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Lesson Seven

FOCUS: Character Development

Novels often trace the development of characters as they encounter a series of challenges and conflicts throughout the story. While the story follows the protagonist, we also follow the development of other supporting characters. While character development can be provoked by outside forces, changes can also be brought about internally with thoughts and emotions as the main figures search to overcome fears, realize dreams, or discover their identity. The protagonist often undergoes a profound change of heart, and his or her shortcomings may affect the manner in which he or she is able to respond to certain tests. Most characters contain a complex balance of strengths and weaknesses. The tension between a character's strengths and weaknesses keeps the reader guessing about what might happen next, affecting the drama of the plot.

In *The Great Gatsby*, Fitzgerald explores characters in relation to their landscape, their wealth, and their prior relationships. The more we know about these characters, the more their lives shift from idyllic islands of wealth to colorless portraits floating through a “valley of ashes” with “grotesque gardens.” In this lesson, examine Fitzgerald's ability to present characters in both their ideal and real countenances.



Discussion Activities

Now that you have read up to Chapter 6, have any of the main characters changed? Look at Tom, Daisy, Nick, Jordan, and Gatsby. Are there any moments when these characters have a realization or change of heart?

In the beginning of the novel, Daisy says contemptuously “Sophisticated—God, I'm sophisticated!” (p. 17). Now that we know more about Daisy, what did she mean? Does her life represent the free spirit of the Roaring Twenties? If not, why not?

How does the Long Island landscape parallel the internal struggles of the main characters?



Writing Exercise

Read Handout Two. This novel does not appear to present a “coming-of-age” story—a classical literary model. Or does it? Write a brief essay on whether or not this is a coming-of-age story. Who is coming-of-age? Nick? Gatsby? Daisy? Support your conclusions by referring to quotes from the novel.



Homework

Read Chapter 7 (pp. 113-145). Come to class with the two most important turning points in the plot of the novel.