

The Great Gatsby Essay

3 grades

4-5 pages (1200-1500 words)

Choose one. Your essay should be carefully (and beautifully) written—the more eloquent the better—and supported with a plethora of textual citations to support your points. Use MLA format (consult your *BBR*, if you have questions). These questions require knowledge of the text *and* developed thinking, be sure to show evidence of both.

1. “It was all very careless and confused. They were careless people... they smashed up things and creatures and then retreated back into their money or their vast carelessness or whatever it was that kept them together, and let other people clean up the mess...” Analyze the theme of carelessness. How is carelessness pivotal in the character’s lives? How is carelessness related to childishness? Is Nick simply frustrated and angry—and basically guilty of the same general fault? Or is he right? Consider Tom, Daisy, Jordan, and Myrtle.
2. “So we beat on, boats against the current, borne back ceaselessly into the past.” The American Myth (grandma and apple pie; truth, justice, & the America way; “the pursuit of happiness”) is partially founded on the denial of the past. Generations of immigrants and upstarts have come to the great expanses or metropolises of the “New World” to seek their destiny without the encumbrances of the “Old World” and its old ways. Can we ever successfully deny our past, past selves, experiences? How does Nick emerge from the labyrinth of the Eggs to discover, a bitter understanding of reality?
3. “Greed is Good” – Gordon Gecko from *Wall Street* (1987 film)
Cupiditas radix malorum est (The love of money is the root of all evil)— *St. Timothy*

Often, as good Americans, we find ourselves pit between two opposing value systems: compassion or profit. Can these two moral systems coexist? Or are we doomed, as at times it seems Jay Gatz was, to vacillate endlessly between incompatible poles—behaving much like we belong in a mental ward? Can these competing value systems work in harmony? Support your thesis with examples from two characters from the *Great Gatsby*.
4. Water appears in both actuality and in symbolic language quite often. We first meet Gatsby at the water’s edge and we bid him farewell in his little used pool, for example. To emphasize the fact, Nick compares us to little boats trying to sail against the current at the close of his short history of joy and sorrow. What does water represent for Fitzgerald and Nick? How may it be related to Manhattan and Long Island being islands themselves—there at the great estuary of the Hudson and the Atlantic? Is this a contrast with the landlocked Middle West? Is this a feature of the moral qualities of each place, too?