

# 4

## Lesson Four

### FOCUS: Characters

The central character in a work of literature is called the protagonist. The protagonist usually initiates the main action of the story and often overcomes a flaw, such as weakness or ignorance, to achieve a new understanding by the work's end. A protagonist who acts with great honor or courage may be called a hero. An antihero is a protagonist lacking these qualities. Instead of being dignified, brave, idealistic, or purposeful, the antihero may be cowardly, self-interested, or weak. The protagonist's journey is enriched by encounters with characters who hold differing beliefs. One such character type, a foil, has traits that contrast with the protagonist's and highlight important features of the main character's personality. The most important foil, the antagonist, opposes the protagonist, barring or complicating his or her success.

Nick Carraway narrates the story, but it is Jay Gatsby who is the novel's protagonist. Gatsby's love affair with Daisy, her marriage to Tom, and Gatsby's quest to regain Daisy's affection provide the story's narrative arc.

### Discussion Activities

Ask your students the following questions: What kind of person is Nick Carraway? How does he compare to narrators in other novels your students have studied? How might Nick's narration color the way readers view the other characters? Is he a reliable narrator?

Divide the class into groups. Assign each group two secondary characters: Daisy, Jordan, Tom, Myrtle, Wilson, Mrs. McKee, Catherine, Mr. McKee, or Gatsby's party-goers. Ask students to review the first three chapters of the novel. Have each group list key attributes of its characters. Prepare a presentation that documents moments when these characters bring out reactions from Nick. What do these characters teach Nick about himself? What do we learn about Gatsby?

### Writing Exercise

Have students write two pages on the character they believe to be an antagonist to Nick, to Gatsby, or to both men. What qualities does this character have that make him or her an opposing force? How might encounters with the antagonist change Nick or Gatsby?

### Homework

Homework: Chapter 4 (pp. 61–80). Ask students to consider Fitzgerald's descriptions as they read. Find the three most vivid descriptions in Chapter 4. Are they effective? Why or why not? Why does Nick say, "There are only the pursued, the pursuing, the busy, and the tired" (p. 79)?