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## Lesson Eight

### FOCUS: The Plot Unfolds

The plot is usually propelled by some conflict, either among characters, within a character, or between a character and a larger force, such as history, nature, or truth. The timing of events can make a novel either predictable or riveting. Great novelists often work to situate their novels in a particular genre (detective story, adventure story, coming-of-age story) while transcending the limitations of that genre at the same time.

*The Great Gatsby* has a remarkable structure. Chapter 5 provides the emotional center of the drama: when Gatsby reunites with Daisy, when Nick experiences a grand foreboding, and when Daisy's voice becomes a "deathless song." Some chapters exhibit parallels. Chapters 2 and 8 are physically violent turning points, with grotesque landscapes, dust, and ashes. The novel begins with Nick's arrival to Long Island and his memories of his father's words. Nick wants "the world to be...at a sort of moral attention forever" (p.2). The novel ends with an encounter with Gatsby's father and Nick's realization: "I see now that this has been a story of the West after all...perhaps we possessed some deficiency in common which made us subtly unadaptable to Eastern life" (p.176).

### Discussion Activities

Have students identify the most important turning points in the novel. Ask students to reference the passages from the novel, explaining why these events are the most significant. Use this information for the next activity.

Map a time line that depicts the dramatic build-up in the novel. This map should include the most significant turning points, but also examine the lesser events that build tension. As students develop their maps, they should define the beginning, middle, and end of the plot.

### Writing Exercise

Outline a sequel to Fitzgerald's novel. How would this plot unfold? How might students map the beginning, middle, and end? Have them write the opening paragraphs to the sequel.

Rewrite the novel's ending as if Gatsby and Daisy reunited. Would the novel be as powerful? Why or why not? What might make this new plot successful?

### Homework

Read Chapters 8 and 9 (pp.147-180). Why does Nick think that Gatsby paid a "high price for living too long with a single dream?"