

Prominent Themes in *The Great Gatsby*

Society and Class

- ❖ The novel is set amongst wealthy, educated people who have little concern about people outside of their 'social circle'. The people belonging to the East Egg – such as Jordan Baker and the Buchanans – who come from old money, hold contempt for the people living in the West Egg – such as Nick Carraway and Jay Gatsby – who come from new money.
- ❖ They are not concerned about politics but instead they care about how they are perceived by society.
- ❖ The class and wealth of the two Eggs are virtually indistinguishable from each other, but the people belonging to 'old money' believe themselves to be of a higher class than the West Eggers because their money dates back centuries.
- ❖ In the novel the only element not restricted to one class is unhappiness. All members of the novel seem to be unhappy for some reason or another.

Love

- ❖ The novel suggests that what people believe to be love is, in fact, often only a dream.
- ❖ Gatsby believes that he loved Daisy when he actually loves a memory of her. She is not the same person she once was. Similarly, Daisy thinks that she loves Gatsby but she actually just loves being adored.
- ❖ Love is a source of conflict in the novel as well, driving men to fight and ultimately causing three deaths.
- ❖ The text seems to argue that there is violence and destruction inherent in love.

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- ❖ America is presented mostly through class: the rich, the poor, and everyone in between are identified by how much money they have.
- ❖ The whole of America is represented in the novel as New York, where all classes are pitted fairly close to each other. There's Wilson, the working-class man who has to work constantly to stay afloat. Then there are the Buchanans', who have an unimaginable amount of money and live a life of luxury. Then there is Nick, whose upper-middle-class existence allows him many luxuries, but not everything he wants. Then there's Gatsby, who, even when he gets to the top, is still looked down upon by those with 'old money'.
- ❖ In the novel, the American Dream seems corrupted. Whereas it used to stand for independence and the ability to make something of oneself with hard work, in the Great Gatsby the American Dream seems more about materialism and selfish pursuit of pleasure. Not to mention, no amount of hard work can change where Gatsby came from, and the old money people maintain their air of superiority because of that simple fact.
- ❖ Gatsby's experiences in New York prove that the 'American Dream' is not only a difficult goal to reach for, but is truly impossible to achieve.

Wealth