled with symbolism and beautiful, well-crafted passages. Through it we are given a glimpse into the characters’ moral emptiness, selfishness, and narcissism.

Chapter 2

But above the grey land and the spasms of bleak dust which drift endlessly over it, you perceive, after a moment, the eyes of Doctor T.J. Eckleburg. The eyes of Doctor T.J. Eckleburg are blue and gigantic—their retinas are one yard high. . . . his eyes, dimmed a little by many paintless days under sun and rain, brood on over the solemn dumping ground.

Vocabulary:

Choose the correct meaning of the underlined word in each sentence below based on how that word is used in the sentence. You may need to use a dictionary.

1. . . . ashes take the forms of houses and chimneys and rising smoke and finally, with a transcendent effort, of men who moved dimly and already crumbling through the powdery air.

In the context of this passage, *transcendent* means:

- a. extreme
 - b. performed
 - c. beyond comprehension
 - d. confusing
2. The only building in sight was a small block of yellow brick sitting on the edge of the waste land, a sort of compact Main Street ministering to it and contiguous to absolutely nothing.

In the context of this passage, *contiguous* means:

- a. indicative
- b. adjacent
- c. opposing
- d. compared

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3. It had occurred to me that this shadow of a garage must be a blind and that sumptuous and romantic apartments were concealed overhead . . .

In the context of this passage, *blind* means:

- a. window shade
- b. obstruction
- c. decoy
- d. darkness

4. . . . a tin of large hard dog biscuits—one of which decomposed apathetically in the saucer of milk all afternoon.

In the context of this passage, *apathetically* means:

- a. impassively
- b. endlessly
- c. disgustingly
- d. loosely

5. She came in with such a proprietary haste and looked around so possessively at the furniture that I wondered if she lived here.

In the context of this passage, *proprietary* means:

- a. uninterested
- b. aggressive
- c. planned
- d. owned or managed

6. The intense vitality that had been so remarkable in the garage was converted into impressive hauteur.

In the context of this passage, *hauteur* means:

- a. performance
- b. arrogance
- c. frivolity
- d. intensity

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7. “My dear,” she told her sister in a high mincing shout, “most of these fellas will cheat you every time.”

In the context of this passage, *mincing* means:

- a. dainty or delicate
 - b. irritating/annoying
 - c. concise or pithy
 - d. youthful/childish
8. “Crazy about him!” cried Myrtle incredulously. “Who said I was crazy about him? I never was any more crazy about him than I was about that man there.”

In the context of this passage, *incredulously* means:

- a. nervously
- b. amazingly
- c. ironically
- d. skeptically

Questions:

1. List some of the descriptive words and phrases used to describe the setting in the first two paragraphs of Chapter 2.

2. Who, or what, is “Doctor T.J. Eckleburg”? Where is he seen? What does Doctor T.J. Eckleburg stare over?

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3. What is the proximity between the Wilsons' home and the "valley of ashes," or the "waste land?" What do you think this relationship says about their lives?

4. What does Myrtle's sister tell Nick about Gatsby? What impression of Gatsby does this give you?

5. Why does Tom break Myrtle's nose?

Analysis:

6. A *symbol* is something physical that represents something abstract. We identify symbols in literature through the author's emphasis and the author's use of repetition. We understand what symbols mean through the author's tone and imagery.

In the beginning of Chapter 2, considerable time is spent describing the "valley of ashes." What ideas or concepts does one generally associate with ashes? What do you think the "valley of ashes" between West Egg and New York symbolizes?

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7. Many analyses of *The Great Gatsby* suggest that the eyes of Doctor T.J. Eckleburg are a symbol for God. What evidence in Chapter 2 is there to support this idea? If this is “God” in the novel, what do you think Fitzgerald is saying by depicting God as a man-made advertisement overlooking a valley of ashes?

8. Twice Nick mentions the photograph on the wall of Myrtle’s apartment. How does he characterize or personify the photograph? How is the photograph similar to the eyes of Dr. T.J. Eckleburg?

9. The exterior of Myrtle’s apartment is described as “one slice in a long white cake of apartment houses.” What does this positive imagery imply? How does the outward appearance differ from the relationships within? Compare this idea with Christ’s imagery of the Pharisees as “whitewashed tombs” (Matthew 23:27, 28). What was Jesus implying through this comparison? How is Myrtle’s apartment, and Tom and Myrtle’s affair, like a “whitewashed tomb”?

10. What books and magazines does Nick find at Myrtle’s apartment? What might the titles of these books and magazines suggest?

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11. *Dramatic irony* is when the reader sees a character's mistakes which the character is unable to see himself. What is ironic about Myrtle's negative attitudes toward the "lower classes"?

12. An author's *tone* is the way he presents his subject matter to readers. Through his use of language, the author can influence the way readers view certain characters or events in a novel. Examine the tone with which Fitzgerald writes about George Wilson. How does he present George Wilson to the reader? Do you think Fitzgerald wishes for readers to sympathize with George Wilson? Explain your answer with examples from the book.

Dig Deeper:

13. Read Matthew 6:25–34. What do these verses tell us about where our priorities should be in our careers, possessions, and relationships?

14. Three times during Chapter 2 Nick finds himself unable to leave the company of Tom and Myrtle. First, when the train stops on the way to New York, then in the taxicab on the way to the apartment, and finally during the party. How is Nick unable to leave in each case?

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15. How do these three attempts to leave show a progression toward Nick becoming a willing participant in the clandestine meeting?

16. Read 1 Corinthians 5. Do you think that by remaining with Tom and Myrtle throughout the chapter Nick is showing his approval of the affair? Explain your answer.

17. Using evidence from the novel, analyze the relationship between Tom and Myrtle. Why are Tom and Myrtle having an affair? What do you think they are hoping to gain from it? Do you think it has made them happier?

18. Near the end of Chapter 2, Nick comments to the reader, “I was within [the apartment] and without, simultaneously enchanted and repelled by the inexhaustible variety of life.” How does this statement compare with Paul’s statement in Romans 7:14–25. Have you ever found yourself being both “enchanted and repelled” by what you know is wrong? How did you deal with it? What is promised in Romans 8:1–11, 26–39 for those who struggle?

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Optional Exercises:

- Read and discuss excerpts from T. S. Eliot's *The Waste Land* (1922).
- Draw a picture portraying the imagery of the ash heaps and Doctor T.J. Eckleburg.
- Search out scripture passages dealing with marriage and discuss the Biblical view of marriage. Some good starting points are Proverbs 5, Malachi 2:13–16, Ephesians 5:22–33, and Hebrews 13:4.

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around three different parties to show how miserable all the people were, even in the midst of what should have been happy events.

11. Answers will vary, but may include discussions of loneliness, showing off wealth, boredom, etc. The true reason, not even hinted at yet, is revealed in the next chapter.

Dig Deeper:

12. Proverbs 10:18, 19 applies to those at the party who participated in slanderous rumor and speculation about Gatsby. Proverbs 23:29–35 also applies to almost all of the characters. In the closing scene of the party many, if not most, of the people were sorrowful and/or fighting with each other. The man in the library seemed to have been drinking for a week. The man in the accident, though probably banged up, had difficulty even understanding there had been an accident. The parallels between these verses and the events in the novel so far are remarkably close.

13. Cardinal virtues are ones that all civilized people recognize: common sense, restraint, justice, courage, etc. Nick speaks as if there is something suspicious about having virtue. There is something ironic about this, considering that one usually views vices as suspicious rather than virtues.

14. Answers will vary. We may feel distrustful—often people who most strongly declare their honesty are least to be trusted. However, Nick has so far given no apparent reason for distrust, and may be genuinely stating what he believes to be true.

Chapter 4

Vocabulary:

1. a; 2. c; 3. b; 4. c; 5. b

Questions:

1. Gatsby's car is described with the following phrases: rich cream color; bright with nickel; swollen; monstrous length; terraced; labyrinth of windshields that mirrored a dozen suns; layers of glass; green leather conservatory; fenders spread like wings; splendid. The automobile is often called the ultimate symbol of American wealth and prestige. Gatsby's auto is the flashiest, most costly of the time, possibly expressing his need to display his wealth.

2. Gatsby claims he grew up in the San Francisco, which he calls the "Middle West," as the son of some wealthy people who are now all dead. He was educated at Oxford and came into a good deal of money. After Oxford he lived like a "young rajah" in all the capitals of Europe, collecting jewels, hunting game, painting, and trying to forget something "very sad." He accepted a commission in the war and was promoted to major.

3. Nick remarks that Gatsby stumbled over the phrase "educated at Oxford," and with this "his whole statement fell to pieces." Nick also finds incredulous Gatsby's statement about living "like a young rajah in all the capitals of Europe." But Gatsby shows Nick a medal from the war and a picture of himself at Oxford, and this convinces Nick that at least some of Gatsby's story is authentic.

4. Meyer Wolfsheim's association with crime includes: Rosy Rosenthal's death, gambling, and his connection with the fixing of the World Series.

5. Jordan tells Nick that Gatsby was a lieutenant who dated Daisy. Gatsby went overseas and Daisy never saw him again. The next autumn Daisy married Tom Buchanan.

6. According to Jordan, Gatsby bought his house "so that Daisy would be just across the bay."

7. Gatsby's purpose in life is to win back Daisy.

Analysis:

8. Answers may vary. Sunday morning and the church bells may represent Christian spirituality or conventional life and social rules. The implication is that most people would rather come worship at the temple of pleasure, represented by Gatsby's house.

9. Answers may vary. Those attending Gatsby's parties ate his food and enjoyed his house, but cared nothing about Gatsby.

10. Answers will vary, but most answers will probably be negative. A number of the people have some association with violence (death, prison) and a greater number have silly or vulgar-sounding names (Leeches, Fishguards, Hammerheads, Beluga, Ferret, Duckweed, Belcher, Smirkes, etc.). It appears to have been Fitzgerald's intent to make these people appear vulgar and silly.

11. By showing a funeral procession passing Gatsby's car, Fitzgerald reinforces the connection between Gatsby's life and corruption or death. It may be significant that the hearse passes Gatsby's car, suggesting that death will overtake Gatsby or his dream.