

# 4

## Lesson Four

### FOCUS: Characters

The main character in a work of literature is called the “protagonist.” The protagonist often overcomes a weakness or difficulties to achieve a new understanding by the work’s end. A protagonist who acts with great courage and strength may be called a “hero.” Alternatively, a protagonist of dubious tenacity and questionable virtue is an “antihero.” The protagonist’s journey is made more dramatic by challenges presented by characters with different beliefs or perspectives. A “foil” provokes or challenges the protagonist so as to more clearly highlight certain features of the main character. The most important foil, the “antagonist,” opposes the protagonist barring or complicating his or her success.

#### Discussion Activities

What kind of narrator is Nick Carraway? How does he compare to narrators in other novels you have studied? Does Nick’s narration color our view of all the other characters?

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

Write two pages on the character that you believe to be the antagonist. Is it Tom? Daisy? Gatsby? If Nick is our protagonist, why is this character opposed to him? How is this character forcing him to look at himself in profound ways? Cite passages from the text to support your conclusions.

#### Homework

Homework: Chapter 4 (pp. 61-80). Consider Fitzgerald’s descriptions as you 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)?