

The Great Gatsby – The American Dream revisited in novel and film

by Dr. Bernd Klewitz



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Bald hundert Jahre nach seinem Erscheinen gilt der Roman *The Great Gatsby* (1925) nach wie vor als Klassiker. Mehrfache Verfilmungen, zuletzt 2013 mit Leonardo DiCaprio in der Hauptrolle, zeigen, dass der Stoff noch immer fasziniert. Anhand der vorliegenden Materialien erarbeiten die Schülerinnen und Schüler F. Scott Fitzgeralds Roman umfassend. Sie erschließen die Handlung und Erzählperspektive, analysieren Charaktere und Motive und setzen sich mit dem historischen Kontext sowie dem Konzept des American Dream auseinander. Abschließend beschäftigen sich die Lernenden mit den beiden bekanntesten Verfilmungen des Romans (1974 und 2013).

Edition of the novel used for this unit:

F. Scott Fitzgerald: *The Great Gatsby*. Penguin English Library 2018.

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Competences and skills:

Working with literary sources, historic documents, video clips and other material, students particularly train their **reading and analytic skills**. Different viewpoints and literary devices are scrutinised in a critical manner, **viewing comprehension skills** are enhanced and there is a **focus on language production** in oral and written formats.

Overview:

List of abbreviations:

C Comment**D** Discussion**GW** Gallery walk**P** Working with a picture/cartoon**S** Summary**TPS** Think-Pair-Share**W** Writing**CH** Characterisation**GP** Group puzzle**LVC** Listening/viewing comprehension**R** Research**T** Working with text**VI** Working with a video

Topic	Material	Methods/Skills
1: The plot of the novel	M1–M2	GW, LVC, P, T, VI
2: Narrator and narration	M3–M7	R, T, TPS
3: Focus on character	M8–M9	CH, GP, T
4: The green light and other metaphors and motifs	M10–M15	C, D, T
5: The American Dream	M14–M17	GP, P, T
6: From novel to film	M18–M20	D, S, T, TPS, VI, W
7: The Jazz Age and the Roaring Twenties	M21–M25	D, R, T, VI

M7 Worksheet – Narrator and narration



Working with the excerpts (M3)

1. Read the excerpts. With a partner, discuss whether the novel's first-person narrator Nick Carraway is able to keep his initial promise of being careful with criticising other people – taking into account the phrases underlined in the second excerpt.
2. In a think-pair-share format, describe how Nick compares and contrasts the two locations of West Egg and East Egg, why he calls his own rented house an "eyesore" and which expectations the reader would develop about Gatsby's person.

Analysis (M4)



3. Read the information about the narrative perspective. Analyse the differences between a first-person and third-person narrator in terms of credibility and find examples in the novel of how Nick might be called a "trustful observer" but, at the same time, remains quite detached from the action itself. Compare findings in plenary.

Working with the biography (M5/M6)



4. Read the texts about Fitzgerald and his wife. His early life bears some resemblance with characters and events in *The Great Gatsby*. Find proof in the novel and explain:
 - a) Resemblances between Fitzgerald and Nick Carraway:

- b) Resemblances between Fitzgerald and Jay Gatsby:

- c) Resemblances between Daisy Buchanan and Zelda:

- d) Resemblances to the setting – Long Island, West and East Egg:

Worksheet – Focus on character

M9

Working with the excerpts (M8)

1. Read the excerpts. Outline traits of character that can be inferred from the text.



Group puzzle

2. In a group puzzle, work on the four main characters more closely: Gatsby, Nick, Daisy, Tom. You may use your notes from task 1 as a starting point.



Make sure to cover the following aspects for each character as far as possible:

- physical appearance
- character traits
- personal history/background
- relationships to other characters.

Group puzzle

1. Form groups of four students. This is your **home group**. Agree on who will work on which character.
2. In the next step, you will work on your respective character. You will do so in new groups. These are called **expert groups**.
3. Each expert group consists of one person from each home group. Each expert group takes care of one character.
4. Now each expert group back to his/her home group. Each expert reports to the other group members what he/she found out in his/her expert group.
5. Write down your findings.



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M16 There's no way like the American way

The contrast between the two images addresses the tension between the American Dream and the American Nightmare. The comparison between the cut out picture above and the original version of this poster from 1937 below shows the impact of images and the effects of manipulation in a succinct way. In the same year the photo below was taken, a flood left many coloured residents in poor neighbourhoods homeless.



Wikipedia. Gemeinfrei.



© Margaret Bourke-White, found at: <https://www.sartle.com/media/artwork/at-the-time-of-the-louisville-flood-margaret-bourke-white.jpg> [last access: 18/01/2023]

Topic 6: From novel to film

M18 One novel, two films



Film version 1

1974. Director: Jack Clayton. Actors: Robert Redford, Mia Farrow, Tom Waterston, Bruce Dern

This was the third film version of the novel. Tennessee Williams (in his memoirs 1975) claims that the film was much better than the original novel. Less positive were other critiques which doubted that the film was a successful adaptation of the novel, where Gatsby appeared as a romantic, heroic and naive man, despite his criminal past. The film did not represent this image and the film script would use the narrative as a quarry. On the other hand, Frances Scott Fitzgerald, daughter of the author, supported the film in an advisory role and demanded that Gatsby would not be shown as a gangster. Shooting location was Rosecliff estate on Rhode Island and designer Ralph Lauren created the male costumes. The film won several Oscars and earned 26 million US Dollars.

Two contrasting criticisms of the 1974 film:

A: The film is faithful to the letter of F. Scott Fitzgerald's novel but entirely misses its spirit.

B: *The Great Gatsby* is a stand-out novel that is brilliantly written with a simple story. This book adaptation captures the feel and tone of F. Scott Fitzgerald's classic work. Taken from: https://www.rottentomatoes.com/m/1008799-great_gatsby [last access: 18/01/2023]

Film trailer: <https://raabe.click/gatsby-1974-trailer> [last access: 18/01/2023]

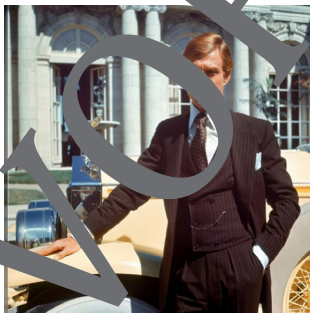
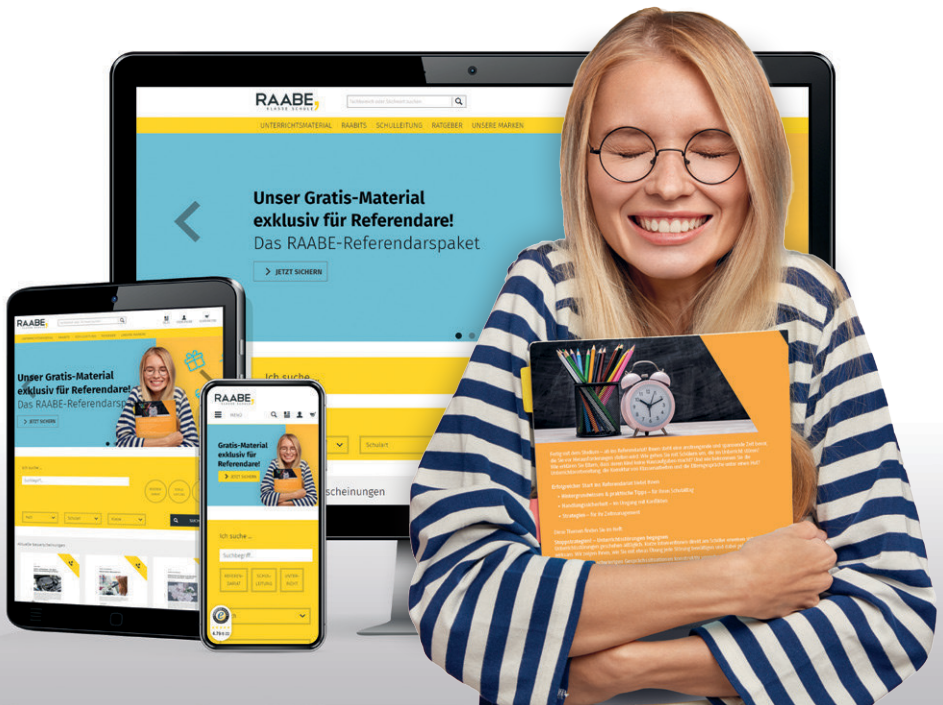


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