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Lesson Ten

FOCUS: A Great Novel

The topics in this guide reflect the fundamental elements of the novel. Novels illustrate the connections between individuals and the general conflicts and questions of humanity at large. Great novels often seduce the reader to forge a bond with the story as the writer's voice, style, and sense of poetry enchant us. We find ourselves carried along on the tide of the story's plot, and we are guided through our own adventures by the successes and failures of the central character as he or she navigates conflicts and challenges. Great stories articulate and explore the tensions and mysteries of our daily lives, while painting those struggles as a larger picture of human struggle everywhere.

Discussion Activities

Ask students to make a list of the characteristics of a great book. Put these on the board. What elevates a novel to greatness? Then ask them to discuss, within groups, other books they know that include some of the same characteristics. Do any of these books remind them of *The Great Gatsby*? Is this a great novel?

A great writer can be the voice of a generation. What kind of voice does Fitzgerald provide through Nick and Gatsby? What does this voice tell us about the concerns and dreams of their generation?

According to avant-garde writer Gertrude Stein, this was the novel of the “new generation.” How might it come to capture the “new generation”?

Writing Exercise

If you were the voice of your generation, what would be your most important message? Why might you choose to convey this in a novel rather than a speech or an essay? What story would you tell to get your point across?

Have students work on their essays in class. Be available to assist with outlines, drafts, and arguments. Have them partner with another student to edit outlines and/or rough drafts. For this editing, provide students with a list of things they should look for in a well-written essay.

Homework

Finish essay. Students will present their paper topics and interpretations to the class. Celebrate by participating in a Big Read community event or show a film version of *The Great Gatsby*.