

## THE GREAT GATSBY STUDY GUIDE

For more information go to <http://mreldridge.net/> or check out the AP English blog at <http://brenteldridge.edublogs.org/>.

### Context

F. Scott Fitzgerald wrote *The Great Gatsby* to not only be book that would be well respected, but also as a commentary on his times, and, most importantly, to make money; lots of money. He never made as much as he wanted, but his books did sell well. Take some time to discover the world that Fitzgerald was a part of—in fact, he was the man who gave the Jazz Age its name. The 1920s would not have roared without him.

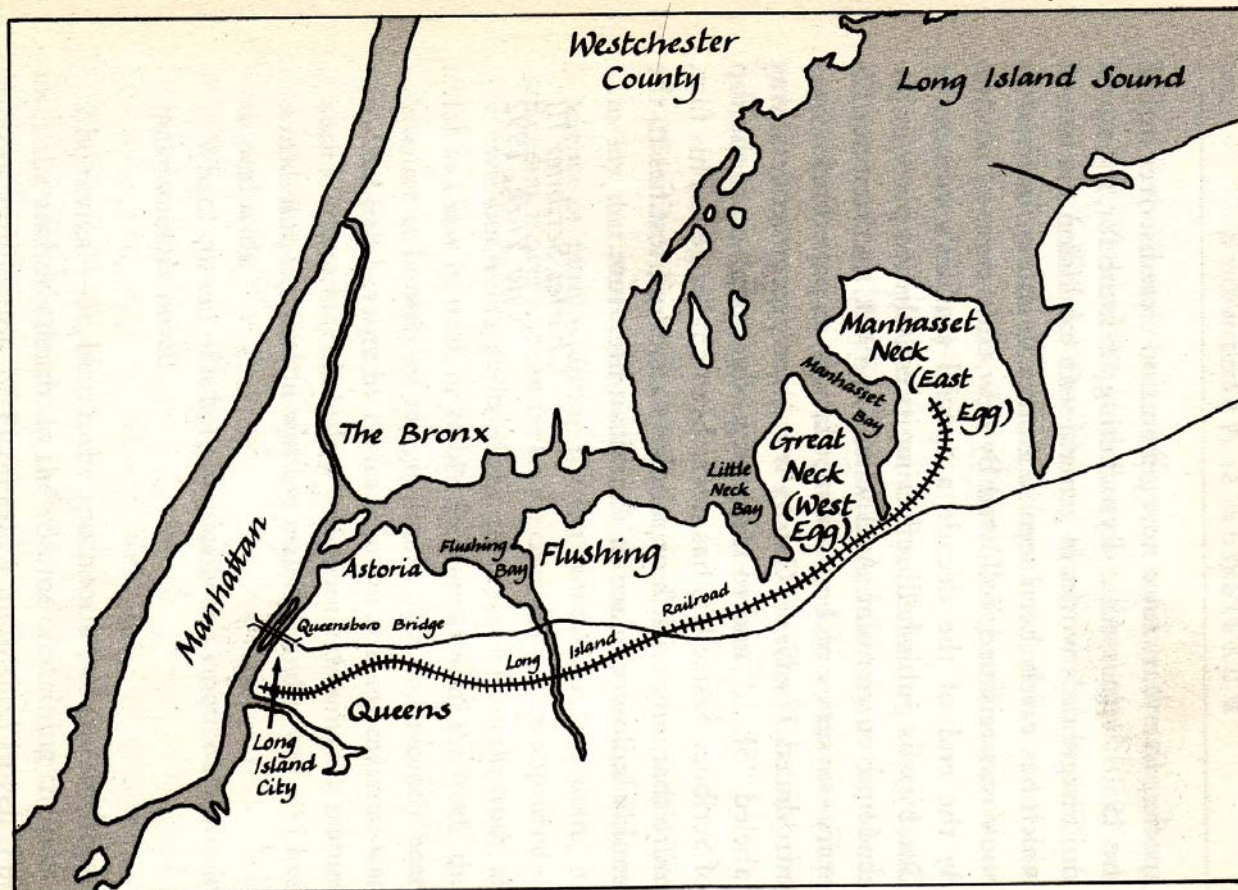
For information that will help put the novel into historical context visit Flapper Station 2001 at <http://home.earthlink.net/~rbotti/>

For information on F. Scott Fitzgerald visit the University of South Carolina's (the only USC that I can stand) website on him at <http://www.sc.edu/fitzgerald/index.html>.

Read up on Prohibition and the 18<sup>th</sup> amendment to the Constitution. Wikipedia is a decent source for getting started. You can also read up in your US history text. The story of *The Great Gatsby* occurs during the summer of 1922, right in the heart of the Prohibition years.

One more note about wealth. We are, right at this moment (2007), at the pinnacle of our wealth in historical terms. Nowhere in history has so much wealth been spread amongst so many people. In America during the 1920s this kind of wealth distribution was not even a mere dream. If you have any doubts watch James Cameron's *Titanic* and pay special attention to the intensity of the class distinctions. I think that movie captures the spirit of the class divide quite well. So, when people say they have boats or cars or investments, these happen to be the richest of the richest. Honestly, if people just have multiple shirts, they have at least a decent amount of money. [As a side note: neckties for men were developed in order to keep the collar neatly attached to the man; collars would fall out because they were separate from shirts (hence the need for ties). This way a man could own one shirt but 5 collars and he would look like he had a clean shirt on every time. But I don't imagine that he smelled very nice—at least by our standards.]

Here is a map of the New York City area with pertinent details for *Gatsby*. Remember that a "sound" can be a body of water.



Long Island: East Egg to Manhattan.

## Before Beginning

Some very important things for you to consider before and while you read. Please refer back to this list often.

### COVER

Take a look at the cover. The art was painted previous to the book being published, so Fitzgerald took it into account before and as he was writing. It may be the most famous of all covers/dustjackets of any volume ever published. What is happening in the painting? There is a combination of many images into one, why? How many different ways can we “read” it?

### SYMBOLS

Examine the following symbols in *The Great Gatsby*. Describe the meaning/function of each symbol. Some of the symbols are characters and some of them are actions. Think about all of them in the following way: what is the function/meaning of this symbol?

- |   |                                  |
|---|----------------------------------|
| A. Gatsby's uncut books/Nick's unread books                                       | G. Time, seasons                 |
| B. Wolfsheim's cufflinks  | H. The ash heap                  |
| C. Gatsby's car/Gatsby's clothes  | I. East versus West Egg          |
| D. Tom Buchanan pushing people around/<br>Tom Buchanan quoting things "he's read" | J. Gatsby's career/Nick's career |
| E. The faded timetable (showing the names of<br>Gatsby's guests)                  | K. Dan Cody                      |
| F. Weather  | L. T.J. Eckleberg                |
|   | M. Silver and gold (color)       |
|   | N. White (color)                 |
|   | O. Green (color)                 |

### THEMES

- The American dream
- The hollowness of the upper class
- Carelessness
- The persistence of the past
- Romanticism (more than just romance)
- The uses of lies