

American Literature: Classics

Coursebook



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Introduction

Welcome to *American Literature: Classics!* In this course, you will be reading the thoughts and feelings of men and women who have lived on this land that we now call the United States. Through their words, you will experience the events that helped create this country and made it what it is today. In the process, you will begin to understand more fully the unique heritage and vision of the American people.

This coursebook gives you the instructions and the assignments that you need to complete the course.

Content warning: The classic texts in this course describe events that portray danger, sorrow, and trauma in an accurate, realistic way. You will encounter disturbing material. As with all material in this course, please approach the topic with sensitivity and kindness, both to the people you are studying and to yourself. If you are struggling emotionally with topics in this course, please contact your teacher or another trusted adult.

Course Materials

The following materials are used in this course:

- *The Red Badge of Courage* by Stephen Crane
- *To Be a Slave* by Julius Lester
- *The Great Gatsby* by F. Scott Fitzgerald

You will also be reading a book of your choice in lessons 34–36, which you will need to acquire ahead of time.

What to Expect in This Course

In each lesson, you will find reading and writing assignments. For written assignments, include examples and direct references from the text to support your observations and opinions.

When you begin each lesson, scan the entire lesson first so you have an idea of what you will be doing. Take a quick look at the number of assignments and amount of reading. Having a sense of the whole lesson before you begin will help you manage your time effectively. Use the assignment checklist to keep track of your progress.

This full-year course is divided into 36 lessons, and each lesson is designed to take about one week to complete. In the lessons, you will find the following sections:

An **Assignment Checklist** is included at the beginning of each lesson. Assignments are fully explained in the lesson.

Learning Objectives outline the main goals of the lesson and give you an idea of what to expect.

Lesson Introductions provide background information or questions to guide your learning.

Reading Assignments include a wide range of classical texts from American writers.

Vocabulary Exercises help you develop a wider vocabulary and gain a better understanding of the texts.

Writing Assignments highlight important literary elements, develop your analytical skills, and help you gain deeper insight into the literature. You will find different types of writing assignments, including **Comprehension Questions**, **Critical Thinking Questions**, and **Composition Exercises**.

Share Your Work provides reminders for students who are submitting work to a teacher. You are not necessarily required to complete all the assignments for each lesson. Be sure to check with your teacher at the beginning of each lesson to make sure you understand what you are required to do.

This course is designed for independent learning, so hopefully you will find it easy to navigate. However, it is assumed you will have an adult (such as a parent, tutor, or school-based teacher) supervising your work and providing support and feedback. We will refer to this person as “your teacher” in this course. If you have a question about your work, ask them for help.

Active Reading

Have you ever thought about your own reading style? After all, how you read is critical in determining what you receive from literature.

There is a major difference between active and passive reading. Passive reading is a little like watching television—the reader moves through the story or poem superficially. Perhaps they are entertained, but the depth of their understanding is minimal. An active reader, on the other hand, is engaged with the material. The active reader asks questions, looks deeply into the material, and makes discoveries.

What are the specifics of active reading? What should a reader look for? Here are some suggestions you might find helpful.

- Plot: What happens in the book? How is the story structured?
- Setting: Where does the story take place? How does the setting affect the characters?

- Character development: How does the main character change? What causes these changes to occur?
- Point of view: Who is telling the story? How would the story be different if it was told from another point of view?
- Language and tone: How would you describe the author's writing style? Is the language formal or informal? Are the sentences long or short? Can you find a rhythm in the writing? What about the paragraphs? What is the tone of the language? Is it humorous, serious, or matter-of-fact?
- Meaning: Is there a moral or message to the story? What has the main character learned from their experiences? What have you learned from reading the book?

Keep these suggestions in mind as you read. If you are not accustomed to active reading, it may be demanding at first. Ultimately, though, approaching literature this way will make it more meaningful and more pleasurable.

Academic Expectations

The appendix contains important information that you will need to read and incorporate into your work throughout the year. Take some time to familiarize yourself with the resources in the appendix. You will find information about original work guidelines, tips on how to avoid accidental plagiarism, and details on citing sources and images.

You will also find a detailed section on the writing process that gives information on outlining, writing a rough draft, revising, editing, and proofreading. You are expected to follow the writing process in all of your longer assignments and essays.

A Note About the Workload

Students vary greatly in terms of reading speed, reading comprehension, and writing ability. Some may find the reading in this course takes longer than expected; others may find the writing assignments take a great deal of time. In general, you can expect to spend about five hours on each weekly lesson. If you need more time to complete the work, you can modify some lessons to focus on fewer assignments or forgo the reading assignments in order to focus on your composition skills. Modifications like these will allow you to produce work of a higher quality. With your teacher's help, each lesson in this course can be customized to suit your needs.

Keep an eye on the workload as you progress through the course. Make adjustments so you have time for meaningful learning experiences rather than rushing to try to get everything done. Always consult with your teacher when making adjustments to the workload.

Lesson

1

The Red Badge of Courage

Learning Objectives

In this lesson, you will:

- Recall explicit story details.
- Explore the significance of the landscape in the novel.
- Investigate character motivation.

Lesson Introduction

Stephen Crane's *The Red Badge of Courage* gave birth to American realism. First published in 1895, the novel was groundbreaking in its unflinching account of a Civil War battle, its complex psychological landscape, and its stylized prose. Certainly, it was among the first American novels to offer a realistic, rather than romantic, account of war.

Crane's life fueled his writing. Amazingly, he had never seen battle when he wrote *The Red Badge of Courage*, but shortly after completing the novel, he became a war correspondent. In addition to covering the Spanish American War, he was shipwrecked en route to Cuba—an ordeal he relates in his classic short story, "The Open Boat." Despite the success of his novels, by 1898 Crane was near bankruptcy. He died of tuberculosis in 1900.

Reading

Read chapters 1–5 in *The Red Badge of Courage* by Stephen Crane.

Vocabulary Exercises

1. Choose three of the vocabulary words in the accompanying box and use them in one or more sentences.

ASSIGNMENT CHECKLIST

- Read chapters 1–5 in *The Red Badge of Courage*.
- Complete the vocabulary exercises.
- Answer the comprehension questions.
- Answer the critical thinking questions.

2. Choose three unfamiliar words from the reading, define them, and use them in one or more sentences. Underline the vocabulary words in your sentences.

Vocabulary

The texts in this course use varied and complex vocabulary. Here are some words from the reading that may be unfamiliar to you.

- **epithet:** *v.* a descriptive name, particularly a disparaging or abusive word or phrase.
- **perambulate:** *v.* to walk about or stroll.
- **vociferous:** *adj.* making a loud outcry; shouting noisily.
- **harangue:** *v. or n.* a ranting speech characterized by vehement expression.
- **pilfer:** *v.* to steal.
- **confidant:** *n.* one to whom secrets are entrusted.
- **stolid:** *adj.* having or expressing little or no emotion; impassive.
- **commiserate:** *v.* to feel or express sorrow or compassion for.

You are encouraged to look up words you don't know to expand your vocabulary and gain a greater understanding of the text.

Comprehension Questions

1. When the novel opens, the regiment is despondent and Henry, the "youth," is dissatisfied. Why?
2. How does Henry's mother feel about her son going to war? What advice does she give him after he decides to enlist?
3. When the youth goes to "bid adieu to many schoolmates," there are a variety of responses to his "martial spirit." Explain.
4. What do the tall soldier and the loud private wrangle about? Who is mistaken in his argument?
5. Give at least one instance when Henry refers to his regiment as a "blue demonstration." What does he mean by this?
6. Briefly describe what happens when one of the soldiers tries to "pilfer a horse from a dooryard." How do the troops respond?
7. Describe the loud soldier. What is his name? What is his attitude toward the impending battles? What does he give Henry before the fighting begins?

8. What strategy do some of the soldiers use to protect themselves in battle? Are they all in agreement about this strategy? Explain.
9. In the “moments of waiting” before seeing his first action, the youth “thought of the village street at home.” What does he recall about it?
10. What happens to the soldier who retreats in the first battle?

Critical Thinking Questions

Respond to following critical thinking questions by writing at least one full paragraph for each assignment. Use direct quotes and supporting details from the assigned chapters to explain your answer

1. The author never loses sight of the fact that the Civil War was fought in rugged terrain and battlefields of wilderness. In fact, amid the most gruesome details of battle, he contrasts astonishing natural imagery. In this way, nature is fused into the psychology of the novel.

Citing the book’s opening paragraph and the final paragraph of chapter 5, discuss the significance of the landscape. Locate at least two other passages that point to the significance of nature. Use direct quotes and supporting details from the novel to explain your answer. (Always include the page number when citing text references.)

2. Before his first battle, Henry spends time observing many skirmishes, until he finally “encountered the body of a dead soldier.”

Discuss Crane’s description of the corpse. Is there anything romantic about it? Is it excessively gruesome? Are there particularly vivid images?

Discuss Henry’s reaction to the dead man. Does he respond differently than his comrades? What does his response reveal about his personality?

3. In his “months of monotonous life in a camp,” Henry began his own internal conflict, as a “panic-fear grew in his mind.” With the inevitability of battle, Henry is forced to admit “that as far as war was concerned he knew nothing of himself.”
 - a. Before he enlists, how had Henry’s “youthful eyes . . . looked upon the war”? Now that he is engaged in the Civil War, what does Henry fear most about fighting? What does this obsessive fear reveal about his personality? How does he attempt to measure himself with his comrades? Why does he feel himself a “mental outcast”?
 - b. Henry feels that the resolution of his self-doubts will come only in battle. In fact, he “saw salvation in such a change.” Does this redemptive change occur during his first battle? Is there a dissolution of his personality and his internal debate?
4. Before the regiment’s first skirmish, the loud soldier hands Henry a “little packet done up in a yellow envelope.” Begin by listing a few of the objects the packet might have contained. Next, imagine the packet contained a letter from the soldier to his family. What do you think the letter

might have expressed? Based on what you know of this character, write your response in letter form, from the soldier's point of view.

5. *The Red Badge of Courage* is set during the Civil War battle of Chancellorsville, Virginia. To better understand the context of the story, familiarize yourself with the historical background. Explain the cause of the Civil War. What was the central conflict?

SHARE YOUR WORK

When you have completed this lesson, share your work with your teacher for feedback. You are not necessarily required to complete all the assignments for each lesson. Be sure to check with your teacher at the beginning of each lesson to make sure you understand what you are required to do.

Your teacher will let you know the best way to submit your work. If you have any questions about the lesson content, assignments, or submission methods, contact your teacher.

Lesson

2

The Red Badge of Courage

Learning Objectives

In this lesson, you will:

- Investigate character motivation.
- Explore character development.
- Explore the author's treatment of the contrast between nature and war.

ASSIGNMENT CHECKLIST

- Read chapters 6–15 in *The Red Badge of Courage*.
- Complete the vocabulary exercises.
- Complete the writing assignments.

Reading

Read chapters 6–15 in *The Red Badge of Courage* by Stephen Crane.

Vocabulary Exercises

1. Choose three of the vocabulary words in the accompanying box and use them in one or more sentences.
2. Choose three unfamiliar words from the reading, define them, and use them in one or more sentences. Underline the vocabulary words in your sentences.

Vocabulary

Here are some words from the reading that may be unfamiliar to you.

- **blanch:** *v.* to make ashen or pale.
- **marshal:** *v.* to place in proper order or position.
- **imprecation:** *n.* curse or invocation of evil. **laggard:** *n.* one who lags, a dawdler.
- **sinuous:** *adj.* of a serpentine or wavy form; winding.

- **fracas:** *n.* a brawl.
- **remonstrance:** *n.* forcefully reproachful protest.
- **ague:** *n.* an attack of fever marked by chills or shivering.

You are encouraged to look up words you don't know to expand your vocabulary and gain a greater understanding of the text.

Writing Assignments

The following assignments will require both comprehension and critical thinking skills. Use specific details and quotes from the text to support your responses. (Remember to include page numbers when using quotations from the text.)

1. Just as Henry begins to feel he had passed the “test” of his first battle, his “ecstasy of self-satisfaction” is brought to a halt. Suddenly, “cries of amazement [break] out along the new ranks of the regiment,” and the Confederate soldiers attack.
 - a. Describe what takes place in the ensuing battle. Why does Henry retreat? Is there anything in the description of the battle itself to suggest that Henry was cowardly?
 - b. Discuss the range of emotions that Henry experiences as he wanders the battlefields. Initially, how does he regard his retreat? When does he begin to feel shame? Besides retreating, what is Henry ashamed of? Is he able to reconcile his actions to himself?
2. One of the strangest and most haunting episodes of book revolves around the death of Jim Conklin (the “tall soldier”).
 - a. What does Jim ask of Henry? Where does he run to and why? What are some of the “rite-like . . . movements of the doomed soldier”? How does Henry react to his friend’s agony and death?
 - b. Citing some specifics, explain how the author’s tone contributes to the eeriness of the scene of Jim Conklin’s slow death.
 - c. After witnessing Jim’s death, Henry realizes the tattered man is also mortally wounded. What strange behaviors does the tattered man exhibit? Why does Henry run, leaving “the tattered man wandering about helplessly in the field”? Do you think Henry is justified in abandoning the wounded soldier, or is it a selfish act?
3. To a great degree, Henry’s shame and self-loathing result from his ideal of honor. As he stares at the maimed soldiers, it is this ideal that makes him wish for “a wound, a [little] red badge of courage.” Citing specific examples, discuss Henry’s concept of honor. Where does it come from? Does it seem like the other men share his values? Thus far, has he been able to live up to his standards?

4. Eventually, Henry is wounded.
 - a. How does he get hurt?
 - b. When Henry suddenly finds himself in the middle of a fleeing mass of soldiers, “he knew at once that the steel fibers had been washed from their hearts.” Describe Henry’s state of mind. Why does he behave so wildly? What motivates his actions?
5. To continue your exploration of the contrast between nature and war, consider the following passage:

After a time the sound of musketry grew faint and the cannon boomed in the distance. The sun, suddenly apparent, blazed among the trees. The insects were making rhythmical noises. They seemed to be grinding their teeth in unison. A woodpecker stuck his impudent head around the side of a tree. A bird flew on lighthearted wing.

Off was the rumble of death. It seemed now that Nature has no ears.

- a. What is Crane suggesting by celebrating nature as—in a sense—the heroine of the novel?
 - b. How does nature inspire Henry? When does he receive solace from the natural world? Cite specific examples.
 - c. Nature is used to set a tone and contrast with the chaos and destruction of war. Choose one of the passages about nature that stood out for you. Create an artistic rendering of the scene or write the passage down and embellish it with decorations.
6. When Henry returns to his regiment, he is wounded and exhausted.
 - a. What does he tell his comrades about his head injury and his whereabouts? Were you surprised by Henry’s account?
 - b. After being led back to his regiment, Henry is tended to by his friend, Wilson. Soon, the youth “took note of this remarkable change in his comrade since those days of camp life.” Describe this change. How does it surface in Wilson’s actions? What brought it about?
 - c. In only a short time, Henry is able to restore his self-respect. In fact, he even feels a sense of superiority over Wilson, the one who cared so selflessly for him. What is the “small weapon” that gives Henry power over Wilson? Does he ever use this weapon?

SHARE YOUR WORK

When you have completed this lesson, share your work with your teacher for feedback.

If you have any questions about the lesson content, assignments, or submission methods, contact your teacher.

Lesson

6

Composition: Relative Clauses

Learning Objectives

In this lesson, you will:

- Practice identifying and forming relative clauses.
- Demonstrate the use of relative clauses in a story.

ASSIGNMENT CHECKLIST

- Complete the composition exercises.

Lesson Introduction

In our study of composition, we now turn to relative clauses. Relative clauses add information and variety to sentences. Consider, for example, this pair of sentences:

The vacation spot is a lovely place to visit.

The vacation spot was recently purchased by our company.

Notice how they can be made more effective by turning one sentence into a relative clause (shown in bold):

The vacation spot, **which was recently purchased by our company**, is a lovely place to visit.

Relative clauses modify nouns by adding detail; they are sometimes called *adjective clauses* because adjectives modify nouns. Relative clauses are dependent clauses—meaning they cannot stand alone as complete sentences—and are introduced with words such as *which*, *who*, *whom*, *that*, and *whose*.

Choosing which relative pronoun to use depends on the type of noun it modifies or replaces. *Who* and *whom*, for example, replace nouns that refer to people.

ORIGINAL SENTENCES	COMBINING SENTENCES WITH A RELATIVE CLAUSE (using <i>who</i> or <i>whom</i>)
Joe has just been hired. Joe learned how to program computers.	Joe, who learned how to program computers , has just been hired.
I gave the book to Joe. I've known Joe for years.	I gave the book to Joe, whom I've known for years .

Whose replaces possessive nouns.

ORIGINAL SENTENCES	COMBINING SENTENCES WITH A RELATIVE CLAUSE (using <i>whose</i>)
The woman's baby was crying. I helped carry groceries for the woman.	I helped carry groceries for the woman whose baby was crying .

That is one of the most versatile relative pronouns because it can refer to either people or things.

ORIGINAL SENTENCES	COMBINING SENTENCES WITH A RELATIVE CLAUSE (using <i>that</i>)
We belong to a reading group. The group meets every Saturday.	We belong to a reading group that meets every Saturday .

When using relative clauses, remember that a sentence's meaning can change depending on your use of commas. Consider, for example, the different meanings of the following two sentences:

Professional athletes who gamble are usually suspended from their sport.

Professional athletes, who gamble, are usually suspended from their sport.

Notice that the first sentence implies that only some athletes gamble, while the second implies that *all* athletes gamble.

When you are using a relative clause to replace a proper noun, always use commas around the relative clause.

Anne Bradstreet, **who lived in the Massachusetts Bay Colony**, was an excellent poet.

Once you start using relative clauses, you will discover their versatility. Not only do they enhance sentence variety and help avoid repetition, but they can also strengthen paragraph structure.

Composition Exercises

1. Using at least one relative clause, combine each of the following sentence groups into one sentence.
 - a. Longfellow wrote "Evangeline." Longfellow lived in the nineteenth century.
 - b. Mercury is the smallest planet in our solar system. Mercury is the closest planet to the Sun.
 - c. The Sistine Chapel was built in 1473. It was built by Pope Sixtus IV. It contains work by Michelangelo.
 - d. I substituted for the player. The player's father was ill.

- e. No one solved the case. The case was officially closed in 1964. It was closed because it implicated some high-standing politicians.
2. Combine the following groups of sentences into one fluid story. Use several relative clauses. Feel free to use other sentence-combining strategies as well.

The wagon moved along slowly.

The wagon carried three families.

The wagon was run down.

The families were on their way to California.

The families reached the river.

The river was shallow enough to cross.

The family was relieved.

They arrived at the fort.

The fort was teeming with pioneers.

They bought some fresh jerky.

They bought some rope.

A man approached.

He was carrying a long rifle.

“Where you folks headed?” he asked.

“We’re headed to California,” answered Ma.

Ma was looking suspiciously at the man.

The man carried a blue umbrella.

“Can I hitch a ride?” asked the man.

“No, sir,” answered Pa.

Pa knew lots about traveling the trail.

“That blue umbrella means you’re one of Thompson’s Gang,” added Pa.

Joey was nervous as he watched the man.
The man closed his umbrella.
His umbrella had the initials “T. G.” painted on it.

Now the man was smiling.
He took out a badge.
It was a sheriff’s badge.

“Whoops,” said the sheriff.
The sheriff looked embarrassed.
“I forgot I was carrying this around.”

It turned out he was a sheriff in Sacramento.
Sacramento was a big gold town in California.
We were headed to Sacramento.
So we took the sheriff along.
His name was O’Dooley.

3. Using at least six relative clauses, write a one-page story about anything you choose. Underline the relative clauses.

SHARE YOUR WORK

When you have completed this lesson, share your work with your teacher for feedback.

If you have any questions about the lesson content, assignments, or submission methods, contact your teacher.

Lesson

17

Speeches by Abraham Lincoln

Learning Objectives

In this lesson, you will:

- Analyze historical speeches, using examples and direct quotes to highlight key ideas.
- Memorize and perform a speech.

Lesson Introduction

Abraham Lincoln is a mythic figure in American history. Raised on the Kentucky frontier, Lincoln educated himself and ran a successful law practice before entering politics. His timing could not have been more dramatic—he became president just as the Civil War broke out. During his presidency, Lincoln withstood the nation’s bloodiest war—an unprecedented, relentless campaign. With it came the abolition of slavery.

Although Lincoln was opposed to slavery, he felt his primary responsibility as president was to keep the union together. His speeches and letters are a testimony to this vision and commitment. As Walt Whitman wrote:

He has shown, I sometimes think, an almost supernatural tack in keeping the ship afloat at all, with head steady, not only not going down, and now certain not to, but with proud and resolute spirit, and flag flying in sight of the world, menacing and high as ever.

While Lincoln is remembered as an uncompromising visionary, it is his beautiful, lofty words that transmit this vision. At once simple, poetic, humorous, and mystical, Lincoln’s writings reflect what many consider to be the integral character of the United States.

ASSIGNMENT CHECKLIST

- Read two speeches by Abraham Lincoln.
- Complete the vocabulary exercises.
- Complete the memorization exercise.
- Complete the writing assignments.

Reading

Read the following two speeches by Abraham Lincoln. Both are found in the appendix.

- “Lincoln’s Gettysburg Address”
- “Lincoln’s Second Inaugural Address”

Vocabulary Exercises

1. Choose three of the vocabulary words in the accompanying box and use them in one or more sentences.
2. Choose three unfamiliar words from the reading, define them, and use them in one or more sentences. Underline the vocabulary words in your sentences.

Vocabulary

The author uses a varied and complex vocabulary. Here are some words that may be unfamiliar to you.

- **consecrate:** *v.* to make or declare sacred; to dedicate to some service or goal.
- **engross:** *v.* to take or engage the whole attention of; occupy completely.
- **hallow:** *v.* to make holy; to honor or revere.
- **attribute:** *n.* an inherent characteristic; an innate quality.
- **insurgent:** *n.* or *adj.* rising in revolt against civil or governmental authority.
- **malice:** *n.* ill will; desire to cause pain or harm.
- **inaugural:** *adj.* of or relating to a ceremonial induction into office.
- **scourge:** *n.* an instrument of punishment.

You are encouraged to look up words you don’t know to expand your vocabulary and gain a greater understanding of the text.

Memorization Exercise

Memorization is a valuable process. Not only does it give your mind a workout, but it puts you in touch with a writer’s rhythm and language. It’s also a great gift to yourself; when you know something by heart, then it lives inside you.

There are many strategies to memorization. You might try reading the speech 10 or 20 times. Like a song, its rhythms will become familiar, which will ease the process of memorization. Then take it a line at a time. Another idea is to write each stanza on a note card, read one aloud right before you go to bed at night and first thing in the morning when you wake up. When that one is memorized, add the next one.

This week, memorize the Gettysburg Address. When you are ready, recite the speech to friends or family members.

Writing Assignments

1. To fully appreciate the Gettysburg Address, you must be familiar with the setting in which it was recited. The three-day battle at Gettysburg, Pennsylvania claimed more than 6,000 lives and resulted in thousands of injuries. To honor the dead, a national cemetery was established on the battleground. Many great speakers, including Lincoln, were invited to dedicate the cemetery.

Discuss the tone of Lincoln's oration. In what spirit does he meet the grave circumstances? Is there blame in his words? A sense of bitterness? Does he mourn? Is his speech too brief? In your estimation, do his words do justice to the dead?

Write your response in a well-organized paragraph that includes direct quotes from the text.

2. In both speeches, Lincoln talks about the Civil War. In the Gettysburg Address, what is the "cause" for which the soldiers fought? What is the "last full measure of devotion"?
3. You can learn a great deal about effective speech writing by studying Lincoln's work. Discuss the structure of both the Gettysburg Address and the Second Inaugural Address. In two or three paragraphs, compare the two pieces of writing, using text citations to address the following elements.
 - a. Do the speeches unfold in a logical manner? Do they have central arguments that receive support?
 - b. Compare the texture of the words in both speeches. In general, are these the typical words of a president? A lawyer? A priest? How is repetition used in the speeches? What effect does it have?
4. Using specifics from both speeches, discuss Lincoln's sentiments toward the Confederacy. In either speech, does he disparage the Southern secessionists? Does he blame them? Does he ever show love toward his "enemies"? Does he ever use the platform to promote himself or his Republican party?
5. Like many politicians, Lincoln speaks of God. According to his inaugural address, what is God's position in regard to the Civil War? Does he claim that God is on his side? How does he reconcile his belief in a just God with the devastation of war? (Use specific quotes in your response.) In your opinion, is Lincoln sincere in his religious conviction?

6. In the Second Inaugural Address, Lincoln defines the cause of the war. According to him, what was it? Could the conflict have been settled without bloodshed?

SHARE YOUR WORK

When you have completed this lesson, share your work with your teacher for feedback.

If you have any questions about the lesson content, assignments, or submission methods, contact your teacher.

Lesson

23

The Great Gatsby

Learning Objectives

In this lesson, you will:

- Recall explicit story details.
- Explore the role of the narrator.
- Analyze character development and motivation.

Lesson Introduction

Few American eras were as colorful and tempestuous as the 1920s. Following World War I, the “Jazz Age” was a time of prosperity, gaiety, and decadence. F. Scott Fitzgerald is famous for his portrayals of this decade.

In *The Great Gatsby*, which many people consider to be F. Scott Fitzgerald’s finest novel, the 1920s come to life through the narrative of Nick Carraway, a thirty-year-old man. Rather than give us a sweeping history of the decade, Fitzgerald offers an intimate portrait through a handful of characters.

Fitzgerald’s writing is beautifully literate. The sentences are fluid, the descriptions are striking, and the structure is remarkably cohesive. He remains one of the most eminent literary figures in the United States.

Despite his early literary success, Fitzgerald led a difficult life. Not only did he endure his wife’s mental illness, but he grew increasingly insecure about his own literary status. After turning to alcohol to cope, Fitzgerald’s health declined. He died in 1940.

Reading

Read chapters 1–3 in *The Great Gatsby* by F. Scott Fitzgerald.

Note: For lesson 26, you will be asked to write an interpretive essay about the novel. Keep this in mind as you respond to the questions, since you will need to choose a topic that interests you.

ASSIGNMENT CHECKLIST

- Read chapters 1–3 in *The Great Gatsby*.
- Answer the comprehension questions.
- Answer the critical thinking questions.

Vocabulary Exercises

1. Choose three of the vocabulary words in the accompanying box and use them in one or more sentences.
2. Choose three unfamiliar words from the reading, define them, and use them in one or more sentences. Underline the vocabulary words in your sentences.

Vocabulary

The author uses a varied and complex vocabulary. Here are some words that may be unfamiliar to you.

- **supercilious:** *adj.* coolly and patronizingly haughty; scornful.
- **libel:** *n.* a written defamatory statement that unjustly damages a person's reputation.
- **divan:** *n.* a large couch, usually without back or arms.
- **caterwaul:** *n.* screech, wail, or scream.
- **peremptory:** *adj.* brusque; imperious; demanding immediate attention or obedience.
- **florid:** *adj.* flushed with rosy color; ruddy.
- **reciprocal:** *adj.* shared, felt, or shown by both sides; mutual.
- **vacuous:** *adj.* empty; vacant; inane.

You are encouraged to look up words you don't know to expand your vocabulary and gain a greater understanding of the text.

Comprehension Questions

1. "It was a matter of chance," Nick tells us early on, "that I should have rented a house in one of the strangest communities in North America." He is speaking, of course, of West Egg.
Describe Nick's neighborhood. Where is it located? How does it differ from East Egg?
Where is Nick originally from? What brought him to the East Coast? What is his new line of business?
2. Describe Jordan Baker. What does she do for a living? What is Nick's first impression of her?
3. What is the "family secret" concerning the butler? In what way is the butler's fate a commentary on the nature of the times?

4. “About halfway between West Egg and New York,” Nick tells us in the opening of chapter II, lies the “valley of ashes.” Describe this area. Include a description of “the eyes of Doctor T. J. Eckleberg.”
5. What does Mrs. Wilson (Myrtle) purchase before arriving at the apartment with Tom, Nick, and Jordan? Does this action seem strange? Explain.
6. Briefly describe Mr. McKee. Give some examples of his self-absorbed, humorous behavior.
7. Describe the behavior of the man with “enormous owl-eyed spectacles” when Nick and Jordan meet him in Gatsby’s library. In what way is he different from the others at the party? When does he reappear?
8. What does Jordan have to say to Nick about her private meeting with Gatsby?
9. Briefly describe the “tumultuous scene” Nick witnesses in the road after leaving Gatsby’s party.
10. What does Nick have to say about Jordan’s driving? How does she respond?

Critical Thinking Questions

1. Fitzgerald is famous for his portrayals of the 1920s, the “Jazz Age.”
 - a. Write a few paragraphs describing the political, artistic, and social climate of the United States during the 1920s. Discuss Prohibition and bootlegging.
 - b. Listen to some 1920s jazz. Describe the sound. How does it compare to modern jazz? How did the music capture the spirit of the times?
2. In the opening of the novel, Nick says he is “inclined to reserve all judgments, a habit that has opened up many curious natures to me . . .” However, we also learn that his “tolerance . . . has a limit.” This is the opening of a complex first-person narrative and a complex narrator.
 - a. Nick is young and rather naive when he arrives in Long Island. However, when he returns to the Midwest, he tells us that he “wanted the world to be in . . . moral attention forever.” Clearly, his “privileged glimpses into the human heart” left him with a distaste. The only exception was Gatsby, who, ironically, “represented everything for which [Nick] had unaffected scorn.”

Give several examples of Nick’s aversion to his new social circles. What specific things bother him?

How does Nick regard Gatsby? What is the tone of his descriptions of Gatsby?

Write at least one page in response. Include examples.
 - b. Although Nick focuses a great deal of attention on Gatsby, the novel is ultimately about Nick. What is Nick like? Highlight specific episodes that reveal his personality. What does he think of himself? Is he assertive? Reserved?

3. Write a character portrait (a description) of Tom Buchanan. “The history of the summer,” Nick tells us, “really begins on the evening I drove over . . . to have dinner with the Tom Buchanans.” Describe Tom. Include a discussion of his personality, appearance, and political and social convictions. What are some of his “supercilious” behaviors? What is Nick’s opinion of him?
4. Gatsby’s parties are a metaphor for the time period, the gilded “Roaring ’20s.” However, they are also deeply connected to Gatsby’s personal history.
 - a. Begin by describing the party. Include descriptions of the food, music, and variety of guests.
 - b. How do the guests regard their host? How well do they know Gatsby, and what stories do they tell about him? What does this relationship (or lack of it) tell us about Gatsby himself?
 - c. Give examples of some of the decadent behavior during the party. Choose one or two events that capture the superficiality of the crowd.
 - d. Given what you know about Gatsby’s past, why do you think he is sponsoring these summer bashes?

SHARE YOUR WORK

When you have completed this lesson, share your work with your teacher for feedback.

If you have any questions about the lesson content, assignments, or submission methods, contact your teacher.



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surrounds thee. He who knows that power is inborn, that he is weak because he has looked for good out of him and elsewhere, and so perceiving, throws himself unhesitatingly on his thought, instantly rights himself, stands in the erect position, commands his limbs, works miracles; just as a man who stands on his feet is stronger than a man who stands on his head.

So use all that is called Fortune. Most men gamble with her, and gain all, and lose all, as her wheel rolls. But do thou leave as unlawful these winnings, and deal with Cause and Effect, the chancellors of God. In the Will work and acquire, and thou hast chained the wheel of Chance, and shalt sit hereafter out of fear from her rotations. A political victory, a rise of rents, the recovery of your sick, or the return of your absent friend, or some other favorable event, raises your spirits, and you think good days are preparing for you. Do not believe it. Nothing can bring you peace but yourself. Nothing can bring you peace but the triumph of principles.

Lincoln's Gettysburg Address

given November 19, 1863, on the battlefield near Gettysburg, Pennsylvania, USA

Four score and seven years ago, our fathers brought forth upon this continent a new nation: conceived in liberty, and dedicated to the proposition that all men are created equal.

Now we are engaged in a great civil war . . . testing whether that nation, or any nation so conceived and so dedicated . . . can long endure. We are met on a great battlefield of that war.

We have come to dedicate a portion of that field as a final resting place for those who here gave their lives that this nation might live. It is altogether fitting and proper that we should do this.

But, in a larger sense, we cannot dedicate . . . we cannot consecrate . . . we cannot hallow this ground. The brave men, living and dead, who struggled here have consecrated it, far above our poor power to add or detract. The world will little note, nor long remember, what we say here, but it can never forget what they did here.

It is for us the living, rather, to be dedicated here to the unfinished work which they who fought here have thus far so nobly advanced. It is rather for us to be here dedicated to the great task remaining before us . . . that from these honored dead we take increased devotion to that cause for which they gave the last full measure of devotion . . . that we here highly resolve that these dead shall not have died in vain . . . that this nation, under God, shall have a new birth of freedom . . . and that government of the people . . . by the people . . . for the people . . . shall not perish from this earth.

Lincoln's Second Inaugural Address

March 4, 1865

Fellow countrymen: At this second appearing to take the oath of the presidential office, there is less occasion for an extended address than there was at the first. Then a statement, somewhat in detail, of a course to be pursued, seemed fitting and proper. Now, at the expiration of four years, during which public declarations have been constantly called forth on every point and phase of the great contest which still absorbs the attention and engrosses the energies of the nation, little that is new could be presented. The progress of our arms, upon which all else chiefly depends, is as well known to the public as to myself; and it is, I trust, reasonably satisfactory and encouraging to all. With high hope for the future, no prediction in regard to it is ventured.

On the occasion corresponding to this four years ago, all thoughts were anxiously directed to an impending civil war. All dreaded it—all sought to avert it. While the inaugural address was being delivered from this place, devoted altogether to saving the Union without war, insurgent agents were in the city seeking to destroy it without war—seeking to dissolve the Union, and divide effects, by negotiation. Both parties deprecated war; but one of them would make war rather than let the nation survive; and the other would accept war rather than let it perish. And the war came.

One-eighth of the whole population were colored slaves, not distributed generally over the Union, but localized in the Southern part of it. These slaves constituted a peculiar and powerful interest. All knew that this interest was, somehow, the cause of the war. To strengthen, perpetuate, and extend this interest was the object for which the insurgents would rend the Union, even by war; while the government claimed no right to do more than to restrict the territorial enlargement of it.

Neither party expected for the war the magnitude or the duration which it has already attained. Neither anticipated that the cause of the conflict might cease with, or even before, the conflict itself should cease. Each looked for an easier triumph, and a result less fundamental and astounding. Both read the same Bible, and pray to the same God; and each invokes his aid against the other. It may seem strange that any men should dare to ask a just God's assistance in wringing their bread from the sweat of other men's faces; but let us judge not, that we be not judged. The prayers of both could not be answered—that of neither has been answered fully.

The Almighty has his own purposes. "Woe unto the world because of offenses! for it must needs be that offenses come; but woe to that man by whom the offense cometh." If we shall suppose that American slavery is one of those offenses which, in the providence of God, must needs come, but which, having continued through his appointed time, he now wills to remove, and that he gives to both North and South this terrible war, as the woe due to those by whom the offense came, shall we discern therein any departure from those divine attributes which the believers in a living God always ascribe to him? Fondly do we hope—fervently do we pray—that this mighty scourge of war may speedily pass away. Yet, if God wills that it continue until all the wealth piled by the bondsman's two hundred and fifty years of unrequited toil shall be sunk, and until every drop of blood drawn by the lash shall be paid by another

drawn with the sword, as was said three thousand years ago, so still it must be said, “The judgments of the Lord are true and righteous altogether.”

With malice toward none; with charity for all; with firmness in the right, as God gives us to see the right, let us strive on to finish the work we are in; to bind up the nation’s wounds; to care for him who shall have borne the battle, and for his widow, and his orphan — to do all which may achieve and cherish a just and lasting peace among ourselves, and with all nations.

There Was a Child Went Forth

by Walt Whitman

There was a child went forth every day;
And the first object he look’d upon, that object he became;
And that object became part of him for the day, or a certain part of the day, or for many years,
or stretching cycles of years.
The early lilacs became part of this child,
And grass, and white and red morning-glories, and white and red clover, and the song of the
phoebe-bird,
And the Third-month lambs, and the sow’s pink-faint litter, and the mare’s foal, and the cow’s
calf,
And the noisy brood of the barn-yard, or by the mire of the pond-side,
And the fish suspending themselves so curiously below there — and the beautiful curious
liquid,
And the water-plants with their graceful flat heads — all became part of him.
The field-sprouts of Fourth-month and Fifth-month became part of him;
Winter-grain sprouts, and those of the light-yellow corn, and the esculent roots of the garden,
And the apple-trees cover’d with blossoms, and the fruit afterward, and wood-berries, and the
commonest weeds by the road;
And the old drunkard staggering home from the out-house of the tavern, whence he had lately
risen,
And the school-mistress that pass’d on her way to the school,
And the friendly boys that pass’d — and the quarrelsome boys,
And the tidy and fresh-cheek’d girls — and the barefoot negro boy and girl,
And all the changes of city and country, wherever he went.
His own parents,
He that had father’d him, and she that had conceiv’d him in her womb, and birth’d him,
They gave this child more of themselves than that;
They gave him afterward every day — they became part of him.
The mother at home, quietly placing the dishes on the supper-table;



Cherry trees in autumn.
(Image credit: Edal Anton Lefterov)



Merengue dancing.
(Image credit: Garry Knight)

Elements of Good Writing

All good writing shares the elements of authenticity, clarity, economy, and voice. Keep these in mind as you write and use them to guide you in every rewrite.

Authenticity: This is the most important element and the most difficult to master. Originality is essential. Writing with authenticity encompasses issues of academic integrity and plagiarism, but it is more about expressing your authentic self. Are you expressing your own ideas or are you writing what you think the teacher wants to read? Your knowledge, thoughts, and opinions are unique to you. Always express yourself authentically.

Clarity: Are your sentences understandable? Is your language precise? Are you using words that are descriptive and accurate? In addition to conveying your ideas clearly, present them in a logical sequence so they make sense to the reader, and create transitions between paragraphs that help one idea flow into the next.

Economy: Have you expressed your ideas succinctly? Wordy, convoluted passages are confusing and cause readers to lose interest. Strive for quality over quantity. Avoid repetition. When revising, find ways to streamline your writing to make it more concise. In most cases, this will make your writing clearer and more powerful.

Voice: The narrative voice refers to the tone and style of the writing, which depends on the purpose of the piece—think of the difference between writing a funny scene in a story or writing a letter to your state senator. Your narrative voice might be objective, opinionated, questioning, scholarly, playful, or your natural voice. Your choice will change based on what you are trying to accomplish. The voice should be consistent throughout the text.