

## Gatsby Character Analysis

**Character Analysis Jordan Baker** Jordan Baker is an attractive, impulsive, childhood friend of Daisy Buchanan. She is the first person to bring up the subject of Gatsby to Nick Carraway. She also relates the sad story of his relationship with Daisy and Daisy's doomed marriage to the philandering Tom Buchanan. While intrigued by her good looks, Nick recalls that he saw her picture in photos of the sporting life at Asheville, Hot Springs, and Palm Beach in connection with a "critical, unpleasant story." The reader later discovers this concerns a time she cheated in a major golf tournament. Her insincerity with Nick in their love affair is another example of her detached personality. When she first appears in the novel, she is lounging on a sofa with Daisy "as cool as their white dresses and their impersonal eyes in the absence of all desire," like two princesses in an unreal world. Both women use and dispose of people, as Gatsby and Nick experience firsthand. In Fitzgerald's long line of sensual, modern flapper characters, Jordan is one of the most well-known. There is an amoral aura about her, and her world revolves around herself and false material values. Jordan is distinguished from Daisy in her hard, unsentimental view of romance.

### Daisy Buchanan

Daisy Buchanan is one of the true "Golden Girls" of Fitzgerald's stories, the wealthy, hard-to-get debutante. In this book, she is the love interest of Jay Gatsby, who builds his mansion for her, and views her East Egg home from the point of its green light. She is the cousin of Nick Carraway, and was brought up in Louisville society. She was the young love of Gatsby when he was a soldier. He does not see her after he is called to battle overseas. During the interim, she meets Tom Buchanan and marries him. At first happy in this marriage, she later discovers that Tom is having affairs. She withdraws into a dream world, yet never loses interest in the illusion of her love with Gatsby. Daisy flirts with him and entertains his obsessive interest until she commits murder and he takes the rap. Then, she hides behind the protection of her husband, a cruel brute, who uses and abuses people. Moreover, Daisy's voice is the voice of money, as Nick discovers. Her whole careless world revolves around this illusion: that money makes everything beautiful, even if it is not. The danger is, like Gatsby, she carries the "well-forgotten dreams from age to age." Her spiritual lightness parallels her material wealth, and she hides behind Tom when Gatsby is in danger. From the film *The Great Gatsby*, starring Robert Redford and Mia Farrow, Paramount, 1974.

### Tom Buchanan

Tom Buchanan is the villain of this novel and has Nazi-like theories of race. Nick knew him from Yale and describes him as "one of the most powerful ends that ever played football" there. From an "enormously wealthy" family, he brings a string of polo ponies from Lake Forest, Illinois, to the East. He and Daisy spend Character Analysis 67 a year in France and "drifted here and there unrestfully wherever people played polo and were rich together," before ending up in East Egg. After college, Tom changes and becomes, the writer notes, a blond thirty-year-old with a "rather hard mouth and a supercilious manner." He tells Nick that, based on a book Tom has read and obviously reveres, "The Rise of the Colored Empires," civilization is "going to pieces" and that the white race will be "submerged." Nick observes that Tom and Daisy belonged to a "secret society" that ruined, through their insensitivity and carelessness, other peoples' lives. Tom is demeaning to George Wilson, his mistress's husband, who owns a garage in the wasteland between New York and East Egg. He also mistreats Myrtle herself, whom he violently hits in front of her sister and Nick when she mentions Daisy's name. The overall impression the reader has of this character

is his physical power and brute strength. He is a fairly one-dimensional figure in this sense. Tom is indirectly responsible for Gatsby's death because he uses Wilson's hatred and jealousy against Gatsby in making Wilson believe that Myrtle was Gatsby's mistress.

### **Nick Carraway**

The character of Nick Carraway functions prominently in this novel. He is a transplanted Midwesterner who buys a house in West Egg and sells bonds on Wall Street in New York City. Young and attractive, Nick becomes friends with Jordan Baker at a dinner party, where he is reunited with his cousin, Daisy. Nick, who claims to be the only honest person he knows, succumbs to the lavish recklessness of his neighbors and the knowledge of the secret moral entanglements that comprise their essentially hollow lives. While he is physically attracted to Jordan, he recognizes her basic dishonesty and inability to commit to a relationship. He muses on the loss of his innocence and youth when he is with her on his thirtieth birthday and sees himself driving on a road "toward death through the cooling twilight." Lacking the romantic vision of Gatsby, Nick sees life now as it is. Nick deduces that Gatsby is both a racketeer and an incurable romantic, whose ill-gotten wealth has been acquired solely to gain prominence in the sophisticated, moneyed world of Daisy's circle. Nick is the moral center of the book. From his perspective, we see the characters misbehave or behave admirably. In keeping with Nick's code of conduct, inherited from his father, we learn from the very beginning of the novel that he is "inclined to reserve all judgments" about people because whenever he feels compelled to criticize someone he remembers "that all the people in this world haven't had the advantages that you've had." His father also told him, prophetically, that "a sense of the fundamental decencies is parcelled out unequally at birth." At the novel's end, most readers find that Nick is more akin to Gatsby than to any other character in the book. Insofar as Gatsby represents the simplicity of heart Fitzgerald associated with the Midwest, he is really a great man. His ignorance of his real greatness and misunderstanding of his notoriety endear him to Nick, who tells him he is better than the "whole rotten bunch put together."

### **Ewing**

See Mr. Klipspringer

### **Jay Gatsby**

One of the most fascinating figures in American literary history, Jay Gatsby is a self-created personage, the embodiment of the American Dream. As Nick discovers, Gatsby's parents were poor farmers, whom he had never accepted as his parents. "The truth was that Gatsby of West Egg, Long Island, sprang from his Platonic conception of himself." He developed out of an idealization of the American Dream, and the Golden Girl who personified that. One day, while attending a small Lutheran college in southern Minnesota and feeling dismayed by having to work as a janitor to put himself through school, Gatsby spots the moored yacht of Dan Cody. In an action that changes the young boy's life, Cody welcomes him aboard his yacht and introduces him to fine living. Gatsby becomes the protege of the wealthy goldminer and lives with him until Cody dies. With some wealth of his own and dreams of more, he goes into the army. His fate is truly sealed when he meets the most popular girl in the Alabama town near his army post. She becomes the embodiment of the American Dream for him instantly, and from that moment they fall in love and he is determined to have the girl named Daisy. He becomes impressed with her beautiful home and many Character Analysis 68 boyfriends. Perhaps attracted to her material value, she becomes his sole reason for being. When he considers his penniless state, he vows never to lose her in that way again, for

while he is called to fight and is away at war, she marries a wealthy Midwesterner named Tom Buchanan. Gatsby commits himself to “the following of a grail” in his pursuit of her and what she represents. This obsession is characteristic of a dreamer like Gatsby, who loses a sense of reality but rather believes in “a promise that the rock of the world was founded securely on a fairy's wing.” Jay Gatsby successfully completes his military obligation and attends Oxford afterwards. He then returns to America and becomes involved in a drug ring. In his criminal affairs, he quickly gains wealth. The next time he sees Daisy, however, she is married to Tom Buchanan and lives on Long Island. To be close to her, Gatsby buys a mansion across the bay and gives extravagant parties in the hopes that Daisy will come to one. He discovers that Nick is a distant cousin of Daisy and gets Nick to take him to see her. Gatsby's parties are vulgar, in spite of his polite manners, and he lacks a sense of security despite the outward manifestation of his ego. Nevertheless, his loyalty to his dream and idealism mark him as one of the tragic heroes in American literature.

### **Mr. Klipspringer**

Mr. Klipspringer is a hanger-on, who lives off Gatsby by boarding at his mansion. He does liver exercises on the floor when Nick tours with Daisy and Gatsby. A “dishevelled man in pajamas,” he gives nothing back to Gatsby. Gatsby compliments Klipspringer, or Ewing, as he calls him, for his piano playing of popular songs. One of these features the lines: “One thing's sure and nothing's surer / The rich get richer and the poor get children / Ain't we got fun?” As most of the characters' names in Fitzgerald's stories, Klipspringer resonates as the name of someone who jumps around and “clips” or robs people of something.

### **Michaelis**

Michaelis is a coffee-store owner who lives next to the Wilsons. He is the chief witness at the inquest about Myrtle's death.

### **Owl Eyes**

This minor character illuminates the character of Jay Gatsby. He finds that the books in Gatsby's library are real, even though the pages are uncut. Like the books, Gatsby is the real thing, but unformed, unlettered, and for all his financial cunning, ignorant. Furthermore, the ocular imagery in the book is enhanced by this character's role since various acquaintances of the mysterious Gatsby lend their truth to his real story.

### **George Wilson**

George Wilson feels henpecked by his wife Myrtle. A victim of circumstance, he has a poor life and can only work to make a living and must ask the man who is having an affair with his wife, Tom Buchanan, for a car with which to move away. Full of anger and frustration about his wife's disloyalty, Wilson acts on his impulses and kills someone who is just as much a victim of the Buchanans as he. According to Nick, “he was a blonde, spiritless man, anemic, and faintly handsome. When he saw us ... hope sprang into his light blue eyes.” He is a true product of the wasteland between the suburban world of wealth and New York City.

### **Myrtle Wilson**

Myrtle Wilson is the mistress of Tom Buchanan and wife of George Wilson, men representing distinctly separate classes on the social spectrum. Myrtle clearly aspires to a life of wealth with Tom, who humors

her with gifts: a puppy, clothes, and various personal items. Nick describes her as a stout woman in her mid-30s, who carries “her surplus flesh sensuously as some women can.” She has a vitality and ignores her husband “as if he were a ghost” when Tom appears. She is another one of Tom's victims, since he physically hits her Character Analysis 69 in the face at her mention of Daisy's name, and is murdered by a speeding car she thinks belongs to Tom, as she rushes out to greet it.

### **Meyer Wolfsheim**

Meyer Wolfsheim is one of Jay Gatsby's underworld contacts in bootlegging and racketeering. Fitzgerald based this character on a real gangster who fixed the 1919 World Series, Arnold Rothstein. We see Wolfsheim at the Metropole and in dark settings. One of Wolfsheim's notable characteristics is his wearing of cufflinks made of human molars. He is so selfish and insecure that he refuses to attend Gatsby's funeral. Nick sees the gangster part of Gatsby's life as one of the ways he made his money, but he separates Gatsby's character from true insensitive, subhuman criminals like Wolfsheim. Gatsby stands by Daisy when she commits a crime, but Wolfsheim will not honor his relationships.