

The Great Gatsby

Lesson 1 (from Chapter 1)

Objective

In Chapter 1, we are introduced to the narrative voice of Nick Carraway. Having a first-person narrator who is not the main character was an innovation in Fitzgerald's time. He must have had an objective in mind when he made what was then such an unusual choice. Nick's claims that he is an objective narrator who doesn't judge people should be scrutinized. After all, Fitzgerald could have chosen a third-person narrator. Since the whole story will be offered through Nick's eyes, students should develop an understanding that Nick may not know himself as well as he thinks he does and that the prejudices he hides from himself may not only color his narrative but may be central to the book's theme. The objective of this lesson is for students to create their own characterizations of Nick, supported by textual evidence, and then analyze how this characterization impacts Nick's role as narrator.

Lesson

1. Direct students' attention to the novel's opening. Point out both Nick's father's advice and Nick's claim about not judging people:

“Whenever you feel like criticizing any one,” he told me, “just remember that all the people in this world haven't had the advantages that you've had.”

And

“In consequence I'm inclined to reserve all judgments....”
2. Discuss what kind of persona Nick is trying to project here: that of an honest and sympathetic person who will tell us *Gatsby's* story without bias.
3. Have students individually reread the novel's first three pages and jot down a list of evidence--word choices, details, and so on--that might make a reader question Nick's characterization of himself.
4. Divide students into groups of three and ask them to compare lists. After comparing, they should come up with a single group answer to the following questions:
 - How would you characterize Nick Carraway?
 - What are your top five pieces of evidence to support your claim?
5. Have groups share their answers. After each group shares, discuss as a class which characterizations of Nick have the strongest evidence.
6. Direct students to individually complete the following:
 - Write a paragraph explaining the difference between the way Nick presents himself and the way a reader sees him. Use textual evidence to support your answer.

- Write a second paragraph in which you predict how Nick's personality might affect the way he tells a story.

For Homework:

- Reread another 5 pages of Chapter 1, keeping in mind your characterization of Nick.
- List 5 pieces of evidence that Nick's personality affects the way he tells us the story.

For Homework:

- Write a brief character description of another main character in *The Great Gatsby*.
- Rewrite two paragraphs of Chapter 1 from that character's point of view, keeping in mind how the characterization you've described affects the way they tell the story.

Lesson 2 (from Chapter 1)

Objective

The first chapter of the novel gives many descriptions of setting. It's summer, just after World War One. In West Egg, we see Nick in the setting of his small home and Gatsby on the lawn of his mansion, and in East Egg we see Tom and Daisy in their own mansion. The cardinal directions, the season and the year, and the specific descriptions of place all evoke important thematic ideas. East makes us think of tradition--in both positive and negative ways. West suggests new opportunities. Summer is a season when things grow, when they are in the process of maturing. World War One left many young people feeling disillusioned about America and older generations. And each home that is described in this chapter gives us a sense of the people who live in it--both the personas they want to show the world and the deeper truth underneath. The objective of this lesson is for students to analyze the settings in Chapter One and to connect these settings to characterization and theme.

Lesson

1. Direct students attention to the settings described in Chapter 1. Remind them that setting means both time and place.
2. Ask students to spend a few minutes trying to draw a map of the East and West Egg area based on Nick's description of it. Have them label where they think Nick's, Gatsby's, and the Buchanans' houses are.
3. Ask a student who feels confident in their sketch to recreate it on the board. Discuss as a class and make any revisions needed. Have students revise their own maps as needed.
4. Divide students into groups of 3. Ask that each group answer the following questions:

- What feeling is created by Nick's description of Tom and Daisy's house? List three textual details to support your answer.
 - What feeling is created by Nick's description of Gatsby's house? List three textual details to support your answer.
 - What feelings and ideas do we as a society associate with summer?
5. Discuss the group findings as a whole class.
 6. Ask students to individually read about the "Lost Generation": this can be done by providing a print version of an article, from a textbook reading, or by asking students to look the term up on the web.
 7. Discuss how the summertime setting just after World War One affects the way we should understand Nick's descriptions of Gatsby's and the Buchanans' homes. Fitzgerald is a member of the "Lost Generation," but is Nick? What might change in the way he views these houses after his process of growing and maturing during the summer? What are some possible reasons that Nick chooses not to describe his own house in as much detail as the other houses? And how do our feelings about these settings, as readers, impact the way we understand Nick, Gatsby, Tom, and Daisy?

For Homework:

- Choose either Tom and Daisy's house or Gatsby's house and write a paragraph of analysis showing how you could change the descriptive details and completely change the reader's understanding of the characters who live in the house.
- Write a second paragraph in which you speculate about possible themes in this novel and explain how changing the description of the house you chose would impact a reader's understanding of theme.

Multiple Choice (Chapter 1)

1. The Great Gatsby is narrated by
 - a. Nick
 - b. Tom
 - c. Gatsby
 - d. A third-person narrator
2. Daisy Buchanan is Nick's
 - a. Wife
 - b. Cousin
 - c. Ex-girlfriend
 - d. Mistress

3. Gatsby lives in
 - a. East Egg
 - b. West Egg
 - c. The Valley of Ashes
 - d. New York
4. Nick Carroway is from
 - a. New York
 - b. West Egg
 - c. San Francisco
 - d. The Midwest
5. The novel is set just after
 - a. The stock market crash
 - b. World War Two
 - c. World War One
 - d. The Great Depression
6. When we meet him, Nick's job is in
 - a. Real estate
 - b. Law
 - c. Bonds
 - d. Advertising
7. Tom Buchanan can be described as
 - a. Powerful, arrogant, and racist
 - b. Cruel, cautious, and quiet
 - c. Wealthy, mysterious, and generous
 - d. Shallow, bored, and aimless
8. Jordan Baker is
 - a. The owner of Nick's cottage
 - b. Tom's mistress
 - c. Gatsby's assistant
 - d. Daisy's friend
9. Nick's dinner at the Buchanan's is interrupted by
 - a. The telephone ringing
 - b. Tom and Daisy's daughter
 - c. Gatsby's arrival
 - d. Jordan's insistence that they go to New York
10. When Nick sees Gatsby on his lawn, Gatsby is stretching his arms toward
 - a. His own house
 - b. A light across the bay
 - c. The stars
 - d. An unknown woman