

MFAH Book Club

The Great Gatsby
By F. Scott Fitzgerald
Spring 2011 MFAH Book Club Selection
Discussion Questions
(adapted from various sources)

Use the discussion questions on the following pages to facilitate your book club's conversation!

Then visit www.mfah.org/bookclub to request a tour for your group.

Tours feature works of art on view at the MFAH that explore subjects, themes, and ideas similar to those outlined in the questions below.

To get warmed up, how do you think these two paintings relate to *The Great Gatsby*?



1. How does *Gatsby* represent the American dream? What does the novel have to say about the condition of the American dream in the 1920s?
2. Describe Nick as a narrator. In what ways does he sound reliable or unreliable? How do his qualities as a character affect his narration?
3. Discuss *Gatsby*'s character as Nick perceives him throughout the novel. In what ways is he 'great'? In what ways is he not?
4. Throughout the novel, characters reference past events. How is nostalgia important to the novel? How is *Gatsby* tethered to the past?

5. How does F. Scott Fitzgerald reveal character in *The Great Gatsby*? Who is the most complex or full-developed character in the novel? Does any character grow or change?
6. How does geography feature in the story? How do key locations (West Egg, East Egg, New York City, The Valley of Ashes) relate to the action that takes place there? How does the Midwest compare to the East coast in Nick's mind?
7. How does Gatsby fit the definition of a "self-made man"? In what ways does he take it too literally?
8. How are Gatsby and Tom alike and different? Even though Tom is portrayed in a negative light throughout the novel, why does Daisy choose to stay with him rather than leaving him for Gatsby?
9. Daisy said of her newborn daughter, "And I hope she'll be a fool – that's the best thing a girl can be in this world, a beautiful little fool." What is the role of women in the text? Does Daisy herself fulfill her hopes for her daughter?
10. Fitzgerald's story shows the clear delineations between different strata of society: new money, old money, some money, and no money. How are readers to interpret his comments on each of these groups? Does he hold any one group above the other?
11. Part of Fitzgerald's strength as a writer comes from his imagistic, sensory-oriented style of writing. What kind of atmosphere do these details help create? How do they affect you as a reader?
12. How is *The Great Gatsby* relevant today?

F. Scott Fitzgerald

Born in 1896 in St. Paul, Minnesota, F. Scott Fitzgerald was educated at Princeton, which he left in his senior year to join the army. At one of his army posts, near Montgomery, Alabama, he met Zelda Sayre, who he subsequently married. His first novel, *This Side of Paradise*, was a great critical and financial success. The Fitzgeralds lived in Paris for several years among the expatriates of the twenties. Upon their return to the United States, Fitzgerald completed *Tender Is the Night* and was at work on *The Last Tycoon* when he died in Hollywood in 1940.

Images (left to right):

Peter Blume, American, born in Russia, 1906 – 1992, *Study for Parade*, 1930, Mixed media on illustration board, the MFAH, Gift of Miss Ima Hogg, 65.30 © Peter Blume/Licensed by VAGA, New York

Elsie Driggs, American, 1898 – 1992, *Aeroplane*, 1928, the MFAH, Museum purchase with funds provided by the Brown Foundation Accessions Endowment Fund, 2006.297