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Need to write about a theme for a Great Gatsby assignment or just curious about what exactly a theme is? Not sure where to start? Learn here what a theme is, what the main themes in The Great Gatsby are, and what the best tips for writing about themes for your English/Language Arts class essays are.We will also link to our specific articles on each theme so you can learn even more in-depth about themes central to Gatsby. What Is a Theme? Why Should You Care? First things first: what exactly is a theme? In literature, a theme is a central topic a book deals with. This central topic is revealed through plot events, the actions and dialogue of the characters, and even the narrator's tone. Themes can be very broad, like love, money, or death, or more specific, like people versus technology, racial discrimination, or the American Dream.In short, a book's theme can usually answer the question, "what's the point of this book?". They're the "so what?" of literary analysis. Also, note that books can definitely have more than one major themein Gatsby we identify seven!Knowing a book's major theme(s) is crucial to writing essays, since many assignments want you to connect your argument to a book's theme. For example, you might be asked to write an essay about a prompt like this: "How does the life of Jay Gatsby exemplify (or deconstruct) the idea of the American Dream?" This prompt has you connect specific details in Jay Gatsby's life to the larger theme of the American Dream. This is why many teachers love theme essays: because they encourage you to connect small details to big ideas!Furthermore, the AP English Literature test always has an essay question that has you analyze some aspect of a book and then "compare it to the theme of the work as a whole." (If you want specific examples you can access the last 15 years of AP English Literature free response questions here, using your College Board account.) So this skill won't just help you in your English classes, it will also help you pass the AP English Literature test if you're taking it!So keep reading to learn about the major themes in Gatsby and how they are revealed in the book, and also to get links to our in-depth articles about each theme. Overview of Key Themes in The Great Gatsby Before we introduce our seven main themes, we'll briefly describe how the story and characters suggest the major Great Gatsby themes. Remember that the story is set in the 1920s, a period when America's economy was booming, and takes place in New York: specifically the wealthy Long Island towns of West Egg and East Egg, as well as Manhattan and Queens.As you should know from the book (check out our summary if you're still hazy on the details!), The Great Gatsby tells the story of James Gatz, a poor farm boy who manages to reinvent himself as the fabulously rich Jay Gatsby, only to be killed after an attempt to win over his old love Daisy Buchanan. Daisy is married to Tom Buchanan, and they're both from old money, causing them to look down Gatsby's newly rich crowd (and for Tom to look down at Gatsby himself).Meanwhile, Tom is having an affair with Myrtle Wilson, the wife of mechanic George Wilson. Through the Wilsons, we see the struggles of the working class in dismal Queens, NY. As if they didn't already have it hard enough, Myrtle is killed in a hit-and-run accident (caused by Daisy Buchanan), and George, who's manipulated by Tom to believe that Jay Gatsby was both his wife's lover and her murderer, ends up shooting Gatsby and then himself.The whole story is told by Nick Carraway, a second cousin of Daisy's and classmate of Tom's who moves in next to Gatsby's mansion and eventually befriends Jay -- and then comes to deeply admire him, despite or perhaps because of Jay's fervent desire to repeat his past with Daisy. The tragic chain of events at the novel's climax, along with the fact that both the Buchanans can easily retreat from the damage they caused, causes Nick to become disillusioned with life in New York and retreat back to his hometown in the Midwest. Aside from having a very unhappy ending, the novel might just ruin swimming pools for you as well. The fact that the major characters come from three distinct class backgrounds (working class, newly rich, and old money) suggests that class is a major theme. But the rampant materialism and the sheer amount of money spent by Gatsby himself is a huge issue and its own theme. Related to money and class, the fact that both Gatsby and the Wilsons strive to improve their positions in American society, only to end up dead, also suggests that the American Dream -- and specifically its hollowness -- is a key theme in the book as well.But there are other themes at play here, too. Every major character is involved in at least one romantic relationship, revealing that they are all driven by love, sex, and desire -- a major theme. Also, the rampant bad behavior (crime, cheating, and finally murder) and lack of real justice makes ethics and morality a key theme. Death also looms large over the novel's plot, alongside the threat of failure.And finally, a strong undercurrent to all of these themes is identity itself: can James Gatz really become Jay Gatsby, or was he doomed from the start? Can someone who is not from old money ever blend in with that crowd? Could Gatsby really aspire to repeat his past with Daisy, or is that past self gone forever?In short, just by looking at the novel's plot, characters, and ending, we can already get a strong sense of Gatsby's major themes. Let's now look at each of those themes one by one (and be sure to check out the links to our full theme breakdowns!). The 7 Major Great Gatsby Themes Money and Materialism: Everyone in the novel is money-obsessed, whether they were born with money (Tom, Daisy, Jordan, and Nick to a lesser extent), whether they made a fortune (Gatsby), or whether they're eager for more (Myrtle and George). So why are the characters so materialistic? How does their materialism affect their choices? Get a guide to each of the characters' material motivations and how they shape the novel.Society and Class: Building on the money and materialism theme, the novel draws clear distinctions between the kind of money you have: old money (inherited) or new money (earned). And there is also a clear difference between the lifestyles of the wealthy, who live on Long Island and commute freely to Manhattan, and the working class people stuck in between, mired in Queens. By the end of the novel, our main characters who are not old money (Gatsby, Myrtle, and George) are all dead, while the inherited-money club is still alive. What does this say about class in Gatsby? Why is their society so rigidly classist? Learn more about the various social classes in Gatsby and how they affect the novel's outcome.The American Dream: The American Dream is the idea anyone can make it in America (e.g. gain fame, fortune, and success) through enough hard work and determination. So is Jay Gatsby an example of the dream? Or does his involvement in crime suggest the Dream isn't actually real? And where does this leave the Wilsons, who are also eager to improve their lot in life but don't make it out of the novel alive? Finally, do the closing pages of the novel endorse the American Dream or write it off as a fantasy? Learn what the American Dream is and how the novel sometimes believes in it, and sometimes sees it as a reckless fantasy.Love, Desire, and Relationships: All of the major characters are driven by love, desire, or both, but only Tom and Daisy's marriage lasts out of the novel's five major relationships and affairs. So is love an inherently unstable force? Or do the characters just experience it in the wrong way? Get an in-depth guide to each of Gatsby's major relationships.Death and Failure: Nick narrates Gatsby two years after the events in question, and since he's obviously aware of the tragedy awaiting not only Gatsby but Myrtle and George as well, the novel has a sad, reflective, even mournful tone. Is the novel saying that ambition is inherently dangerous (especially in a classist society like 1920s America), or is it more concerned with the danger of Gatsby's intense desire to reclaim the past? Explore those questions here.Morality and Ethics: The novel is full of bad behavior: lying, cheating, physical abuse, crime, and finally murder. Yet none of the characters ever answer to the law, and God is only mentioned as an exclamation, or briefly projected onto an advertisement. Does the novel push for the need to fix this lack of morality, or does it accept it as the normal state of affairs in the "wild, wild East"?The Mutability of Identity: Mutability just means "subject to change," so this theme is about how changeable (or not!) personal identity is. Do people really change? Or are our past selves always with us? And how would this shape our desire to reclaim parts of our past? Gatsby wants to have it both ways: to change himself from James Gatz into the sophisticated, wealthy Jay Gatsby, but also to preserve his past with Daisy. Does he fail because it's impossible to change? Because it's impossible to repeat the past? Or both? How to Write About The Great Gatsby ThemesSo now that you know about the major themes of The Great Gatsby, how can you go about writing about them? First up: look closely at your prompt.Sometimes an essay prompt will come right out and ask you to write about a theme, for example "is The American Dream in Gatsby alive or dead?" or "Write about the relationships in Gatsby. What is the novel saying about the nature of love and desire?" For those essays, you will obviously be writing about one of the novel's major themes. But even though those prompts have big-picture questions, make sure to find small supporting details to help make your argument. In the same way a tree would look really silly if it was just a trunk with no branches and leaves, your essay won't be that great without smaller details to support the larger argument about the theme. For example, if you're discussing the American Dream and arguing it's dead in the novel, don't just make that claim and be done with it. Instead, you can explore Gatsby's past as James Gatz, George Wilson's exhausted complacency, and Myrtle's treatment at the hands of Tom as examples of how the American Dream is treated in the novel. Obviously those examples are far from exhaustive, but hopefully you get the idea: find smaller details to support the larger argument.On the other hand, many essay prompts about Gatsby will look like a question about something specific, like a character or symbol:Explore Tom and Daisy as people who 'retreat into their money.'What does the green light at the end of Daisy's dock represent? How does its meaning change throughout the novel?Show how Fitzgerald uses clothing (and the changing of costumes) to tell the reader more about the characters and/or express theme(s).These prompts are actually a chance for you to take that detailed analysis and connect it to one of the larger themesin other words, even though the prompt doesn't state it explicitly, you should still be connecting those more focused topics to one of the big-picture themes.For example, if you talk about Tom and Daisy Buchanan, you will definitely end up talking about society and class. If you talk about the green light, you will end up talking about dreams and goals, specifically the American Dream. And if you discuss clothing to talk about the characters, you will definitely touch on money and materialism, as well as society and class (like how Gatsby's pink suit makes him stand out as new money to Tom Buchanan, or how Myrtle adopts a different dress to play at being wealthy and sophisticated).In short, for these more specific prompts, you start from the ground (small details and observations) and build up to discussing the larger themes, even if the prompt doesn't say to do so explicitly! What's Next?Now you're an expert on themes, but what about symbols? If you need to write about the important symbols in The Great Gatsby, check out our symbols overview for a complete guide.Want a full analysis of Jay Gatsby and his backstory? Not sure how his story connects with the American Dream? Get the details here.Want to go back to square one? Get started with Chapter 1 of our Great Gatsby plot summary. Article written by Emma Baldwin B.A. in English, B.F.A. in Fine Art, and B.A. in Art Histories from East Carolina University. The Great Gatsby follows Nick Carraway, who meets the mysterious multimillionaire Jay Gatsby after moving to New York. He gets wrapped up in Gatsbys dreams and his cousins difficult marriage while learning about the pitfalls of wealth and the truth of the American dream. Themes The Great Gatsby is more than a tale of wealth and glamour; its a study of dreams lost and identities shaped by a world that prizes illusion over reality. Through the themes explored in the story, Fitzgerald shows how far people will go to chase what they can never truly have. Wealth Wealth is one of the most important themes Fitzgeralds characters contend with within The Great Gatsby. Specifically, he draws a contrast between the aristocracy, those with old money like Daisy and Tom, and those with new money, like Gatsby. They live different lives and consider one another in different lights. But, both types of wealth corrupt in the same way. As the money amasses, their consideration of other people decreases. Fitzgerald provides a great example at the end of the novel when Daisy and Tom move away to a new home rather than attend Gatsbys funeral or deal with the consequences. Instead, they use their money to keep others at a distance and get whatever they want out of life. The American Dream This theme is central to Gatsbys understanding of the world and Nicks judgments about the future at the end of the novel. It is a set of ideas suggesting that anyone who works hard can succeed in the United States. Gatsby rose from poverty up to the level of a multi-millionaire. But, when it came to what he wanted in life, he failed. He spent his whole life thinking that if he just made enough money, hed be able to convince Daisy to love him and have everything he wanted. But, he couldnt retrieve his relationship with Daisy, and his pursuit of it led to his death. Love/ Relationships There are a few depictions of love and relationships in The Great Gatsby, and none are ideal. There is Gatsbys unending love for Daisy, Georges love for his wife, Myrtle, Tom and Daisys relationship, and Nicks relationship with Jordan. Gatsbys goal to bring Daisy back into his life is built on an idealized image of the latter, which fails to fulfill itself in reality. Gatsby loves the idea of Daisy and thought of possessing her more than he does the person. The same can be said of Toms consideration for his wife. He wants to keep her as a commodity and as a symbol of his status. But he doesnt love her. He continually cheats on her and doesnt attempt to hide it. Nicks fleeting relationship with Jordan is emotionally distant. There isnt enough emotion on either side for it to be anything other than a passing distraction. Loss of Idealism In The Great Gatsby, Fitzgerald paints a picture of loss, but its not just the loss of things you can hold in your hands. Its the loss of dreams, the loss of that bright, shining idealism that once made life seem so full of promise. Gatsby himself is a man who builds his whole life around one dreamDaisy. But that dream crumbles. The green light across the bay, so close and yet always out of reach. Gatsbys unchecked pursuit of Daisy, the woman he believes represents his perfect future, is rooted in an illusiona vision of the past that can never be reclaimed, that probably never was. He chases that version of Daisy, clinging to a youthful belief that the world can be molded to fit his desires. The story peels back the layers of Gatsbys dream, revealing the harsh truth: idealism, unchecked by reality, fades into disillusionment. Through Gatsbys tragic fall, Fitzgerald captures the fragility of dreams, and the loss that comes when they collide with the world as it is. Identity and Self-Perception Identity is a significant theme in the novel; who we are, or at least who we think we are. In Gatsbys case, its all a performance. He creates this personathis larger-than-life millionaire throwing lavish parties, hiding behind wealth to cover the truth. But underneath all that glitter, Gatsby is just James Gatz from North Dakota. And the tragedy is, he believes in the man hes made up. Its not just Gatsby. Each character grapples with identity and self-perception. Tom plays the powerful, indifferent man, but hes afraid of losing control. Daisy flits between her roles as lover and wife, never fully herself. Even Nick, the quiet observer, questions who he is by the end. They all wear masks, fitting themselves into roles they think they need to play, but none find true satisfaction. Key Moments Nick Moves to West Egg: Nicks journey begins with a move to West Egg. Hes come to make his way in the world but is surrounded by wealthtoo much of itthe kind that overwhelms and blinds. His modest background sticks out against the mansions and parties. This move sets him up as the observer of a world he will never truly belong to, a world of glitz and glamor. Nick Meets Gatsby and Learns About His Love for Daisy: Meeting the great Gatsby is something else. Theres a mystery about him, a sense that hes chasing something out of reach. Then, it all comes outhis love for Daisy. That love explains everything to Nick: the mansion, the parties, the way hes built his whole life around a dream. But its a dream that might already be gone. Nick sees it, even if Gatsby doesnt. Nick Helps Reunite the Two: Nick arranges the reunion, and its awkward from the start. In his small cottage, Gatsby and Daisy try to pick up pieces of a past that never existed. For Gatsby, this is everything. For Daisy, its more complicated. As Nick watches them, he feels the weight of itGatsbys dream is too perfect, too fragile. Tom and Gatsbys Confrontation: When Tom and Gatsby finally face off, its like two worlds colliding. Tom attacks Gatsby, cutting into his past, money, and identity. Gatsby tries to hold his ground, claiming Daisy loves him, but Toms grip on Daisy is firmer than Gatsby wants to believe. Gatsbys dream, which hes built everything around, is slipping away, and everyone can feel it. Daisy Hits Toms Mistress, Myrtle, with Gatsbys Car: One reckless night changes everything. Daisy, behind the wheel of Gatsbys car, hits Myrtle, and shes killed instantly. This isnt just an accident; it is the critical moment that shatters every hope of Gatsbys dream. Gatsby takes the blame in the false hope that Daisy will leave Tom for him. Myrtles death also critiques the recklessness of the wealthy and the consequences of their actions. George Shoots Gatsby and Then Shoots Himself: Tom implies to Myrtles husband, George, that Gatsby is responsible for her death. George goes to Gatsbys mansion and shoots him in a fit of rage and grief. Then, he turns the gun on himself. Gatsbys death is symbolic of the death of the American Dream, and the emptiness of the world Gatsby tried to conquer. Nick Attends Gatsbys Small Funeral While Daisy and Tom Move Away: At Gatsbys funeral, almost no one shows up. All those people who flocked to his parties? Gone. Nick is left standing there, realizing how hollow Gatsbys world was. Meanwhile, Daisy and Tom quietly leave as if nothing ever happened. They move on, untouched by the destruction theyve left behind, and Nick sees them for what they arecareless, selfish, unreachable. Nick Returns to Minnesota Disgusted with What Hes Seen of the Upper Classes: In the end, Nick packs up and leaves. Hes seen and learned too much about wealth and privilege. Members of the upper class, with their money and power, arent what they seem. Theyre empty, dangerous even. Nick returns to Minnesota, disillusioned, leaving behind the glittering world that turned out to be a lie. Writing Style, Tone, and Figurative Language F. Scott Fitzgeralds style in The Great Gatsby is a blend of lyrical elegance and sharp precision. He writes with a fluidity that lets the story drift like a dream, yet every sentence has a purpose. The beauty of his prose lies in its balance. At times, Fitzgerald is poetic, painting vivid pictures with his words. Take, for example, his description of Gatsbys mansion: It was a factual imitation of some Htel de Ville in Normandy, with a tower on one side, spanking new under a thin beard of raw ivy. Here, the words create an image both grand and artificial, mirroring Gatsbys own life. But just as often, Fitzgerald cuts through the illusion with pointed observations. He uses Nicks voice to guide us, offering reflections that are sharp, almost cynical. Fitzgeralds style dances between lush descriptions and biting insights, giving us a sense of beauty wrapped around the hollow core of the world hes describing. The tone of The Great Gatsby is one of both awe and disillusionment. Nick, the narrator, is mesmerized by Gatsbys charm and the glamour of the wealthy. But as the novel progresses, his admiration sours into disappointment. The tone shifts from one of fascination to one of quiet judgment. Nick becomes more critical, especially toward the characters who are careless with other peoples lives. When he says, They were careless people, Tom and Daisythey smashed up things and creatures and then retreated back into their money or their vast carelessness, or whatever it was that kept them together, the tone is clear: theres bitterness, almost a moral anger in his words. Gatsbys world, which once glittered with promise, now feels cold, empty. The tone reflects Nicks journey from wonder to wariness, and ultimately, to disgust with the world he once thought he could understand. Fitzgerald uses figurative language extensively. One of his favorite techniques is symbolism. The green light at the end of Daisys dock is perhaps the most famous symbol in the book, representing Gatsbys unreachable dreams. Metaphors and similes also run through the text, painting vivid emotional landscapes. When Fitzgerald writes, Gatsby believed in the green light, the orgastic future that year by year recedes before us, hes not just talking about a light on a dockhes talking about the universal human longing for something beyond our grasp. Another example is his description of Tom and Daisys house, where the lawn started at the beach and ran toward the front door for a quarter of a mile, jumping over sundials and brick walls and burning gardens. The metaphor hereof a lawn leaping over barriersgives life to the setting, emphasizing its fantastical, almost surreal quality. Symbols In The Great Gatsby, symbols work like brushstrokes, each adding depth to the picture Fitzgerald paints of the world. These symbols add layers to Fitzgeralds novel; theyre subtle, but powerful, and each one speaks to something larger than itself. Colors Colors stand out, and are used for symbolic effect in The Great Gatsby. Fitzgerald uses them to express mood and character. Green is hope, the future Gatsby yearns for. Yellow is wealth, but also decay, like the yellow car that brings death. White, often tied to Daisy, suggests purity at first glance, but in the end, its more like a mask, a representation of Daisys hollowness. Blue, like Gatsbys lawn, is lonely and sad. The Green Light The green light is perhaps the most important symbol in The Great Gatsby. It sits at the end of Daisys dock, and Nick catches Gatsby staring at it towards the novels beginning. Its always there, just out of Gatsbys reach, a reminder of the future he longs for but can never quite grasp. Its hope, ambition, and ultimately, the unattainable. It keeps pulling Gatsby forward, even though what hes chasing is already lost. The Eyes of Doctor T. J. Eckleburg Doctor T. J. Eckleburgs eyes are another prominent symbol in the novel. They are a pair of eyes on a faint billboard over the Valley of Ashes. They loom over the Valley of Ashes, watching everything. Some say theyre the eyes of God, looking down on the moral decay of the world below. Others see them as a symbol of the empty promises of the American Dreamnothing more than a faded billboard, staring blankly at the ruin that surrounds it. The Valley of Ashes The Valley of Ashes contrasts the glittering world of East and West Egg. Its where dreams go to die, a wasteland where the poor labor, crushed under the weight of others wealth. Fitzgerald uses this desolate landscape to remind us of the divide between rich and poor, the forgotten space where all that glitters turns to dust. Gatsbys Car Gatsbys car is flashy, over-the-top, and it stands outjust like Gatsby himself. Its a symbol of his wealth and his desire to show off what hes become. But its also tied to destruction. Its in this car that Daisy kills Myrtle, and it becomes a symbol of the recklessness that wealth can bring. Personal Perspective Reading The Great Gatsby is like stepping into a vivid dream that unravels into a haunting reality. Fitzgerald opens a window into the glittering yet hollow world of the Roaring Twenties. Youll find yourself immersed in the lives of characters who chase after impossible dreams, their hopes shining as brightly as the green light across the bay. But beneath that glamour lies a deep sense of yearning and disillusionment. Its themes and symbols pull you deeper into a world that reflects our own modern struggles and aspirations. The book explores love, ambition, and the ache of unfulfilled dreams, so deeply resonant in our own world of Bitcoin, Iphones and superconductors! Join Book Analysis for Free! Exclusive to Members Get access now Home F. Scott Fitzgerald The Great Gatsby Themes and Analysis B.A. in English, B.F.A. in Fine Art, and B.A. in Art Histories from East Carolina University. Emma Baldwin, a graduate of East Carolina University, has a deep-rooted passion for literature. She serves as a key contributor to the Book Analysis team with years of experience. Need to write about a theme for a Great Gatsby assignment or just curious about what exactly a theme is? Not sure where to start? Learn here what a theme is, what the main themes in The Great Gatsby are, and what the best tips for writing about themes for your English/Language Arts class essays are.We will also link to our specific articles on each theme so you can learn even more in-depth about themes central to Gatsby. What Is a Theme? Why Should You Care? First things first: what exactly is a theme? In literature, a theme is a central topic a book deals with. This central topic is revealed through plot events, the actions and dialogue of the characters, and even the narrator's tone. Themes can be very broad, like love, money, or death, or more specific, like people versus technology, racial discrimination, or the American Dream.In short, a book's theme can usually answer the question, "what's the point of this book?". They're the "so what?" of literary analysis. 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Learn what the American Dream is and how the novel sometimes believes in it, and sometimes sees it as a reckless fantasy.Love, Desire, and Relationships: All of the major characters are driven by love, desire, or both, but only Tom and Daisy's marriage lasts out of the novel's five major relationships and affairs. So is love an inherently unstable force? Or do the characters just experience it in the wrong way? Get an in-depth guide to each of Gatsby's major relationships.Death and Failure: Nick narrates Gatsby two years after the events in question, and since he's obviously aware of the tragedy awaiting not only Gatsby but Myrtle and George as well, the novel has a sad, reflective, even mournful tone. Is the novel saying that ambition is inherently dangerous (especially in a classist society like 1920s America), or is it more concerned with the danger of Gatsby's intense desire to reclaim the past? Explore those questions here.Morality and Ethics: The novel is full of bad behavior: lying, cheating, physical abuse, crime, and finally murder. Yet none of the characters ever answer to the law, and God is only mentioned as an exclamation, or briefly projected onto an advertisement. Does the novel push for the need to fix this lack of morality, or does it accept it as the normal state of affairs in the "wild, wild East"?The Mutability of Identity: Mutability just means "subject to change," so this theme is about how changeable (or not!) personal identity is. Do people really change? Or are our past selves always with us? And how would this shape our desire to reclaim parts of our past? Gatsby wants to have it both ways: to change himself from James Gatz into the sophisticated, wealthy Jay Gatsby, but also to preserve his past with Daisy. Does he fail because it's impossible to change? Because it's impossible to repeat the past? Or both? How to Write About The Great Gatsby ThemesSo now that you know about the major themes of The Great Gatsby, how can you go about writing about them? First up: look closely at your prompt.Sometimes an essay prompt will come right out and ask you to write about a theme, for example "is The American Dream in Gatsby alive or dead?" or "Write about the relationships in Gatsby. What is the novel saying about the nature of love and desire?" For those essays, you will obviously be writing about one of the novel's major themes. But even though those prompts have big-picture questions, make sure to find small supporting details to help make your argument. In the same way a tree would look really silly if it was just a trunk with no branches and leaves, your essay won't be that great without smaller details to support the larger argument about the theme. For example, if you're discussing the American Dream and arguing it's dead in the novel, don't just make that claim and be done with it. Instead, you can explore Gatsby's past as James Gatz, George Wilson's exhausted complacency, and Myrtle's treatment at the hands of Tom as examples of how the American Dream is treated in the novel. Obviously those examples are far from exhaustive, but hopefully you get the idea: find smaller details to support the larger argument.On the other hand, many essay prompts about Gatsby will look like a question about something specific, like a character or symbol:Explore Tom and Daisy as people who 'retreat into their money.'What does the green light at the end of Daisy's dock represent? How does its meaning change throughout the novel?Show how Fitzgerald uses clothing (and the changing of costumes) to tell the reader more about the characters and/or express theme(s).These prompts are actually a chance for you to take that detailed analysis and connect it to one of the larger themesin other words, even though the prompt doesn't state it explicitly, you should still be connecting those more focused topics to one of the big-picture themes.For example, if you talk about Tom and Daisy Buchanan, you will definitely end up talking about society and class. If you talk about the green light, you will end up talking about dreams and goals, specifically the American Dream. And if you discuss clothing to talk about the characters, you will definitely touch on money and materialism, as well as society and class (like how Gatsby's pink suit makes him stand out as new money to Tom Buchanan, or how Myrtle adopts a different dress to play at being wealthy and sophisticated).In short, for these more specific prompts, you start from the ground (small details and observations) and build up to discussing the larger themes, even if the prompt doesn't say to do so explicitly! What's Next?Now you're an expert on themes, but what about symbols? If you need to write about the important symbols in The Great Gatsby, check out our symbols overview for a complete guide.Want a full analysis of Jay Gatsby and his backstory? Not sure how his story connects with the American Dream? Get the details here.Want to go back to square one? Get started with Chapter 1 of our Great Gatsby plot summary. The story takes place in New York, with action occurring in the city, and in the fictional suburban neighborhoods of East Egg and West Egg. These neighborhoods represent wealth, with East Egg being the home of families that have been wealthy for generations and West Egg being the home of the newly rich.Between the East and West Egg neighborhoods is the Valley of Ashes, which is where the working class live and work. This is a necessary neighborhood to drive through for the East and West Egg residents to drive into the city.The Valley of Ashes is a dirty neighborhood, polluted by industry in the city. Here, the citizens live while the industrial ashes pollute both their living spaces as well as their hopes and dreams. It is no coincidence that Fitzgerald made the Valley of Ashes a pit-stop for motorists traveling to the city from their homes in the wealthier neighborhoods as wealth plays as a prominent factor in the storys themes. Themes in The Great GatsbyHeres a list of major themes in The Great Gatsby. The Decline of the American Dream.The Moral Emptiness of the Upper Class.Class as a Protective Force.Love and Marriage. Theme of Decline of the American DreamDecline of the American Dream Meaning: Life in the 1920s was exuberant and indulgent. Prohibition made the illegal sale and consumption of liquor unregulated and intense. The nations economy was booming, and many people found themselves experiencing increased wealth.In the novel, Fitzgerald portrays this time of excess and material prosperity as experiencing a co-occurrent decay of social and moral values. The reckless abandon with which the wealthy partied and celebrated their wealth alienated a whole class of people while causing the wealthy to forget their morals in favor of corruption, notoriety, and pleasure.This disillusionment is something that narrator Nick Carraway remarks on throughout the novel. Fitzgerald intentionally created Nick as an open-minded, patient character who is quietly perceptive in order to shed light on the greedy and hypocritical nature of extravagant wealth.Originally, the American Dream was focused on pursuit of happiness, but Fitzgeralds views as portrayed in the novel have shown how money, greed, and relaxed social values have morphed the American Dream into a fight for power and social status.For example, Daisy gets caught up in this new American Dream and betrays her love, who she has promised to wait for while he serves in World War I. Instead, she marries the extremely wealthy Tom Buchanan. Seeing that Daisy is attracted to status and wealth, Gatsby sets his sights on winning Daisy back by becoming that person, losing track of himself and his values along the way. It is hinted at that Gatsby turned to organized crime in order to amass his wealth. So, the question is: was what he had to sacrifice in order to appeal to Daisy worth it? The events of the story say no, as this reckless desire to win back Daisy led to his tragic downfall. Gatsby was not a bad person, but the tainted American Dream destroyed him. The Moral Emptiness of the Upper ClassMorality in The Great Gatsby: A major focus on the novel is the effects that wealth has on people, both collectively and individually. There is a notable distinction in how the newly wealthy behave and are viewed by others from how the old aristocracy conduct themselves. The newly wealthy are portrayed as more brash, vulgar, and ostentatious, without the social charms of refinement. In contrast, the aristocratic wealthy are graceful and elegant, with more subtlety in their behaviors.However, both distinctions of wealth are ultimately viewed as lacking in morals. Whereas the newly wealthy flaunt their success and money with gaudy decorations and elaborate parties, the aristocrats tends to be sneakily cunning and will do anything to avoid conflict by instead retreating to hide behind their money. For example, when Daisy kills Myrtle by driving recklessly, Gatsby takes the fall for her and then dies for it. Daisy almost entirely pretends that nothing ever happened, as she knows that she is safe with Tom and Toms protective money. Class as a Protective ForceTowards the end of the novel, after Gatsby has been killed, Nick observes Daisy and Tom and notices that their interactions seem to be strangely intimate given all that has happened. One would suppose that the events (affairs, accidental deaths, lies, etc.) would have torn them apart, but they are oddly drawn together.Nick notices that they are both incredibly selfish and aloof individuals who are afforded the luxury of pretending that nothing bad in the world can get to them. They are the wealthiest characters in the book, and they are the only ones to escape the tragic events unscathed. Because of their elite economic and social status, Tom and Daisy truly believe that they are immune to the consequences of their greed, deceptions, and disregard for other people. Theme of Love and MarriageJust like the other themes that speak to the moral decay in American society, the themes surrounding love and marriage do so as well. The institution of marriage is tested in the novel.Myrtle Wilson, who is adored and celebrated by her husband, finds him boring and begins an affair with the wealthy and powerful Tom Buchanan. It is likely that she sees Tom as her ticket out of her dull life, which is unfortunately true in a sense.While Tom is having an affair with Myrtle, Daisy seems relatively indifferent and ultimately begins her own affair with Gatsby. As Tom becomes suspicious, he acts jealous and suspicious and begins to behave as if he is in a competition with Gatsby. Ultimately, he knows that his wife is too accustomed to the status and wealth that she has achieved in marrying him and begins to realize that he has the upper hand over Gatsby. Overall, neither Daisy nor Tom seem to have any regard at all for their marriage vows and instead treat the whole thing as a transaction and something that can be won. Ultimately, their refusal to be in touch with the evils of the world and their comfort living behind the veil of their wealth brings them closer together. Fitzgerald seems to portray it more as rottenness attracting rottenness, as the characters who are genuine and kind suffer but are portrayed much more sympathetically. Wealth does not equal happiness or class, as seen with Gatsby and Daisy's love story.The novel shows how love is complicated by social class and is often driven by obsession.Idealism in pursuing the American dream can lead to disappointment, as illustrated by Gatsby's tragic end. The Great Gatsby, by F. Scott Fitzgerald, presents a critical portrait of the American dream through its portrayal of the 1920s New York elite. By exploring The Great Gatsby's themes of wealth, class, love, and idealism, the book raises powerful questions about American ideas and society. The Great Gatsby's characters represent the wealthiest members of 1920s New York society. Despite their money, however, they are not portrayed as particularly aspirational. Instead, the rich characters' negative qualities are put on display: wastefulness, hedonism, and carelessness. The novel also suggests that wealth is not equivalent to social class. Tom Buchanan comes from the old money elite, while Jay Gatsby is a self-made millionaire. Gatsby, self-conscious about his "new money" social status, throws unbelievably lavish parties in hopes of catching Daisy Buchanan's attention. However, at the novel's conclusion, Daisy chooses to stay with Tom despite the fact that she genuinely loves Gatsby; her reasoning is that she could not bear to lose the social status that her marriage to Tom affords her. With this conclusion, Fitzgerald suggests that wealth alone does not guarantee entrance into the upper echelons of elite society. The Great Gatsby theme of love is intrinsically tied to class. As a young military officer, Gatsby fell quickly for debutante Daisy, who promised to wait for him after the war. However, any chance at a real relationship was precluded by Gatsby's lower social status. Instead of waiting for Gatsby, Daisy married Tom Buchanan, an old-money East Coast elite. It is an unhappy marriage of convenience: Tom has affairs and seems just as romantically uninterested in Daisy as she

is in him. The idea of unhappy marriages of convenience isnt limited to the upper class. Toms mistress, Myrtle Wilson, is a spirited woman in a seriously mismatched marriage to a suspicious, dull man. The novel suggests that she married him in hopes of being upwardly mobile, but instead the marriage is simply miserable, and Myrtle herself ends up dead. Indeed, the only unhappy couple to survive "unscathed" is Daisy and Tom, who eventually decide to retreat into the cocoon of wealth despite their marital problems. In general, the novel takes a fairly cynical view of love. Even the central romance between Daisy and Gatsby is less a true love story and more a depiction of Gatsby's obsessive desire to reliveor even redohis own past. He loves the image of Daisy more than the woman in front of him. Romantic love is not a powerful force in the world of The Great Gatsby. The Great Gatsby theme of the loss of idealism is explored by several characters. Jay Gatsby is perhaps one of the most idealistic characters in literature. Nothing can deter him from his belief in the possibility of dreams and romance. In fact, his entire pursuit of wealth and influence is carried out in hopes of making his dreams come true. However, Gatsby's single-minded pursuit of those dreamsparticularly his pursuit of the idealized Daisyis the quality that ultimately destroys him. After Gatsby's death, his funeral is attended by just three guests; the cynical "real world" moves on as though he'd never lived at all. Nick Carraway also represents the failures of idealism through his journey from nave Everyman observer to burgeoning cynic. At first, Nick buys into the plan to reunite Daisy and Gatsby, as he believes in the power of love to conquer class differences. The more involved he becomes in the social world of Gatsby and the Buchanans, however, the more his idealism falters. He begins to see the elite social circle as careless and hurtful. By the end of the novel, when he finds out the role Tom cheerfully played in Gatsbys death, he loses any remaining trace of his idealization of elite society. The American dream posits that anyone, no matter their origins, can work hard and achieve upward mobility in the United States. The Great Gatsby questions this idea through the rise and fall of Jay Gatsby. From the outside, Gatsby appears to be proof of the American dream; he is a man of humble origins who accumulated vast wealth. However, Gatsby is miserable. His life is devoid of meaningful connection. And because of his humble background, he remains an outsider in the eyes of elite society. Monetary gain is possible, Fitzgerald suggests, but class mobility is not so simple, and wealth accumulation does not guarantee a good life. Fitzgerald specifically critiques the American dream within the context of the Roaring Twenties, a time when growing affluence and changing morals led to a culture of materialism. Consequently, the characters of the novel equate the American dream with material goods, despite the fact that the original idea did not have such an explicitly materialistic intent. The Great Gatsby theme suggests that rampant consumerism and the desire to consume has corroded the American social landscape and corrupted one of the country's foundational ideas. close close close close The Great Gatsby themes cover many aspects of life during the Jazz Age, a period when people were driven to find financial success in America. At the same time, they were beginning to realize that this idea was false and that riches dont guarantee happiness. All this is reflected in The Great Gatsby American dream theme, along with other key issues in the novel. We will write a custom essay specifically for you by our professional experts Here, our team will explore every major The Great Gatsby theme: We will discuss each issue as a broader phenomenon, examine its specific role in the novel, and provide relevant quotes. It may seem like this story is all about tragic love, but in The Great Gatsby, the American dream is the central theme. Every scene and every character is connected to the idea of the American dreams corruption. It is not about a better life anymore but about getting richer and richer. The American dream was born when Europeans began to move west to America, seeking a better life. As Nick pictures it in Chapter 9, for the first settlers, it was all about discovery. They wanted freedom, happiness, and equality. However, during the Jazz Age, it turned upside down. Money has become the goal instead of an instrument. After the war, the stock market rocketed up to the point when anyone could become wealthy. That is when the new rich of the 1920s appeared. With time, the greed for money overrode the old dream of free and happy family life. The novel pictures this transition perfectly. Swarms of people moving east to New York represent the American dreams corruption in The Great Gatsby. Nick Carraway can be counted as one of them since he moved to New York City hoping to start a career in the bond business. The minimum time our certified writers need to deliver a 100% original paper Gatsby has already reached success in terms of making money. However, his dream is controversial. He is completely consumed by the materialistic idea of getting as rich as possible, but love for Daisy motivates him. This uncorrupted dream is what makes Gatsby different from other characters who are empty inside. Nevertheless, he is using faulty means to conquer Daisy. Gatsby thinks that money is an easy and fast solution to everything, but that is where he is wrong. Moreover, he connects with the criminals. Initially, hard work and belief were the tools that would lead anyone to the American dream, which is one of the main themes. Gatsby is not the only character in the novel who tries to cheat. Myrtle seems to have fallen for the idea of a wealthy life too. She sees the way to it through Tom Buchanan. At the end of the story, she ends up dead, as well as Gatsby. Their failure symbolizes the danger of taking a shortcut on the way to the American Dream. One of the symbols representing the hopelessness of materialism is the Valley of Ashes. Just like other characters of the novel, people who live there believe that money will make them happy. Fitzgerald hit the nail on the head because if people try to look for the source of abundance outside, it leads them to frustration. If that was true he must have felt that he had lost the old warm world, paid a high price for living too long with a single dream. The Great Gatsby, Nick Carraway, Chapter 8 Jimmy was bound to get ahead. He always had some resolves like this or something. Do you notice what hes got about improving his mind? He was always great for that. The Great Gatsby, Henry C. Gatz, Chapter 9 I thought of Gatsbys wonder when he first picked out the green light at the end of Daisys dock. He had come a long way to this blue lawn and his dream must have seemed so close that he could hardly fail to grasp it. He did not know that it was already behind him, somewhere back in that vast obscurity beyond the city, where the dark fields of the republic rolled on under the night. The Great Gatsby, Nick Carraway, Chapter 9 Women in The Great Gatsby represent the struggle to change the usual perception of gender roles. Each female character in the novel has a different approach to gender inequality at that time. None of them seem to take radical measures, but their behavior is noticeable. Womens rights issue is one of the major themes in The Great Gatsby. The gender roles in The Great Gatsby are represented just according to the way it was at the beginning of the 20th century. Most families, except for old money, follow the unspoken rules. Men work and build careers, while women go out and spend money. Men also show their superiority, often getting physical with their wives. Get your first paper with Learn More In the novel, men are described by their social status and their place of work. However, the role of women in The Great Gatsby comes down to being pretty and obedient wives. It is very well shown by Daisy when she said that the best thing a girl can be in this world is to be a beautiful little fool so that men would use her. Essentially, that is what Daisy does she pretends to be clueless to stay with Tom. Judging by her cynical statements, she seems to be quite intelligent, but she needs to remain submissive to save her status. Betraying Gatsby, she chose to marry Tom, whose stable wealth guarantees a careless life. Unfortunately, it appeared that her husband is a misogynistic, controlling man, for whom women are just possessions. Moreover, he gets physical whenever he feels the urge to show his power. It happened with both Daisy and Myrtle Wilson, his mistress. Now, Daisy is doomed to play the role of a meek wife because it is her choice. Myrtle and Daisy are just common examples of how women had to behave in the 1920s. Unlike Daisy, Jordan chooses not to surrender to life circumstances and represents feminism in The Great Gatsby. She is a new woman, a so-called flapper, which means that she is independent and free to wear bold, colorful make-up and clothing. Jordan has a career, her own point of view, and doesnt seem interested in becoming a mere wife. Moreover, she doesnt limit her choice of partner to males. She challenges patriarchy by taking control of her own life and not depending on men. However, according to Nick, Jordan doesnt possess the level of femininity other ladies in the novel have. He mentions that her body type resembles a manly athlete, even though she is charming. All in all, Jordan Baker is a representative of a feminist movement of the time. All right, I said, Im glad its a girl. And I hope shell be a foolthats the best thing a girl can be in this world, a beautiful little fool. The Great Gatsby, Daisy Buchanan, Chapter 1 She was incurably dishonest Dishonesty in a woman is a thing you never blame deeplyI was casually sorry, and then I forgot. The Great Gatsby, Nick Carraway, Chapter 3 Through this twilight universe Daisy began to move again with the season; suddenly she was again keeping half a dozen dates a day with half a dozen men, and drowsing asleep at dawn with the beads and chiffon of an evening dress tangled among dying orchids on the floor beside her bed. The Great Gatsby, Nick Carraway, Chapter 8 Every character belongs to a specific social class in The Great Gatsby. The differences between the classes are drastic, but they help create a precise image of the 1920s. Fitzgerald also highlights division inside the social classes, which also appears to be a critical theme in The Great Gatsby. There are three social classes in The Great Gatsby: old money, new money, and no money. Although old money and nouveau riche may have the same amount of gold in their banks, they are still distinct. Aristocratic old families from East Egg, represented by the Buchanans, simply cannot accept people who just got rich as not only they lack manners, but they may be a threat. Therefore, the new rich, such as Gatsby, have to stay in West Egg while struggling to make enough connections to be accepted in the elite social class. On the other hand, Myrtle and George Wilson belong to no money the lowest class just like other people living in the Valley of Ashes. We will write a custom essay specifically for you by our professional experts Power and privilege are divided according to social position. It is especially noticeable by the submissive acting of Wilson when Tom comes by his garage. Wilson knows that money equals power, and it is the reason why Myrtle is so eager to get into the elite club. What is more, Myrtles attitude toward her husband brings up a relation between status and love. She mentions that she thought her husband was of better breeding when they met, but he turned out to be poor hence unworthy. And, eventually, Gatsby fails to get Daisy back because it is not the wealth that she is into. Daisy rejects Gatsby due to his social background. Someone who comes from a low-income family is no match for an aristocrat like her. Finally, higher social classes can afford to cover up their missteps, just like it happens with Tom and Daisy. Just like Gatsby, as a very prominent persona, escapes the penalty on the road to New York City, Daisy quickly forgets that she killed a person and simply leaves the city. It is also possible that Tom paid Myrtles sister to stay quiet about his affair since she never dropped a word about it. Not only does Tom feel privileged, but his attitude underlines the issue of racism in The Great Gatsby and the society of the 1920s as a whole. Tom appears to be incredibly racist, and it comes up when he comments on the book called The Rise of the Coloured Empires. He is afraid that the white race will be utterly submerged. Have you read The Rise of the Coloured Empires by this man Goddard?.. Well, its a fine book, and everybody ought to read it. The idea is if we dont look out the white race will bewill be utterly submerged. Its all scientific stuff; its been proved. The Great Gatsby, Tom Buchanan, Chapter 1 Hes an Oggsford man He went to Oggsford College in England. You know Oggsford College?.. Its one of the most famous colleges in the world. The Great Gatsby, Meyer Wolfshiem, Chapter 4 An Oxford man!.. Like hell he is! He wears a pink suit Oxford, New Mexico, or something like that. The Great Gatsby, Tom Buchanan, Chapter 7 The money question also makes it to the list of the major themes in The Great Gatsby. Not only does it include the amount but also the way people get their finances. Essentially, for all the characters in The Great Gatsby, wealth becomes the only goal, and materialism corrupts the American Dream. In The Great Gatsby, materialism takes over peoples minds, and they celebrate nothing else but their ability to get more possessions. Poor characters think that the hunger inside will go away as soon as they get wealthy. But it only takes one glimpse to understand that excessively rich people like Tom stay hollow money doesnt fix it. It all comes down to money in The Great Gatsby. The Roaring Twenties have brought the idea that wealth is universal salvation. Tom keeps a mistress, and Gatsby is trying to get love from Daisy, while she only wants security and status. All of them use money as an instrument to achieve their goals. But it goes further as none of them notices the hollowness of the material side of their lives. Gatsbys flashy parties are one of the symbols of wastefulness and carelessness in the novel. People are trapped in the vicious cycle of consumerism, and they dont see any other aim than just spending money. It underlines the influence of money as the central theme in The Great Gatsby. Also, materialism is tightly connected to the American Dreams corruption since it is easy to quit the dream when there is easy money on the table. For the lower class, money is the same everywhere but not for the elite. Old aristocratic families of East Egg hate on the West Egg newcomers since they got rich just right after the war. These two Long Island areas symbolize the clash of old money vs. new money in The Great Gatsby. The main reason for such a division in the upper class is that aristocrats do not welcome the new rich. The new money vs. old money battle has been going on since the end of the war. Then, people could build up their fortunes thanks to the thriving economy. However, the way from rags to riches does not suggest making social connections. Hence, they have decided to compensate for it with overly ostentatious houses and outfits. Of course, families who have been rich for decades stick to their old traditions, so they only see vulgarity and lack of style in the new money class. But the aristocratic grace and manners appear to be a mask that old money people wear to hide arrogance and hypocrisy. His family were enormously wealthyeven in college his freedom with money was a matter for reproach For instance hed brought down a string of polo ponies from Lake Forest. It was hard to realize that a man in my own generation was wealthy enough to do that. The Great Gatsby, Nick Carraway, Chapter 1 After that I lived like a young rajah in all the capitals of Europe Paris, Venice, Rome collecting jewels, chiefly rubies, hunting big game, painting a little, things for myself only, and trying to forget something very sad that had happened to me long ago. The Great Gatsby, Jay Gatsby, Chapter 4 Her voice is full of money, he said suddenly. That was it. Id never understood before. It was full of moneythat was the inexhaustible charm that rose and fell in it, the jingle of it, the cymbals song of it. High in a white palace the kings daughter, the golden girl The Great Gatsby, Jay Gatsby and Nick Carraway, Chapter 7 Love is the last of the major themes in The Great Gatsby. Fitzgeralds novel is far from an idealized romance, and the awkward attempts of the main characters to have a romantic relationship only point to the instability of love. Even though love is overdriven by wealth in The Great Gatsby, it affects the development of the characters. The two married couples in the novel are definitely an excellent example of corrupted love in The Great Gatsby. Both Daisy and Myrtle got married with the hope of getting a stable budget. However, neither of them experience love and support, which are usually the essentials in every healthy marriage. Myrtles union turned out to be a disappointment since George Wilson lied about his status wearing a borrowed suit for their wedding. Daisy, on the other hand, got what she wanted social status and financial security. Still, she has to obey Tom and suffer from his hypocrisy. It may also refer to another theme of The Great Gatsby wealth and money. Nick tries to pursue a somewhat normal relationship with Jordan. Throughout the novel, there is not much description of the time they spend together. However, according to Nicks feelings, it seems like he is closer to her than anybody else. In the end, Jordan and Nick have quite an unpleasant break-up. During the Jazz Age, people were more likely to have casual relationships for fun rather than looking into love and marriage. It seems like the tender curiosity is the closest that characters can get to real love. Even Gatsbys feelings toward Daisy appear to be just an illusion. He had on a dress suit and patent leather shoes and I couldnt keep my eyes off him but every time he looked at me I had to pretend to be looking at the advertisement over his head I told him Id have to call a policeman, but he knew I lied. I was so excited that when I got into a taxi with him I didnt hardly know I wasnt getting into a subway train. The Great Gatsby, Myrtle Wilson, Chapter 2 I thought Id never seen a girl so mad about her husband. If he left the room for a minute shed look around uneasily and say Wheres Tom gone? and wear the most abstracted expression until she saw him coming in the door. The Great Gatsby, Jordan Baker, Chapter 4 She had told him that she loved him, and Tom Buchanan saw. He was astounded. His mouth opened a little and he looked at Gatsby and then back at Daisy as if he had just recognized her as some one he knew a long time ago. The Great Gatsby, Nick Carraway, Chapter 7 Gatsby and Daisys relationship is the focus of the novel. It all started in Louisville, and they had a beautiful love, which could have lasted forever. Even after being separated for years, Gatsbys love has stayed loyal to Daisy. But she got cold-hearted pretty quickly and chose money over love. Gatsby has gone through a very long and hard way from rags to riches and hasnt forgotten the purpose of this journey. When they finally reunite, it seems like their love has been reborn. Gatsby is glowing with happiness, just like nothing happened, hardly keeping his eyes dry. It must have been the happiest Nick saw him. Daisy, on the other hand, looks quite confused. She might not even remember everything from their little romance in Louisville. A world full of dreams and illusions is where Gatsby lives. For him, everything has finally come back to how it was. A reality check probably wouldnt hurt him. However, Daisy has a real family to attend to. She has a hard time choosing between Tom and Gatsby. Finally, she admits that she also loved Tom and betrays Gatsby once again. The latter, though, refuses to believe that he failed and decides to wait until Daisy changes her mind. But she is quick to erase any memory of him after the accident. Eventually, he would have realized that she could not live up to his expectations, just as Nick has suspected. Gatsby and Daisy used to have a perfect relationship but only for a brief moment. To build a strong union of loving people, they would need to stop looking through rose-colored glasses. Both partners need to see and accept the real identity of their partner. Gatsby, however, has had some surreal expectations towards Daisy. To Gatsby, Daisy represents total perfection an idol of beauty, intelligence, and grace. And even though, in reality, she is far from this image, it is not all he sees in her. Since she was born in a wealthy family, she portrays the golden girl whose appearance radiates extreme wealth. Hence, Gatsby only sees her status in her. He wanted nothing less of Daisy than that she should go to Tom and say: I never loved you. After she had obliterated three years with that sentence they could decide upon the more practical measures to be taken. The Great Gatsby, Nick Carraway, Chapter 6 Gatsby sprang to his feet, vivid with excitement. She never loved you, do you hear? he cried. She only married you because I was poor and she was tired of waiting for me. It was a terrible mistake, but in her heart she never loved any one except me! The Great Gatsby, Jay Gatsby, Chapter 7 I cant describe to you how surprised I was to find out I loved her, old sport. I even hoped for a while that shed throw me over, but she didnt, because she was in love with me too. The Great Gatsby, Jay Gatsby, Chapter 8 Another failed relationship is the union of Daisy and Tom. They have been married for three years and got a house at East Egg. They also have a child together, a lovely little girl named Pammy. According to Jordan, Daisy was even in love with Tom. It may have only been the result of her excitement after the whole three months of honeymoon. However, her feelings faded with all the burdens of family life. Besides, Tom has started cheating as soon as they came back from the honeymoon. It is incredible how Tom and Daisy Buchanan are the only couple that survived throughout the novel. There are so many reasons for them to break it up, but they remain inseparable and even seem to have gotten closer at the end. Daisy loving Gatsby, Tom cheating and abusing her, and the murder of Myrtle were not enough for them to separate. It may not be obvious, but what keeps Daisy and Tom together is their mutual desire to keep the privileges of the upper class. Initially, Tom was approved by Daisys family as a suitable match. Their marriage guarantees the stability of their status. That is why Daisy chose Tom over Gatsby once again. Need to write about a theme for a Great Gatsby assignment or just curious about what exactly a theme is? Not sure where to start? Learn here what a theme is, what the main themes in The Great Gatsby are, and what the best tips for writing about themes for your English/Language Arts class essays are.We will also link to our specific articles on each theme so you can learn even more in-depth about themes central to Gatsby. What Is a Theme? Why Should You Care? First things first: what exactly is a theme? In literature, a theme is a central topic a book deals with. This central topic is revealed through plot events, the actions and dialogue of the characters, and even the narrator's tone. Themes can be very broad, like love, money, or death, or more specific, like people versus technology, racial discrimination, or the American Dream.In short, a book's theme can usually answer the question, "what's the point of this book?". They're the "so what?" of literary analysis. Also, note that books can definitely have more than one major themein Gatsby we identify seven!Knowing a book's major theme(s) is crucial to writing essays, since many assignments want you to connect your argument to a book's theme. For example, you might be asked to write an essay about a prompt like this: "How does the life of Jay Gatsby exemplify (or deconstruct) the idea of the American Dream?" This prompt has you connect specific details in Jay Gatsby's life to the larger theme of the American Dream. This is why many teachers love theme essays: because they encourage you to connect small details to big ideas!Furthermore, the AP English Literature test always has an essay question that has you analyze some aspect of a book and then "compare it to the theme of the work as a whole." (If you want specific examples you can access the last 15 years of AP English Literature free response questions here, using your College Board account.) So this skill won't just help you in your English classes, it will also help you pass the AP English Literature test if you're taking it!So keep reading to learn about the major themes in Gatsby and how they are revealed in the book, and also to get links to our in-depth articles about each theme. Overview of Key Themes in The Great Gatsby Before we introduce our seven main themes, we'll briefly describe how the story and characters suggest the major Great Gatsby themes. Remember that the story is set in the 1920s, a period when America's economy was booming, and takes place in New York: specifically the wealthy Long Island towns of West Egg and East Egg, as well as Manhattan and Queens.As you should know from the book (check out our summary if you're still hazy on the details!), The Great Gatsby tells the story of James Gatz, a poor farm boy who manages to reinvent himself as the fabulously rich Jay Gatsby, only to be killed after an attempt to win over his old love Daisy Buchanan. Daisy is married to Tom Buchanan, and they're both from old money, causing them to look down Gatsby's newly rich crowd (and for Tom to look down at Gatsby himself).Meanwhile, Tom is having an affair with Myrtle Wilson, the wife of mechanic George Wilson. Through the Wilsons, we see the struggles of the working class in dismal Queens, NY. As if they didn't already have it hard enough, Myrtle is killed in a hit-and-run accident (caused by Daisy Buchanan), and George, who's manipulated by Tom to believe that Jay Gatsby was both his wife's lover and her murderer, ends up shooting Gatsby and then himself.The whole story is told by Nick Carraway, a second cousin of Daisy's and classmate of Tom's who moves in next to Gatsby's mansion and eventually befriends Jay -- and then comes to deeply admire him, despite or perhaps because of Jay's fervent desire to repeat his past with Daisy. The tragic chain of events at the novel's climax, along with the fact that both the Buchanans can easily retreat from the damage they caused, causes Nick to become disillusioned with life in New York and retreat back to his hometown in the Midwest. Aside from having a very unhappy ending, the novel might just ruin swimming pools for you as well. The fact that the major characters come from three distinct class backgrounds (working class, newly rich, and old money) suggests that class is a major theme. But the rampant materialism and the sheer amount of money spent by Gatsby himself is a huge issue and its own theme. Related to money and class, the fact that both Gatsby and the Wilsons strive to improve their positions in American society, only to end up dead, also suggests that the American Dream -- and specifically its hollowness -- is a key theme in the book as well.But there are other themes at play here, too. Every major character is involved in at least one romantic relationship, revealing that they are all driven by love, sex, and desire -- a major theme. Also, the rampant bad behavior (crime, cheating, and finally murder) and lack of real justice makes ethics and morality a key theme. Death also looms large over the novel's plot, alongside the threat of failure.And finally, a strong undercurrent to all of these themes is identity itself: can James Gatz really become Jay Gatsby, or was he doomed from the start? Can someone who is not from old money ever blend in with that crowd? Could Gatsby really aspire to repeat his past with Daisy, or is that past self gone forever?In short, just by looking at the novel's plot, characters, and ending, we can already get a strong sense of Gatsby's major themes. Let's now look at each of those themes one by one (and be sure to check out the links to our full theme breakdowns!). The 7 Major Great Gatsby Themes Money and Materialism: Everyone in the novel is money-obsessed, whether they were born with money (Tom, Daisy, Jordan, and Nick to a lesser extent), whether they made a fortune (Gatsby), or whether they're eager for more (Myrtle and George). So why are the characters so materialistic? How does their materialism affect their choices? Get a guide to each of the characters' material motivations and how they shape the novel.Society and Class: Building on the money and materialism theme, the novel draws clear distinctions between the kind of money you have: old money (inherited) or new money (earned). And there is also a clear difference between the lifestyles of the wealthy, who live on Long Island and commute freely to Manhattan, and the working class people stuck in between, mired in Queens. By the end of the novel, our main characters who are not old money (Gatsby, Myrtle, and George) are all dead, while the inherited-money club is still alive. What does this say about class in Gatsby? Why is their society so rigidly classist? Learn more about the various social classes in Gatsby and how they affect the novel's outcome.The American Dream: The American Dream is the idea anyone can make it in America (e.g. gain fame, fortune, and success) through enough hard work and determination. So is Jay Gatsby an example of the dream? Or does his involvement in crime suggest the Dream isn't actually real? And where does this leave the Wilsons, who are also eager to improve their lot in life but don't make it out of the novel alive? Finally, do the closing pages of the novel endorse the American Dream or write it off as a fantasy? Learn what the American Dream is and how the novel sometimes believes in it, and sometimes sees it as a reckless fantasy.Love, Desire, and Relationships: All of the major characters are driven by love, desire, or both, but only Tom and Daisy's marriage lasts out of the novel's five major relationships and affairs. So is love an inherently unstable force? Or do the characters just experience it in the wrong way? Get an in-depth guide to each of Gatsby's major relationships.Death and Failure: Nick narrates Gatsby two years after the events in question, and since he's obviously aware of the tragedy awaiting not only Gatsby but Myrtle and George as well, the novel has a sad, reflective, even mournful tone. Is the novel saying that ambition is inherently dangerous (especially in a classist society like 1920s America), or is it more concerned with the danger of Gatsby's intense desire to reclaim the past? Explore those questions here.Morality and Ethics: The novel is full of bad behavior: lying, cheating, physical abuse, crime, and finally murder. Yet none of the characters ever answer to the law, and God is only mentioned as an exclamation, or briefly projected onto an advertisement. Does the novel push for the need to fix this lack of morality, or does it accept it as the normal state of affairs in the "wild, wild East"?The Mutability of Identity: Mutability just means "subject to change," so this theme is about how changeable (or not!) personal identity is. Do people really change? Or are our past selves always with us? And how would this shape our desire to reclaim parts of our past? Gatsby wants to have it both ways: to change himself from James Gatz into the sophisticated, wealthy Jay Gatsby, but also to preserve his past with Daisy. Does he fail because it's impossible to change? Because it's impossible to repeat the past? Or both? How to Write About The Great Gatsby ThemesSo now that you know about the major themes of The Great Gatsby, how can you go about writing about them? First up: look closely at your prompt.Sometimes an essay prompt will come right out and ask you to write about a theme, for example "is The American Dream in Gatsby alive or dead?" or "Write about the relationships in Gatsby. What is the novel saying about the nature of love and desire?" For those essays, you will obviously be writing about one of the novel's major themes. But even though those prompts have big-picture questions, make sure to find small supporting details to help make your argument. In the same way a tree would look really silly if it was just a trunk with no branches and leaves, your essay won't be that great without smaller details to support the larger argument about the theme. For example, if you're discussing the American Dream and arguing it's dead in the novel, don't just make that claim and be done with it. Instead, you can explore Gatsby's past as James Gatz, George Wilson's exhausted complacency, and Myrtle's treatment at the hands of Tom as examples of how the American Dream is treated in the novel. Obviously those examples are far from exhaustive, but hopefully you get the idea: find smaller details to support the larger argument.On the other hand, many essay prompts about Gatsby will look like a question about something specific, like a character or symbol:Explore Tom and Daisy as people who 'retreat into their money.'What does the green light at the end of Daisy's dock represent? How does its meaning change throughout the novel?Show how Fitzgerald uses clothing (and the changing of costumes) to tell the reader more about the characters and/or express theme(s).These prompts are actually a chance for you to take that detailed analysis and connect it to one of the larger themesin other words, even though the prompt doesn't state it explicitly, you should still be connecting those more focused topics to one of the big-picture themes.For example, if you talk about Tom and Daisy Buchanan, you will definitely end up talking about society and class. If you talk about the green light, you will end up talking about dreams and goals, specifically the American Dream. And if you discuss clothing to talk about the characters, you will definitely touch on money and materialism, as well as society and class (like how Gatsby's pink suit makes him stand out as new money to Tom Buchanan, or how Myrtle adopts a different dress to play at being wealthy and sophisticated).In short, for these more specific prompts, you start from the ground (small details and observations) and build up to discussing the larger themes, even if the prompt doesn't say to do so explicitly! What's Next?Now you're an expert on themes, but what about symbols? If you need to write about the important symbols in The Great Gatsby, check out our symbols overview for a complete guide.Want a full analysis of Jay Gatsby and his backstory? Not sure how his story connects with the American Dream? Get the details here.Want to go back to square one? Get started with Chapter 1 of our Great Gatsby plot summary. A perennial presence on the AP Lit Reading List, the themes at the heart of F. Scott Fitzgeralds The Great Gatsby greed, love, violence, and the American Dream are as compelling as when the novel was published in 1925. While theres no doubt that The Great Gatsby is a classic of American literature, it can be difficult for the casual reader to make sense of the text. In this article, well be looking at Great Gatsby themes, plot, and analysis.Also check out: In this article, were going to talk about some of the major themes in The Great Gatsby. Maybe youre here because your teacher has asked you to write a paper on the themes in Gatsby, or maybe youve just watched Baz Luhrmanns 2013 version starring Leonardo DiCaprio and want to know a little more about the book that inspired it. Maybe you just keep hearing how important The Great Gatsby is and you want to know what the big deal is. Whatever your reason, in this article well be talking about the themes in Gatsby. Well also be thinking about how those themes are presented in the book. (If youre interested in learning more about how literature holds up a mirror to society, check out this list of best colleges to study English.)Whats the difference between plot and theme?On the one hand plot. Its what actually happens in the book. First things first we need to make sure that we understand the difference between plot and theme. The plot is the stuff that actually happens the who, the what, the where. Most of you know the plot of The Great Gatsby, but its worth a quick review. Set in New York City, Long Island, and Queens, The Great Gatsby takes place in 1922, just four years after the end of WWI. The narrator of Gatsby is Nick Carraway, a 29-year-old veteran who has just come east to make his fortune in bonds. Upon his arrival in New York, Nick ends up renting a house on Long Island next a the mansion owned by Jay Gatsby, a mysterious millionaire.When Nick and Gatsby finally meet, we find out that Gatsby is in love with Nicks cousin, Daisy. Unfortunately for Gatsby, Daisy is married to Tom Buchanan. Tom is a brute of a man and a serial philanderer whose current mistress is Myrtle Wilson. Gatsby eventually confesses his love to Daisy (in front of Tom) drama ensues. While driving back to Long Island with Gatsby, Daisy accidentally runs over Myrtle, Toms mistress. In the confusion that follows the accident, Tom lets Myrtles husband George think that it was Gatsby who ran over Myrtle. Distraught, George goes to Gatsbys house, shoots him in his pool, and then kills himself. Gatsbys funeral is attended only by Nick, Gatsbys father, Gatsbys servants, and Owl-eyes (a guest that Nick met at one of Gatsbys parties). Whew!The Great Gatsby Themes (Continued)On the other hand themes. Its why the plot matters.On the other hand, when we talk about themes, were talking about the big issues the text is dealing with. These are often the big-idea words you associate with art or literature good vs. evil, love, nature, or death. Thinking about the themes in a book can help us break the text into manageable parts that we can discuss and analyze. So, for example, some of the themes in the novel could be greed, or wealth, or love.Lets look at a specific example from The Great Gatsby to see how we can move from plot to theme. When we first meet Jay Gatsby, we know him only as a mysterious millionaire who throws elaborate parties at his mansion on Long Island. However, we find out later in the book that Gatsby has misrepresented his past. His actual name is Jay Gatz and he was born to poor farmers in North Dakota. In other words, Gatsby begins his life poor and ends up a millionaire. [Spoiler alert: Gatsbys sole motivation for making money is to try to win back Daisys love.] Considering Gatsbys rags-to-riches story, its clear that one of the main themes of The Great Gatsby is class. That is, the material circumstances were born into (and whether we can escape these origins).Once youve identified a theme, you can start to think about other moments in the text that have that theme in common. For example, you might think about how different social classes are presented in the book. Who is rich and who is poor? How did they become rich? How did they become poor? In what ways are they described? How do they interact? What options are available to them? Which privileges? What does Gatsby say about the American Dream? Now that we know what a theme is, lets look more closely at some of the themes in The Great Gatsby.The American Dream What is it and did Gatsby achieve it?What is the American Dream?Few terms are tossed around more casually than the American Dream. First, lets make sure we understand what we mean when we use this term. In the book that popularized the term, The Epic of America, James Truslow Adams describes the American Dream as a society in which each man and each woman shall be able to attain to the fullest stature of which they are innately capableregardless of the fortuitous circumstances of birth or position. In other words, Adams imagines a society where peoples futures arent defined by how much money their family has or what class they are.Has Gatsby really made it?Its clear that this theme is present in The Great Gatsby. Jay Gatsby seems like the ultimate success story for the American Dream. He comes from nothing his parents were poor farmers and ends up a party-throwing millionaire. On the other hand [spoiler alert], at the end of the book, Jay Gatsby gets shot and killed in his pool by a disgruntled mechanic named George Wilson, so there are clearly some downsides to Gatsbys success.The Great Gatsby Themes (Continued)Besides Gatsbys violent death, there are other things in the book that suggest that it might be criticizing the American Dream. While Jay Gatsby is a millionaire, he is decidedly nouveau riche. In other words, he lacks the generational wealth of such old-money families like Daisy and Tom Buchanan. Gatsby is never accepted as a real member of the upper class precisely because he made his own fortune. The book suggests that even if you make millions of dollars, you cant ever escape your origins.What is also interesting is how James Truslow Adams definition of the American Dream is actually at odds with the spectacular wealth of the characters in The Great Gatsby. For Adams, the American Dream is less about money and more about each individuals search for the abiding values of life. Gatsbys accumulation of wealth isnt about values or morals (its implied hes made his millions illicitly). Rather, Gatsbys millions are in service to his obsession with Daisy Buchanan. Similarly, the old-money wealth of Tom and Daisy Buchanan is a thin veneer that covers their otherwise shallow, bored lives.So while one of the themes of The Great Gatsby is the American Dream, we shouldnt stop there. Its more accurate to say that Gatsby criticizes the materialism that has replaced the American Dream.Social Class Is rags-to-riches really possible?In contrast to the implied mobility of the American Dream, the novel suggests that class is permanent and unchangeable. As we discussed above, Gatsy never really makes it into the upper class. No matter how many millions he makes, he will always remain a poor farmers son. Conversely, nothing can change the fortunes of those born into wealth. Regardless of their behavior and choices, they will remain unaffected.We can see this in Gatsbys portrayal of Tom and Daisy Buchanan. Tom and Daisy Buchanan are described as callous, destructive people whose money insulates them from the consequences of their actions. Though Toms mistress is run over by a car driven by Daisy, Tom and Daisy face no consequences. Nick Carraway, the narrator of the novel, describes Tom and Daisy in this way: They were careless peoplethey smashed up things and creatures and then retreated back into their money or their vast carelessness, or whatever it was that kept them together, and let other people clean up the mess they had made In other words, Tom and Daisy are protected by virtue of their class. However ugly their actions, they will stay rich and careless. (All my quotes are from Project Gutenbergs ebook of The Great Gatsby.)The Great Gatsby Themes (Continued)In The Great Gatsby, the poor are similarly stuck. Though Myrtle Wilson has access to some luxuries as Tom Buchanans mistress, she and her husband George can never escape their material conditions in the Valley of Ashes. George wants to move to the West. However, the text suggests that he will forever be tied to the garage he owns. What is particularly interesting in the book is how the different classes interact. As we mentioned above, when Tom Buchanan learns of Myrtles death, he lets her husband George believe that it was Gatsby who ran her down. This accomplishes two main things:1) it punishes Gatsby for his nouveau riche presumptuousness.2) sets George on his despairing path to suicide. Ultimately, The Great Gatsby portrays a static class-based hierarchy in the service of the generational wealth. Whatever Toms feelings for his mistress Myrtle Wilson, ultimately, his loyalty is to the (classist) status quo.Personal Agency Does an individual have any power?The fact that social class is so rigid in the novel should make the reader wonder if people have any ability to change their circumstances. A useful term that describes someones ability to affect their life and circumstances is personal agency. Even though he failed in the end, the book clearly portrays Gatsby as someone who believes in his ability to shape his own life and destiny.Theres a particularly poignant moment after Gatsbys death that shows how driven he was. Nick is talking to Gatsbys father when the latter pulls out a book that belonged to a 16-year-old Jay Jimmy Gatz. On the last flyleaf of the book is Jays schedule for September 12, 1906 and a list of his General Resolves. With the sad pride of a father morning his son, Mr. Gatz remarks that Jimmy was bound to get ahead. He always had some resolves like this or something. What is interesting in this moment is the contrast between Gatsbys failure [no Daisy, shot in his pool] and his fathers enduring belief in Jimmys drive and ambition.The Great Gatsby Themes (Continued)This isnt the only time Gatsbys belief in his own personal agency is crushed by reality. As mentioned above, the sole reason Gatsby amasses his fortune is to get Daisy back. To understand why he does this, we have to know the backstory between Daisy and Gatsby. Gatsby met Daisy right before he was sent to Europe to fight. While Gatsby didnt exactly lie about his modest origins, he wasnt exactly truthful. Unfortunately, by the time Gatsby makes it back from the war, Daisy has married the very wealthy Tom Buchanan. Faced with this situation, Gatsby tries to recreate himself as the wealthy suitor he claimed to be. Indeed, when Gatsby talks to Nick about his time with Daisy, he has a monomaniacal desire to remake the present. He states, Im going to fix everything just the way it was before, he said, nodding determinedly. Shell see.Whats the deal with that last scene? Nick Carraway and Time in The Great GatsbyIn what is one of the most beautifully written scenes in the novel, Nick Carraway returns to Gatsbys now abandoned house after the funeral. There are three parts to this scene. Each builds on the previous until we reach the famous final line So we beat on, boats against the current, borne back ceaselessly into the past.First, Nick thinks about what Long Island must have looked like to the first European settlers. He imagines the American continent providing, for the last time in historysomething commensurate to his capacity for wonder. Nick then compares this originary wonder to Gatsbys wonder when he first picked out the green light at the end of Daisys dock. What is important to note here is that Gatsbys wonder can only ever be an imitation of the original wonder felt by the first European settlers. Indeed, Nick notes that while [Gatsbys] dream must have seemed so close that he could hardly fail to grasp it, in reality, it was already behind him, somewherewhere the dark fields of the republic rolled on under the night.The Great Gatsby Themes (Continued)Its important to notice the temporal and geographical distance between Gatsby and his dream. Remember that Gatsbys met and fell in love with Daisy five years previous in Louisville, Kentucky. In other words, Gatsbys dream his courtship of Daisy will forever remain behind him, in the past and in the West. Thus, for Nick, the orgastic future that year by year receded before us can only ever be the ersatz phantoms of our past desires.Additional ResourcesIf you enjoyed this article, you may benefit from checking out other blogs in our High School Success section including:

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