



The Great Gatsby

by F. Scott Fitzgerald

In a Nutshell

The Great Gatsby, published in 1925, is set in New York City and Long Island during the Prohibition era. Author [F. Scott Fitzgerald](#) associated this moment in American history - "[The Jazz Age](#)" - with the materialism and immorality that accompanied newfound wealth in the post-[World War I](#) era. The novel's protagonist is Jay Gatsby, a young, wealthy man in love with a society girl from his past.

Gatsby tackles issues such as the American Dream, wealth and class, materialism, and marital infidelity. Although now widely regarded as one of the Great American Novels, *The Great Gatsby* did not sell very many copies when it was initially published. In fact, it wasn't until the novel was re-published after [World War II](#) that it gained its immense popularity - after Fitzgerald passed away from a heart attack at the age of forty-four.

While *Gatsby* is a work of fiction, the story has many similarities to Fitzgerald's real life experiences. Fitzgerald's own personal history is interwoven between the fictitious backgrounds of both Jay Gatsby and Nick Carraway. Nick is simultaneously mesmerized and disgusted by Gatsby's extravagant lifestyle, which is similar to how Fitzgerald professed to feel about the "Jazz Age" excesses that he himself adopted. As an Ivy League educated, middle-class Midwesterner, Fitzgerald (like Nick) saw through the shallow materialism of the era. But (like Gatsby) Fitzgerald came back from [World War I](#) and fell in love with a wealthy southern socialite - Zelda Sayre. *The Great Gatsby* is swaddled in Fitzgerald's simultaneous embrace of and disdain for 1920s luxury.

Since Fitzgerald did indeed partake in the [Jazz Age](#)'s high life of decadence, it's not surprising that the details of the setting and characters make *The Great Gatsby* a sort of time capsule preserving this particular time in American history. *Gatsby* is taught in many high schools and colleges in part because it's both a history lesson and a novel. You may find that when many people refer to the "[Jazz Age](#)," they automatically associate it with *Gatsby*, and vice versa.

Why Should I Care?

The Great Gatsby is a delightful concoction of [MTV Cribs](#), VH1's [The Fabulous Life Of...](#), and HBO's [Sopranos](#). Shake over ice, add a twist of jazz, a spritz of adultery, and the little pink umbrella that completes this long island iced tea and you've got yourself a 5 o'clock beverage that, given the 1920's setting, you wouldn't be allowed to drink.

The one thing all these shows and *Gatsby* have in common is the notion of the American Dream.

The Dream has seen its ups and downs.

But from [immigration](#) (certainly not a modern concern, right?) to the [Depression](#) (stock market crashing? We wouldn't know anything about that), the American Dream has always meant the same thing: it's all about the Benjamins, baby.

Yet *Gatsby* reminds us that the dollars aren't always enough.

As we learned from DiCaprio in *Titanic*, you can put on the tuxedo, but you still aren't going to know which fork to use. At least back in the 1920's - especially if you're bootlegging to make the money for the tuxedo.

Even when they have the cash, newly-made millionaires are still knocking at the door for the accepted elite to let them in.

If the concept of the *nouveau riche* (the newly rich) has gone by the wayside, the barriers to the upper echelon (education, background) certainly haven't.

So there you have it.

There's more to the *Gatsby* cocktail than sex, lies, and organized crime.

Although those are there, too, which, as far as reading the book goes, is kind of a motivation in itself.