American Studies

*The Great Gatsby*

**In-Class Response Preparation**

Choose one of the prompts below and prepare a response to the specific instructions in the prompt. As you prepare for your in-class response, you may put your information on a single note card, no larger than 4 x 6. Plan to have a solid thesis, topic sentences for the start of each body paragraph, and at least two quotations for each of your body paragraphs. Do not “write the response” onto the note card, but rather include notes, your thesis, page numbers referencing the quotes you will use, etc. The response you will write in class, and should draw heavily on examples from the novel. **DO NOT lapse into story summary**, but rather use examples from the text to support your thesis and other assertions. **BRING YOUR COMPLETED NOTE CARD TO CLASS ON TUESDAY OCTOBER 28.**

1) A symbol is an object, action, or event that represents something or that creates a range of associations beyond itself. In literary works a symbol can express an idea, clarify meaning, or enlarge literal meaning. Symbols are typically identified first as motifs, something that recurs and begins to convey theme as a story progresses. Focusing on one symbol/motif, write an essay **analyzing how that symbol functions in The Great Gatsby and what it reveals about characters or themes of the novel as a whole. Do NOT merely summarize the plot.**

Some motifs to consider: eyes, money, carelessness, wealth/material goods, cars/driving, time/clocks, ashes/dust, colors (green, white, yellow, silver, gold).

2) Literary critic Roland Barthes has said, “Literature is the question minus the answer.” Considering Barthes’ observation, write an essay in which you analyze a central question *The Great Gatsby* raises, and the extent to which the novel offers any answers. Explain how Fitzgerald’s treatment of the question affects your understanding of the work as a whole. **AVOID mere plot summary.**

3) In the first chapter, the narrator Nick says:

“Only Gatsby, the man who gives his name to this book, was exempt from my reaction — Gatsby who represented everything for which I have an unaffected scorn. If personality is a series of successful gestures, then there was something gorgeous about him, some heightened sensitivity to the promises of life, as if he were related to one of those intricate machines that register earthquakes ten thousand miles away. This responsiveness had nothing to do with that flabby impressionability which is dignified under the name of the “creative temperament” — it was an extraordinary gift for hope, a romantic readiness such as I have never found in any other person and which it is not likely I shall ever find again. No — Gatsby turned out all right at the end. It is what preyed on Gatsby, what foul dust floated in the wake of his dreams that temporarily closed out my interest in the abortive sorrows and the short-winded elations of men.”

Consider this passage and write an essay **analyzing the title of The Great Gatsby.** Why is Jay Gatsby “great”? Is Fitzgerald being literal or ironic? Use many examples from the novel to support your assertions, but **AVOID excessive plot summary.**

4) James Truslow Adams, writing in *The Epic of America* (1931), coined the term “The American Dream,” and said this:

“The American Dream is that dream of a land in which life should be better and richer and fuller for everyone, with opportunity for each according to ability or achievement. It is a difficult dream for the European upper classes to interpret adequately, and too many of us ourselves have grown weary and mistrustful of it. It is not a dream of motor cars and high wages merely, but a dream of social order in which each man and each woman shall be able to attain to the fullest stature of which they are innately capable, and be recognized by others for what they are, regardless of the fortuitous circumstances of birth or position.”

*The Great Gatsby* has long been considered “a novel about the American Dream.” Considering and drawing from the definition above, write an essay **arguing why or why not Jay Gatsby’s story is, in fact, about the American Dream.** Ultimately, what does Fitzgerald say about The American Dream? Use many examples from the novel to support your assertions, but **AVOID excessive plot summary.**

As you consider your response to ONE of the prompts above the following list of thematic topics all can combine in unique ways to formulate your individual analyses of *The Great Gatsby.* Your goal is to choose an angle for a thesis statement that will address a narrow aspect of the novel.

Possible Thematic Topics are on the **back of this sheet!**
**Absence** | Dr. T.J. –Eckleburg | **Innocence** | Present
---|---|---|---
**Abuse** | Driving | **Insensitivity** | Pride
**Alcohol** | Emptiness | **Irony** | Rebirth
**American -Dream** | End of innocence | **Irresponsibility** | Redemption
**Appearance Vs.-** | Escape | **Jealousy** | Regret
**Reality** | Evil | **Jesus** | Relationships
**Arrogance** | Eyes | **Lies** | Responsibility
**Ashes/Dust** | Failure | **Loneliness** | Sacrifice
**Betrayal** | Family | **Love** | Shame
**Colors** | Fear | **Loyalty** | Sin
**Confusion** | Future | **Manipulation** | Social mobility (or lack)
**Corruption** | Good | **Maturity** | of
**Cowardice** | Greed | **Money** | Social status/class
**Cruelty** | Green light | **Morality (or immoral)ty** | Strength
**Crime** | Grief | **Murder** | Suffering
**Cruelty** | Growth | **Observations/ watching/spying** | Survival
**Death** | Guilt | **Obession** | Time
**Decay** | Hate | Valley/Ashes | **Vengeance**
**Deception** | Honor | **Past** | Wealth
**Depression** | Hope | **Power** | Weather
**Devil** | Hypocrisy | **Present** | **Pride**

**Thesis Statement:**
In one sentence, state your opinionated claim about a theme in the text. Clearly state the message the author conveys in regards to that themes. Be sure to include at least 3 key words from your topic list, but make sure they are connected in a unique way. Use strong verbs to powerfully state your claim.

**The Thesis Statement:**
Try to write a thesis statement incorporating topics that work together and play off each other. Avoid just listing three themes that don’t relate. Focus on showing the connections to formulate your unique claim and make sure the themes are related to the prompt you are addressing.

Basic thesis: *Fitzgerald illustrates the themes of love, corruption, and wealth throughout his novel.*

Better thesis: *Fitzgerald illustrates how money corrupts people and how they are miserable without true love.*

Best thesis: *Fitzgerald illustrates the absence of true love in society due to the corruption of wealth.*

There are an endless number of possibilities and combinations from the themes above that you can use to form your own original thesis statement. Be creative! Think outside the box! Challenge yourself to explore a topic that you haven’t yet considered in great detail.

However, keep in mind that each of the thematic topics in your thesis should work together to create one claim, not three separate ones.

Use the form on the next page to help you organize your response to the prompt.

- Start with identifying the possible themes
- Organize the possible themes into possible thesis statements
- Consider Topic Sentences for each of the body paragraphs of your response
- Start to identify possible evidence/quotations to be used in your response
- Consider how you will elaborate on evidence

Think about it like this:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Thesis Statement</th>
<th>Major point 1</th>
<th>Evidence</th>
<th>Elaboration</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Major point 2</td>
<td>Evidence</td>
<td>Elaboration</td>
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<td>Major point 3</td>
<td>Evidence Elaboration</td>
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