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Lesson Three

FOCUS: Narrative and Point of View

First-person narration wraps the reader into the perspective of the main character, as this person tells us, first-hand, about his or her experiences. This person uses the first-person “I” to draw us through her or his adventures. A first-person narrator is almost always personally invested in how the drama unfolds.

Third-person narration uses “he” or “she” to tell the story, while removed from the drama. Third-person narration establishes a greater distance between narrator and audience and relates events as an outside observer. Since this outside observer does not appear to participate in or affect the events of the story, the narrator objectively relays dramatic events. An omniscient third-person narrator knows the thoughts and movements of every character.

The Great Gatsby is told in the first person by Nick Carraway. The novel begins from the point of view of an older Nick, reminiscing on the events of one summer. Nick’s perspective, entangled in the dramatic action, subjectively depicts a series of events.



Discussion Activities

What do you know about Nick in the first two pages of the novel? How do his attitudes color the story he is about to tell?

How might Chapter 1 be narrated, in the third person, from Daisy’s “sophisticated” point of view? Have the class brainstorm the outline of this new chapter.



Writing Exercise

Based on the previous activity, write a few pages of Daisy’s version of the story.

Chapter 2 begins with the “valley of ashes” and the “eyes of Doctor T. J. Eckleburg.” What do they reveal about Nick’s character and point of view? What do they reveal about the landscape?



Homework

Read Chapter 3 (pp. 39-59). What do we learn about Gatsby from Nick’s observations before we meet him?