***The Great Gatsby* Essay Topic Choices**

1. The American Dream was based on the assumption that each person, no matter what his or her origins, could succeed in life on the sole basis of his or her own skill and effort.

*The Great Gatsby* is a novel about what happened to the American dream in the 1920s, a period when the old values that gave substance to the dream had been corrupted by the vulgar pursuit of wealth.

What Fitzgerald seems to be criticizing in *The Great Gatsby* is not the American Dream itself but the **corruption** of the American Dream. Carefully discuss how this idea is reflected in the novel.

2. The word *careless* sums up one of the most important ideas in the book. Nick refers to Jordan, Tom, and Daisy as careless in one form or another. Their actions are careless and they are careless people. These people live the decadent life of the roaring twenties that many of the writers of this era were criticizing. Fitzgerald uses these characters to expose this life with their selfish actions. Discuss the *carelessness* in the novel, using the characters and the larger themes as supports.

3. In Chapter VII, Nick remembers that it is his thirtieth birthday. He, like Gatsby, Tom, and Daisy, came East to get away from the past; now that his youth is officially over, he realizes that he may have made a mistake to come East, and begins a period of reevaluation that leads to his eventual decision to return to the Middle West. *The Great Gatsby* is the story of Nick's initiation into adult life. His trip East gives him the education he needs to grow up. The novel can, therefore, be called a bildungsroman--the German word for a story about a young man growing up. We simply call them by the more general description of “Coming of Age” or “Rite of Passage” stories. Nick, in a sense, writes *The Great Gatsby* to reflect on what he has learned.

So, what has he learned? What is the lesson Nick is offering his reader? How is the lesson made clear considering Nick’s inability to judge? How has Nick “come of age” during that summer?

4. The past is of central importance in the novel, whether it is Gatsby's personal past (his fling with Daisy in 1917) or the larger historical past to which Nick refers in the closing sentence of the novel: "So we beat on, boats against the current, borne back ceaselessly into the past." The past holds something that both Gatsby and Nick long for. Tom, Daisy and Jordan are creatures of the present--Fitzgerald reveals little about their pasts--and it is this relationship with the present moment that makes them so attractive, and also so rootless and spiritually empty.

How is this theme developed in the novel? How is it a reflection of the era itself?

5. 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 and how is Jay Gatsby “great”? Is Fitzgerald being literal or ironic? Use many examples from the novel to support your assertions, but AVOID plot summary.

6.Write an essay analyzing the role of women in *The Great Gatsby*, as represented by Daisy, Jordan, and Myrtle. What kind of influence or power do they wield? Consider their social positions and interactions. Consider their effects on those around them as well as the results of their actions – both positive and detrimental.

7.Analyze the portrayal of wealth in the novel—the difference between “old money” and “new money” as well as what money can and cannot buy. What is Fitzgerald ultimately trying to say about money and materialism? What does Gatsby’s rise and fall say about the pursuit of wealth and status in the world of the novel?

**REQUIREMENTS:**

Multi-paragraph essay. (Minimum two body paragraphs, four total)

Choose topic today

Write THESIS STATEMENT today, to be checked at beginning of class Friday

Rough OUTLINE of body paragraphs due Monday at end of class

Essay DUE 11:59 pm 3/10 on turnitin.com

Follow required format for intro and conclusion paragraphs

Follow required format for outlining body paragraphs – each body paragraph should have at least TWO quotes cited correctly.

Follow MLA format – TNR font, size 12, double space, proper heading, 1” margins, etc.

Remember to use TRANSITION WORDS!

Remember NOT to use DEAD WORDS!

Essay is 100 pts.