

## Ideas for Pre-reading Activities

1. *Art work:* Research clothing styles in 1920s America. Draw pictures or make a collage of clippings illustrating what men and women from the “Jazz Age” dressed and looked like.
2. *The Lost Generation:* Research American authors and artists from the post-WWI era who were considered part of “the lost generation.” Write a one-page paper discussing who these artists were, why they left America, and what they believed regarding life, literature, and art.
3. *Prohibition:* Write a one-page informative essay regarding prohibition in the 1920s.
4. *The American Dream:* Write a one-page paper defining “the American Dream.” Discuss how the idea of the American Dream has changed through time. Conclude by discussing whether or not you think the American Dream is still possible to achieve, or whether it exists at all.
5. *Materialism:* Write a three- to five-paragraph personal essay about how you see materialism influencing society. How does the desire for money and possessions affect the way people think and plan? Do you find materialism influencing your own plans for college or your career?
6. As you read this novel, pay particular attention to the relationships between the people. Note how they treat each other, how they speak to each other, or how they seem to think about each other. On what are these relationships based? How do these relationships turn out?

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7. *The Great Gatsby* is known for its lavish descriptive passages. With just a few choice words Fitzgerald turns a small decrepit village into a metaphor for decay and death, or turns a small afternoon party into a near nightmare of smoke, babble, and motion. Look up the terms *personification*, *metaphor*, and *simile*, and see how Fitzgerald uses these literary devices throughout the novel.

## Chapter 1

*“Gatsby turned out all right at the end; it was what preyed on Gatsby, what foul dust floated in the wake of his dreams that temporarily closed out my interest in the abortive sorrows and short-winded elations of men.”*

### **Vocabulary:**

Explain the 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. Frequently I have feigned sleep, preoccupation, or a hostile levity when I realized by some unmistakable sign that an intimate revelation was quivering on the horizon. . .

**feigned:**

**levity:**

2. Now he was a sturdy straw-haired man of thirty with a rather hard mouth and a supercilious manner.
3. There was a touch of paternal contempt in it, even toward the people he liked—and there were men at New Haven who had hated his guts.

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4. The other girl, Daisy, made an attempt to rise—she leaned slightly forward with a conscientious expression—then she laughed. . .
  
5. Slenderly, languidly, their hands set lightly on their hips, the two young women preceded us out onto a rosy-colored porch. . .
  
6. Sometimes she and Miss Baker talked at once, unobtrusively and with a bantering inconsequence that was never quite chatter . . . . .  
**unobtrusively:**

**bantering:**

7. “This idea is that we’re Nordics. I am, you are, and you are, and—” After an infinitesimal hesitation he included Daisy with a slight nod, and she winked at me again.
  
8. Something was making him nibble at the edge of stale ideas as if his sturdy physical egotism no longer nourished his peremptory heart.

## *The Great Gatsby*

### **Character Study:**

We learn about characters through what they say, what they do, what others say about them, and how others react to them. We also learn about characters through the tone of the author and the narrator. In order to grasp the text, your goal should be to understand the main characters: their strengths, weaknesses, growth, etc. For each of the passages below, write down in one or two sentences what the passage reveals or suggests about the character listed.

1. Nick Carraway:

. . . I'm inclined to reserve all judgments, a habit that has opened up many curious natures to me and also made me the victim of not a few veteran bores. . . . Reserving judgments is a matter of infinite hope. I am still a little afraid of missing something if I forget that . . . a sense of fundamental decencies is parceled out unequally at birth.

2. Nick Carraway:

. . . after boasting this way of my tolerance, I come to the admission that it has a limit. Conduct may be founded on the hard rock or the wet marshes but after a certain point I don't care what it's founded on. When I came back from the East last autumn I felt that I wanted the world to be in uniform and at a sort of moral attention forever; I wanted no more riotous excursions with privileged glimpses into the human heart.

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3. Jay Gatsby:

No—Gatsby turned out all right at the end; it is what preyed on Gatsby, what foul dust floated in the wake of his dreams that temporarily closed out my interest in the abortive sorrows and short-winded elations of men.

4. Jay Gatsby:

. . . he gave a sudden intimation that he was content to be alone—he stretched out his arms toward the dark water in a curious way, and far as I was from him I could have sworn he was trembling. Involuntarily I glanced seaward—and distinguished nothing except a single green light, minute and far away, that might have been at the end of the dock.

5. Tom Buchanan:

. . . [Tom was] one of those men who reach such an acute limited excellence at twenty-one that everything afterward savors of anticlimax. . . . Now he was a sturdy straw-haired man of thirty with a rather hard mouth and a supercilious manner. Two shining arrogant eyes had established dominance over his face and gave him the appearance of always leaning aggressively forward. . . . [His] was a body capable of enormous leverage—a cruel body.

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6. Daisy Buchanan:

. . . her low, thrilling voice. It was the kind of voice that the ear follows up and down as if each speech is an arrangement of notes that will never be played again. Her face was sad and lovely with bright things in it, bright eyes and a bright passionate mouth—but there was an excitement in her voice that men who had cared for her found difficult to forget: a singing compulsion, a whispered, “Listen,” a promise that she had done gay, exciting things just a while since and that there were gay, exciting things hovering in the next hour.

7. Jordan Baker:

The younger of the two [Jordan] was a stranger to me. She was extended full length at her end of the divan, completely motionless and with her chin raised a little as if she were balancing something on it which was quite likely to fall. If she saw me out of the corner of her eyes she gave no hint of it—indeed, I was almost surprised into murmuring an apology for having disturbed her by coming in.

**Questions:**

1. In the opening lines of the novel, Nick, the narrator, recalls advice that his father gave him. What was this advice?

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2. Describe West Egg, where Nick lives. How does West Egg differ from East Egg? Which of the book's characters live in each?
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
3. How is Nick related to Tom and Daisy Buchanan?
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
4. What does Nick learn about Tom, Daisy, and Jordan during the dinner party?
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
5. When Nick first sees Gatsby, where is Gatsby, and what is he doing?

**Analysis:**

6. What does Nick mean when he says that tolerance has a limit?
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
7. What does Nick say "preyed" on Gatsby? What do you think Nick means by this?



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8. What words or phrases suggest that Nick is initially optimistic about going East?
9. *Personification* is a common technique Fitzgerald uses in *The Great Gatsby*. *Personification* is the giving of human attributes to nonhuman things. For example, the sentence “The sun smiled down on the children at play” paints an image of the sun smiling—a human characteristic.

Nick’s description of the Buchanan’s lawn when he first arrives at their home is a perfect example of personification. Reread this description in the novel. What words or phrases give the lawn a sense of life and motion?

10. Note the imagery Fitzgerald uses to describe Daisy and Jordan when Nick first sees them:

The only stationary object in the room was an enormous couch on which two young women were buoyed up as though upon an anchored balloon. They were both in white, and their dresses were rippling and fluttering as if they had just been blown back in after a short flight around the house. . . . Then there was a boom as Tom Buchanan shut the rear windows and the caught wind died out about the room, and the curtains and the rugs and the two young women ballooned slowly to the floor.

What do you think Fitzgerald is suggesting about these two women through this imagery? What other evidence is given in the chapter to support your idea?

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11. What ideas about race does Tom express? What does this reveal about Tom's character?
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
12. How well do you think Nick fits in with those around him? Explain your answer.
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
13. How does Jordan respond to the idea of Tom's affair? What does this say about her attitude toward marriage?
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
14. With what you have seen in the first chapter, how significant of a role do you think Tom and Daisy's daughter plays in their lives? Why do you think Fitzgerald chose to give this couple a child?

**Dig Deeper:**

15. When Daisy and Nick are alone in the porch, Daisy explains her view of life:

“You see I think everything's terrible anyhow. . . . Everybody thinks so—the most advanced people. And I *know*. I've been everywhere and seen everything and done everything.”

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Read Ecclesiastes 2:1–2, 10–11. How does Daisy’s statement compare with the statement in these verses? Why do you think the pursuit of pleasure might have this effect on people?

### **Optional Exercises:**

- An *allusion* is a reference to an historical or literary person, place, or event with which the reader is assumed to be familiar. In Nick’s discussion of his journey East, he makes an allusion to “the shining secrets that only Midas and Morgan and Maecenas knew.” Research who these characters were and what their “secrets” were. What do these characters have to do with Nick’s career possibilities?