GENERAL

great gatsby what is it about

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Introduction

The novel *Great Gatsby* by F. Scott Fitzgerald remains one of the most celebrated works of American literature. Whether you are a student tackling the text for a class, a book club member curious about its deeper meaning, or simply a reader looking for a compelling story, you may find yourself asking, **“Great Gatsby what is it about?”** This article offers a thorough exploration of the novel’s plot, themes, characters, historical context, and lasting impact. By the end, you’ll not only understand what the book is about but also why it continues to resonate with readers over a century after its publication.

What Is The Great Gatsby About?

At its core, *Great Gatsby*is a tragic love story set against the backdrop of the Roaring Twenties. The narrative follows Nick Carraway, a young man from the Midwest who moves to New York’s Long Island to pursue a career in finance. Through Nick’s eyes, we witness the extravagant parties of the wealthy elite, the moral decay hidden beneath glittering façades, and the relentless pursuit of the American Dream. The story is ultimately a critique of wealth, ambition, and the illusion of happiness.

Plot Overview

The novel is divided into three parts, each revealing a layer of the characters’ lives and the societal forces that shape them.

Nick learns that Gatsby’s wealth and parties are a façade to win back Daisy, whom he met five years earlier in Louisville. Gatsby’s obsession with Daisy drives him to create a persona of wealth and sophistication. Meanwhile, Daisy and Tom’s marriage is strained, and their affair with other men highlights the moral decay of the era. The tension escalates as Gatsby’s past begins to catch up with him.

The climax occurs when Daisy mistakenly kills Tom’s friend, George Wilson, with Gatsby’s car. Gatsby, determined to protect Daisy, takes the blame. The novel ends with Gatsby’s funeral, where few people attend, symbolizing the emptiness behind the glittering surface of wealth. Nick returns to the Midwest, disillusioned by the excesses of the Jazz Age.

Key Characters

- Jay Gatsby – A self-made millionaire who embodies the American Dream, yet remains haunted by his past.
- Daisy Buchanan – A beautiful, superficial woman who represents the allure and emptiness of wealth.
- Tom Buchanan – Daisy’s husband, a symbol of old money and arrogance.
- Nick Carraway – The narrator, a Midwesterner who observes the moral decline of the East Coast elite.
- Jordan Baker – Nick’s love interest and a symbol of the era’s shifting morals.
- George Wilson – A mechanic whose tragic fate underscores the novel’s themes of loss and disillusionment.

Historical Context: The Jazz Age and the American Dream

To fully appreciate *Great Gatsby*, it is essential to understand the era in which it was written and set. The 1920s, known as the Jazz Age, was a period of economic prosperity, cultural dynamism, and social change. Prohibition,

the rise of speakeasies, and the proliferation of jazz music created a vibrant yet morally ambiguous atmosphere.

Prohibition and the Rise of Organized Crime

With alcohol banned nationwide, illegal distilleries and speakeasies flourished. Characters like Gatsby, who amassed wealth through questionable means, reflect the era's blurred lines between legality and morality.

The American Dream Reimagined

Fitzgerald redefines the American Dream as a relentless pursuit of wealth and status, often at the cost of authenticity and moral integrity. Gatsby's relentless ambition, his lavish parties, and his obsessive love for Daisy exemplify this distorted dream.

Social Class and the Division of the Eggs

West Egg, where Gatsby lives, represents new money – wealth acquired quickly and often through illicit means. East Egg, home to the Buchanans, symbolizes old money – inherited wealth and traditional aristocracy. This division underscores the novel's exploration of class, privilege, and social mobility.

Major Themes Explored in Great Gatsby

Beyond its plot, *Great Gatsby* is a rich tapestry of themes that remain relevant today.

The Illusion of the American Dream

Gatsby's story illustrates how the American Dream can become a mirage. Despite his wealth, he remains unfulfilled and ultimately destroyed by his desire for Daisy.

Love, Obsession, and Loss

The novel examines the destructive nature of obsessive love. Gatsby's fixation on Daisy blinds him to reality, leading to tragedy.

Moral Decay and Hypocrisy

Fitzgerald portrays a society where appearances matter more than values. The Buchanans, for instance, appear morally upright but engage in infidelity and violence.

The Passage of Time and the Past

Gatsby's longing for a past that can never be recreated highlights the impossibility of living in the past. The novel's recurring motif of the green light at the end of Daisy's dock symbolizes this unattainable longing.

Symbolism in Great Gatsby

Fitzgerald uses vivid symbols to deepen the narrative's meaning. Understanding these symbols enhances readers' appreciation of the text.

The Green Light

Placed at the end of Daisy's dock, the green light symbolizes Gatsby's yearning for a future that remains forever out of reach. It also represents the broader American Dream – bright, alluring, yet ultimately unattainable.

Eyes of Dr. T. J. E. Fitzgerald

In the novel's final scene, Nick observes the eyes of a billboard advertising the novel's author. These eyes serve as a moral compass, reminding readers of the story's ethical implications.

The Valley of Ashes

Located between West Egg and New York City, the Valley of Ashes represents the moral and social decay hidden beneath the glittering world of wealth. It is the setting for the tragic death of Myrtle, Tom's mistress.

Cars and Fire

Cars, a symbol of modernity and freedom, become instruments of destruction. The novel's climax involves a car accident that leads to tragedy and the unraveling of Gatsby's dream.

Critical Reception and Legacy

Upon its publication in 1925, *Great Gatsby*received mixed reviews. Some critics praised its lyrical prose and social commentary, while others found the narrative overly sentimental. Over time, however, the novel gained recognition as a masterpiece of American literature.

Academic Analysis

Scholars have explored the novel's exploration of identity, the role of the narrator, and its critique of capitalism. The novel's narrative structure, with Nick as a semi-omniscient observer, allows readers to question the reliability of the narrator and the subjectivity of truth.

Popular Culture Influence

The novel's imagery and themes permeate popular culture: from the 1974 film adaptation starring Robert Redford and Mia Farrow to contemporary references in music, fashion, and social media. The novel's exploration of the Jazz Age continues to fascinate audiences worldwide.

Why Great Gatsby Is Still Relevant Today

Despite being set nearly a century ago, the novel's themes resonate with modern readers. The pursuit of wealth, the illusion of success, and the consequences of unchecked ambition are universal issues.

Financial Crises and Economic Inequality

In times of economic turbulence, the novel's critique of the "wealth gap" and the moral cost of rapid wealth accumulation is strikingly relevant. Gatsby's rise and fall mirror the boom-and-bust cycles seen in contemporary financial markets.

Social Media and the Cult of Image

Just as Gatsby's parties were meticulously curated to impress, social media today allows individuals to craft idealized personas. The novel's exploration of authenticity versus façade offers a cautionary tale for the digital age.

Identity and Self-Realization

Nick's journey from a naive outsider to an observer of moral decay reflects the modern quest for self-discovery in a world dominated by superficial values.

How to Read Great Gatsby for the First Time

If you're new to the novel, here are some practical tips to enhance your reading experience:

Fitzgerald uses period-specific slang (e.g., "flapper," "bootlegger") that might be unfamiliar. A glossary will help you stay immersed.

Pay attention to recurring motifs like the green light, the eyes of Dr. T. J. E. Fitzgerald, and the Valley of Ashes. They often foreshadow events or underline themes.

Nick's perspective is subjective and unreliable. Consider how his biases shape the story's presentation.

Book clubs or online forums can offer new insights and interpretations that you may have missed.

Conclusion

In answering the question, **"Great Gatsby what is it about?"** we discover a novel that is far more than a romantic tragedy. It is a penetrating social critique that examines the American Dream, the fragility of identity, and the moral consequences of relentless ambition. Through its richly drawn characters, vivid symbolism, and historical backdrop, *Great Gatsby*invites readers to reflect on the promises and pitfalls of wealth and status. Whether you read it for academic study or personal enrichment, this masterpiece remains a timeless exploration of human desire and the elusive nature of happiness.

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