

# 9

## Lesson Nine

### FOCUS: Themes of the Novel

The themes of a novel are the ideas and questions raised by the story that help the reader and the characters explore the meaning of human life. Themes are usually big topics such as love, war, freedom, responsibility, justice, and truth. The novel raises important questions about these issues, such as "do we have a responsibility to help other human beings?" or "how do we know what the truth of another person's experience really is?" The difficulty of answering these questions holds the reader's attention throughout the novel. Characters often undergo some kind of change or development in response to these thematic dilemmas, and the resolution of the plot often hinges on the outcome of thematic questions.



### Discussion Activities and Writing Exercise



Have students develop their own five themes in the novel. For further discussion, here are four samples:

#### Alienation

At one party, Nick observes, "People disappeared, reappeared, made plans to go somewhere, and then lost each other, searched for each other, found each other a few feet away" (p.37). Soon afterward, Tom breaks his lover's nose. Does Fitzgerald use parties to highlight his characters' failures to relate to one another? Do Gatsby's parties reflect genuine celebration or a kind of mourning?

#### Friendship

Nick is the only person, aside from Gatsby's father, who attends the funeral. What kind of friendship do Nick and Gatsby have? What does Nick derive from this friendship? Is it true friendship, or does Nick simply pity Gatsby his "romantic readiness?"

#### Identity

In Chapter 7, we learn of Gatsby's origins as James Gatz of North Dakota. In the novel, Gatsby has become his alter ego, leaving James Gatz behind as he travels the world as Dan Cody's steward. Was Gatsby doomed to tragedy as long as he disguised his Western origins in favor of a more extravagant, fictional biography? Is Nick judging Gatsby for these imaginative exploits or admiring this skill?

#### The American Dream

In an era of new technology, new opportunity, and artistic expansion, does Fitzgerald's novel comment on American morality and idealism? Is *The Great Gatsby* a satire or critique of American life? If not, why not?



### Homework

Begin essays, using "Essay Topics" at the end of this guide. Outlines due next class.