

A companion guide to the  
Literature to Life production of

# The Great Gatsby

By F. Scott Fitzgerald

**TEACHER'S RESOURCE GUIDE**



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**Next Generation  
English Language Arts  
Learning Standards**

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## KEEP EXPLORING

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**More ways to engage  
with your LTL performance!**



# PRE- AND POST-SHOW ACTIVITIES

The following activities are recommended to be used as preparation and reflection before and/or after seeing the Literature to Life performance of *The Great Gatsby* by F. Scott Fitzgerald.

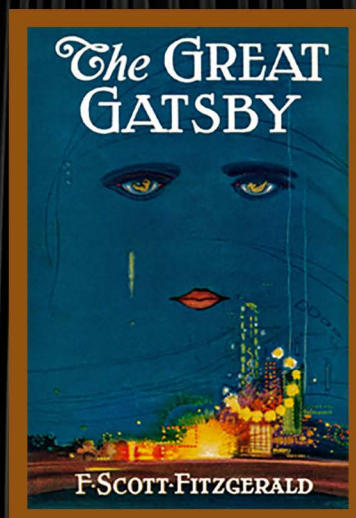
Our Teacher Resource Guides are designed for adaptation and flexibility in response to the teachers' needs. We have attempted to create enough variety to address different styles of learning and exploring. It is our hope that our guides provide insight and inspiration for teachers and students to explore texts from a theatrical perspective.

The time noted for each activity is approximate - please use the activities as they best fit within your classroom.

All Literature to Life resource guides are developed in collaboration with our Teaching Artists. We encourage teachers using our resource guides to reach out to us at [info@literaturetolife.org](mailto:info@literaturetolife.org) to further discuss the material and collaborate in the shaping of your own exploration in the classroom. Think of us as a layer of support for you and your students.

"So we beat on, boats against the current,  
borne back ceaselessly into the past."

*-The Great Gatsby*



# THE ROARING TWENTIES

History/Context, Visual & Textual Analysis and Interpretation, Creative Writing

50-55 MINUTES

Students will delve into the Roaring Twenties, the Harlem Renaissance, and *The Great Gatsby* with background information, images, creative writing, and a poem.

## MATERIALS

- [Book cover & Backstory](#)
- [Roaring Twenties photo gallery](#)
- [Printed Poem: "Harlem"](#)
- Paper and pen/pencil or devices for writing

## INSTRUCTIONS (STEPS)

### CELESTIAL EYES

5-10 min

*The Great Gatsby* is an iconic story of New York and of the 1920s. Show students the book's cover art, which has come to symbolize this place and time. Invite them to read, silently or out loud, the backstory included in the document. Ask students to describe what they see and how it might relate to the story.

#### Possible Prompts:

- *What details do you see? (e.g. the woman's face in the sky, the carnival atmosphere similar to Coney Island, fireworks, tears, etc.)*
- *What does the cover make you expect to happen in the story?*
- *Did the backstory change your opinion? Why do you think this cover was designed/selected?*

### A PEEK AT THE 1920s

10 min

F. Scott Fitzgerald wrote *The Great Gatsby* after living in Great Neck, Long Island, not far outside of New York City. He was commenting on the world he observed. Show students the photos/images linked above. Let students view each picture long enough to discuss specific details they see.

#### Possible Prompts:

- *How would you describe the people in the photos? What are they doing? What might they be feeling?*
- *Which social classes do you believe are depicted? Why?*
- *Do you see yourself reflected in these pictures? Why or why not?*
- *How might these real-life representations be reflected in the book?*

### "HARLEM": READING and RESPONSE

10 min

"Harlem" is a poem by Langston Hughes, a major figure in the Harlem Renaissance, a time of great artistic and intellectual expression within the black community. Read this poem aloud and discuss.

#### Possible Prompts:

- *What is the tone or mood of this poem?*
- *Are the 1920's images we discussed reflected in this poem? Why or why not?*
- *How might this poem reflect the themes in *The Great Gatsby*?*



# THE ROARING TWENTIES

(CONTINUED)

History/Context, Visual & Textual Analysis and Interpretation, Creative Writing

50-55 MINUTES

## INSTRUCTIONS (STEPS)

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### BRING IT TO LIFE

20 min

Building on student response to “Harlem,” put students in small groups and ask them to create their own group “performance” of the poem. Tell students to be as creative as possible – it can be read aloud, acted out, or performed as a spoken word or rap. Encourage students to add additional sound, perhaps even movement or dance. Give students 10 minutes to create/rehearse. Share out and reflect.

#### Possible Prompts:

- *Did acting out the poem help you better understand it? Why or why not?*
- *Why did you make the choices you did in how you performed the poem? Did you have to make edits or changes?*
- *How does this pique your curiosity in how Lit to Life will bring a novel to the stage in just 60 minutes?*

### EXTENSION: OBSERVATION JOURNALING

In *The Great Gatsby*, Fitzgerald (like the story’s narrator Nick) was commenting on the world and the people he observed; he is both “inside” and “outside” the story. Invite students to write a journal entry from their own perspective as onlookers to the world and people around.

#### Possible Prompts:

- *Imagine you were transported to the time and place depicted in one of the images you saw earlier.*
  - *How would you describe what you see?*
  - *What do you hear, smell, touch, taste, etc.?*
  - *Think back on the people in the pictures. Which of them would you choose to spend time with? Or, would you remain on the outside looking in?*
- *Your journal entry could include moments of being both on the “inside” and “outside.”*

# THE AMERICAN DREAM (AND WHAT IT MEANS TO YOU)

Analyzing Society, Comparing & Contrasting Ideas with Peers,  
Reflecting on a Literary Theme, Describing Personal & Family History

50 MINUTES

Students explore the idea of the American Dream, as reflected in *The Great Gatsby*, through discussion, sharing, and writing.

## MATERIALS

- Paper and pen/pencil or devices for writing
- Large pieces of chart paper, markers

## INSTRUCTIONS (STEPS)

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### “WHAT IS THE AMERICAN DREAM?”

15 min

Ask students for their thoughts on this question: “What is the American Dream?”

#### Possible Prompts:

- *Is the American Dream different today than in the past? What does it mean if you are from a different country?*
- *How do you know if you’ve achieved the American Dream? What does it mean to “make it”?*
- *What does “fake it ‘til you make it” mean? How do we try to look like we’ve made it?*
- *Are we all expected to succeed? Why or why not?*

### TALK IT OUT and PRESENT

20-25 min

Post chart paper around the room and separate students into small groups, each near a piece of chart paper. Each student in the group should list 3-4 things that describe their version of the American Dream. After everyone has had a chance to list their responses, students should circle where their ideas overlap, and notice where they don’t. Ask them to think about the following questions:

- What would you be willing to do or to give up to achieve your American Dream?
  - If you could only keep one, which is most important to you, and why?
  - If you had to give one up, which would it be, and why?

### ...”AND WHAT DOES IT MEAN TO YOU?”

10 min

Ask students to journal about how the American Dream is reflected in their own personal history.

#### Possible Prompts:

- *What was your parents’ and/or grandparents’ American Dream? Did they come from another country or another state? Were they the first to go to school or live away from their family? What did they do to better themselves?*
- *Are your parents more successful than their own parents? Will you be?*
- *How is your dream different from your parents’ or grandparents’ generation?*

Share out and reflect.

# DECISIONS, DECISIONS

Identifying & Describing Personal Beliefs, Biographical Context, Character Motivation, Creative Writing, Visual Arts, Performance

45-50 MINUTES

Students will consider how people make difficult choices, and explore/dramatize the conflicting thoughts and feelings a person might have.

## MATERIALS

- [The Real Real](#)
- Chart paper, markers and/or pen/pencil, or devices for writing

## INSTRUCTIONS (STEPS)

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**WARM-UP:  
EITHER/OR**  
10 min

This warm-up will ask students to select one of two options that are of roughly equal value or desirability. Designate one side/area of the room for the 1<sup>st</sup> option and one side/area for the 2<sup>nd</sup> option. When you ask the question, students should move to the designated area silently and without discussion. After the students have made their choice, you may want to ask a volunteer from each side to explain why that choice was made.

**Possible questions:**

- *Gold or diamonds?*
- *Money or love?*
- *Friends or family?*
- *Comfort or risk-taking?*
- *Protecting feelings or being honest?*
- *Self-reliance or accepting help?*
- *Being right or finding common ground?*

**Discuss:** *These are tough choices to make. Were you surprised by any of the choices you made? Were you surprised by the choices your friends made? Did some choices feel totally obvious, while others felt like a 50/50 split?*

**HUMAN BAROMETER,  
GATSBY STYLE**  
10 min

Students gather along one side of the classroom. The spot at which they're standing is 1, and the other side of the classroom is 10. 2 through 9 are spots on the floor evenly placed between 1 and 10. Responding to the following questions, students rate the degree to which they agree (10) or disagree (1) by moving to that spot on the floor.

1. "I believe in the idea of a soulmate or perfect match. Once you find that special someone, do everything you can to make it work."
2. "It is possible to reinvent yourself. You can forget your past, start over, and become whomever you want."
3. "Forgiveness is important. You should always forgive your friends."

**Discuss:** *These questions are probably even tougher than the last ones. Did you immediately know how you felt about any of these prompts? Did you have to think for a moment about any of them? If you responded strongly to one idea, what made you feel that way, positive or negative?*

# DECISIONS, DECISIONS

(CONTINUED)

Identifying & Describing Personal Beliefs, Biographical Context, Character Motivation, Creative Writing, Visual Arts, Performance

45-50 MINUTES

## INSTRUCTIONS (STEPS)

### THE REAL REAL

10 min

Look at biographical details and photos of the real-life inspirations for Gatsby, Daisy, Wolfsheim, and Jordan. Point out that some of the characters in Fitzgerald's novel are combinations of multiple people.

*Discuss: Does it change your feelings about the story knowing Fitzgerald was writing characters and plot details from his own life?*

### CREATIVE WRITING: DOUBLE TROUBLE

15 min

Next, point out that aspects of Fitzgerald himself are spread across multiple characters. Like Nick, he was dazzled by an extravagantly wealthy friend who was full of mysteries, and like Gatsby, he was deeply hurt when he lost out on love because of unfair judgments made about his money and his career.

*Imagine that, like Fitzgerald, you want to write a story about two characters who each have different aspects of you/your personality.*

- Have students write down a list of their personal qualities. The longer the list the better! Be descriptive, and try to delve deeper than “funny,” “nice,” “good friend,” etc.
- Next, on a new page, draw a line down a piece of paper and start grouping the qualities on one side or another. One side will represent one character, and the other will represent a second character.
- Ask students to consider the following:
  - In what ways are these two versions of you similar, and in what ways are they different?
  - What topics might they disagree on? Would they ever argue? If so, who would win?
  - Can they be friends? Why or why not?

Share out and reflect.

### EXTENSION: “DOUBLE TROUBLE” PERFORMANCE

Students can write a short dialogue exchange or comic strip featuring their two “characters.” Encourage them to find a problem that these two might need to solve, and how they can work together to do so despite their differences.



# HIGH STYLE

## Dissecting Visual & Literary Language, Performance, Researching and Using a Glossary, Creative Writing

40-45 MINUTES

Students will experience, dissect, and savor Fitzgerald's stylized language.

### MATERIALS

- [Stylized Language Samples](#)
- [Glossary](#) - Definitions and images of words and concepts in the samples

### INSTRUCTIONS (STEPS)

#### GALLERY WALK

5-10 min

Post words and phrases from the Stylized Language Samples around the room (either the whole passages, or just resonant words and phrases taken from them).

Ask students to walk around the room, taking in the different words and phrases.

If certain words or phrases call out to your students, encourage them to stand by them - they'll have an opportunity to keep working with their chosen phrase.

#### PLAYING WITH WORDS

15 min

Split students into small groups and assign each group a quote from the samples. Give the following information and lead them through each round of instruction:

*F. Scott Fitzgerald wrote *The Great Gatsby* in very stylized language with some characters sounding like they speak in a code that we don't understand. We will dissect details of this language and play with making it fun to speak aloud. There will be 4 rounds of sharing to build understanding and dynamic speaking. Don't worry if they can't understand the whole line immediately, that's why we're diving in this way.*

- **Round 1:** Choose one key word from your line to speak aloud. (Note: this can be a different word for each student in the group or one word done all together).
- **Round 2:** Choose a short phrase from your line to speak aloud (a few words together, which include that keyword).
- **Round 3:** Say your entire line aloud.
- **Round 4:** Create a group tableau (frozen picture) expressing physically the meaning of the line while speaking the entire line aloud.

#### GLOSSARY: CLOSING THE LOOP

5-10 min

End class by closing the loop. Give students access (either on paper or on the board) to the provided glossary of terms. Give them a few minutes to read the glossary and revisit their phrase from the previous exercise.

- **Discuss:** Were you able to learn something new from the glossary? How closely did the group tableau get to the meaning of the passage? Which do you like better, your initial interpretation or the definition provided by the glossary?

If students have been struggling with decoding the provided passages, invite them to paraphrase the passages in plain language now that they have access to the glossary.

# HIGH STYLE

(CONTINUED)

Dissecting Visual & Literary Language, Performance,  
Researching and Using a Glossary, Creative Writing

40-45 MINUTES

## INSTRUCTIONS (STEPS)

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### EXTENSION: DO IT YOUR WAY

Ask students to rewrite the quote in their own stylized language:

*Now that we've seen how Fitzgerald stylized his language, it's your turn. Using your group quote from earlier, or another that stuck out to you, try your own stylization. Rewrite the quote in your own special way, perhaps as lyrics in a song, a rhymed poem, or translated into another language. Or, does the quote bring such strong ideas to mind that you'd prefer to draw what you see? Be creative and let your own style stand out.*

# CHARACTER MAPPING

Graphic Organization, Character Analysis, Point of View,  
Creative Writing, Visual Arts, Performance

45-50 MINUTES

Students will delve into character relationships in *The Great Gatsby*, then write from the point of view of the characters.

## MATERIALS

- [Character map samples](#)
- Chart paper, markers and/or pen/pencil, or devices for writing

## INSTRUCTIONS (STEPS)

### WITH FRIENDS LIKE THESE...

10 min

Ask students to reflect upon the relationships that were depicted in *The Great Gatsby*. Which relationships jumped out as the most memorable? Did some seem more happy and functional than others? Why?

### CHARACTER RELATIONSHIP MAPS

10 min

In small groups or individually, students will take a look at provided samples of character relationship maps.

**Discuss:** Look at the ways that character relationships are categorized and organized in these maps. What do you notice? What do the different types of colors and lines represent? How do they express the kinds of relationships these characters have? (Time permitting, students can look up a character relationship map of a story or series that they like.)

### MAPPING GATSBY

30 min

Now it's time to make your own!

- Ask students to think about the characters in *The Great Gatsby*, from the main ones to the more minor characters.
- Make a list on the board so everyone knows what the pool of characters is to choose from for their maps.
- On a blank piece of paper, students should begin to map out the characters in order to show their relation to one another.
  - On the example maps, there are unique kinds of lines for family, friends, romantic partners, etc. Let students decide how they want to show this on their map - they can select their own colors (e.g. family might be red, friendship might be green, and couples might be purple).
  - *The Great Gatsby* is filled with complicated relationships, drama and conflict. Students should decide how to reflect this on their maps - which characters are friends? Who is in a romantic relationship? Who is fighting? How might you show this - dotted lines, etc.?
  - Remind students that in this story relationships often come in threes. Possible relationship sets to keep in mind:
    - Daisy/Gatsby/Tom
    - Tom/Daisy/Myrtle
    - Nick/Gatsby/Jordan

Ask students to share their character maps with the class. Discuss the choices made and why.

# CHARACTER MAPPING

(CONTINUED)

Graphic Organization, Character Analysis, Point of View,  
Creative Writing, Visual Arts, Performance

45-50 MINUTES

## INSTRUCTIONS (STEPS)

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### **EXTENSION: SPEAK THEIR TRUTH**

Ask students to put themselves in the shoes of one character in one of the above chaotic relationship trios. Ask them to think about the situation that they're in and what choices they have made or might need to make.

Students can write monologues from the perspective of this character - things to think about while they write:

- *Why am I in this relationship? What are the benefits/positives and what are the drawbacks?*
- *What kind of choices did I make to get me here? Do I want to stay in this relationship? If I need to get out, how?*

Invite students to edit/combine their short monologues into short, two-person scenes. What would happen if these characters got together and explained their feelings, their perspectives, their motivations? Are certain relationships salvageable, while others are totally doomed? Do certain scenes end in reunions, while others end in conflict?

Ask students to consider adding set-ups and responses between characters. Rehearse and share these performances.

# BEHIND THE CURTAIN

## Recalling and Interpreting the Performance, Writing and Performing Dialogue

50 MINUTES

Students will creatively fill in the gaps of information and scenes missing from *The Great Gatsby*.

### MATERIALS

- Paper and pen/pencil or device for writing
- [Scenes - Behind the Curtain](#)

### INSTRUCTIONS (STEPS)

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#### WHO IS JAY GATSBY?

5 min

The novel does not give explicit detail about Jay Gatsby's backstory. Ask your students: *Who do you think Gatsby is? How did he become "Gatsby"?* See if they can remember the various explanations offered by the characters in the story (e.g. he came from a rich German family, he came from a poor Midwestern family, he was a hero in the war, he was a bootlegger, etc.)

#### CREATIVE WRITING (FILL IN THE GAPS)

15 min

Certain scenes in *The Great Gatsby* hint at events without going into detail. Ask students to select a partner and write their own version of one of the below scenes. It should be written in dialogue form, as the two or three characters talking to each other. They can also use elements like voiceover, etc. Share the "Fill in the Blank" document above to refresh their memories on the scenes listed here:

- *Tom steps away from his lunch with Nick, Daisy, and Jordan to take a phone call in the other room. Who was on the other end of the call? What did they say to each other? What did Daisy say when she came to find him?*
- *Daisy and Gatsby alone in Nick's house. This is their first reunion in years. The only thing Nick sees upon returning is that Daisy's face is "smeared with tears" and that Gatsby is "glowing." What sort of conversation did Daisy and Gatsby have?*
- *Daisy's wedding day - she is 19 years old and set to marry Tom (who has bought her a \$350,000 pearl necklace) when Jordan finds her drunk and crying in her room. She has a letter from Gatsby in her hand, and she destroys it before she lets anyone see it. What did the letter say? What made Daisy cry? What did Jordan do to help her friend?*

#### PARTNER CRITIQUE AND CLASS SHARE

30 min

Once they have written their dialogue, the pairs should partner with another group to listen and give feedback. The pairs then have 5-10 additional minutes to edit/rewrite any details of their own work. Invite pairs to read their scenes aloud.

**Discuss:** *Why do you think Fitzgerald chose to leave out these scenes? Do we wish any of ours were in the book? How might it have changed how you felt about different characters and relationships?*



# BEHIND THE CURTAIN

(CONTINUED)

Recalling and Interpreting the Performance, Writing and Performing Dialogue

50 MINUTES

## INSTRUCTIONS (STEPS)

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### EXTENSION: IMAGINE A BACKSTORY

Ask students to take it one step further by envisioning backgrounds for characters for which we do not have much detail. Fill in the gaps for yourself. This can be done as a class discussion, journal entry, or even a drawing/collage.

- *Gatsby's momentous rise from poverty as a "bootlegger." One of the explanations we're given for how Gatsby accumulated his wealth is that he sold alcohol at a time when alcohol was illegal and drank in secret (this time was called the Prohibition Era). What was this time like for him? Did he ever get into trouble? What kinds of people did he meet?*
- *Myrtle's double life - Myrtle is secretly going out with Tom, and her husband George doesn't know. What is it like for Myrtle to keep this secret? Does she sneak out at night to party in Manhattan? Does she spend long and lonely hours in George's house waiting for Tom to arrive? Does she have any doubts or concerns about Tom as a person?*

# THE EYES HAVE IT

## Creative Responses - Written or Visual

### 55 MINUTES

Students will interpret *The Great Gatsby* through their own “lens,” either written or visual.

### MATERIALS

- Paper and pen/pencil or device to write/draw

### INSTRUCTIONS (STEPS)

#### DISCUSS “THE EYES”

10 min

Discuss the various symbols in *The Great Gatsby* and the possible meaning of all the eyes, glasses, and “watching” in the book. (Remind them of the book cover with the face in the sky.)

#### Questions:

- *Who’s watching who and why?*
- *Who wears glasses and why are they important? (e.g., besides the eyes of Dr. T.J. Eckleburg, there are Owl Eyes and Klipspringer.)*
- *Who can you look up to in this book and why? Who is the “conscience” in the novel?*
- *Moving to our own lives, think about a “lens” today. Who is watching us? How does/can that affect our choices?*

#### CREATIVE RESPONSE: CHOOSE YOUR LENS

25 min

Ask students to interpret “The Great Gatsby” visually. They can choose to either:

1. Draw a moment or image that stands out (for example: The eyes of Dr. T.J. Eckleburg, the Valley of Ashes, the green light on the dock, Gatsby’s car, etc.)
2. Design social media for one of the story’s characters.
  - Which app does your character use? Instagram, TikTok, Facebook, or something else?
  - Which moments in the story do they post about? How does it come off in their telling?
  - Who’s in their DMs? Who do they “leave on read”?
  - Would this story change in modern day New York?

Remind students to think back on previous lessons - how did they map out their character relationships? What aspects of each relationship would be more public vs. private? What kind of conversations are they having privately vs. what they put on their feed?

#### GALLERY WALL & SHARE

20 min

Ask students to share their work by either displaying it on a Gallery Wall or reading it aloud. Discuss as a group how changing the lens changes the story.

#### EXTENSION: OUR GATSBY

Have students edit or finalize these pieces, then collect into a document to print or project in a public sharing for other classes or an invited audience of parents/guardians.

# KEEP EXPLORING

## What to Do After You See the Performance...

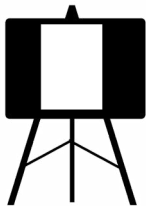
Here are a few more ideas about how you can encourage your students to reflect on the play. We would love to have copies of some of the writings or artwork your students create! Please email your reflective works to [info@literaturetolife.org](mailto:info@literaturetolife.org).

### WRITE



	✓
Write a review of <i>The Great Gatsby</i> as if you were a journalist or news reporter.	
Write a letter to the actor, director, or teaching artist in response to the play.	
Write a letter to the author F. Scott Fitzgerald in response to the novel.	
Write an obituary for Jay Gatsby to be published in <i>The New York Times</i> , including some of his life's accomplishments, the mysteries, ambiguities, and controversies which followed him, and by whom he will be remembered.	
Write an epilogue. Nick, Daisy, Tom, and others live on after the events of the story. What happens to them? How have their lives been affected by the events of the story?	

### DRAW



	✓
Based on the descriptions given in the story, draw how you imagine Gatsby's parties, the valley of ashes, the library in which Owl Eyes works, or other memorable environments.	
There are many noteworthy scenes and many striking lines of dialogue in <i>The Great Gatsby</i> . Comics were popular in the 1920s and 1930s, with titles such as <i>Flapper Fanny</i> , <i>Betty Boop</i> , and <i>Dick Tracy</i> circulating in hundreds of newspapers across America. Draw a comic depicting a scene from <i>The Great Gatsby</i> .	
The actor who performed <i>The Great Gatsby</i> subtly shifted his appearance based on which character he was portraying. Do you remember which choices he made? Draw him depicting his various characters.	
Draw a poster for the LTL production of <i>The Great Gatsby</i> - how would you "sell" it?	

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Based on the memoir *The Great Gatsby* by F. Scott Fitzgerald ©1925

Resource Guide by Elizabeth London, Matthew DeCostanza, and Lisa Beth Vettoso

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