

Studying

THE GREAT GATSBY



TOP TIP

1

Be committed!

Immersing yourself, from the off, in the chaotic, bustling and often glamorous world of Jay Gatsby, Daisy Buchanan and Nick Carraway is the best way to do yourself and the text justice.

Start getting to grips with the text early-on – there is

no **substitute** for knowing the storyline, the characters and the themes inside out.



TOP TIP

2

Get organised!

Be organised and give yourself the best chance of fulfilling your potential, especially when it comes to essay writing.

Practise as much as you can to perfect your **style** and consolidate all that you learn.

Get our **Online guide** to access the **Essay wizard** and **Essay plan** resources in the **Revise** section – these are written by experts and will help you to **structure** and **write** high-quality essays.

TOP TIP

3

Embed your quotations

A sign of a well-written and considered response is the use of **embedded quotations**. By incorporating key **words** and **phrases** into your paragraph without disrupting the flow of your argument, you will demonstrate **clarity of thought** and **creative flair**.

You don't need to quote at great length: embedded quotations can be **short, specific** and **easy to remember**.

Try and master this skill early in your course so that by the exam period it is second nature!



TOP TIP

4

Be brave and back up your opinions!

Ensure you really **engage** with the essay title – don't be afraid to disagree with what is being suggested! If in doubt, break the title down and **always back up** your ideas with **textual references**.

A good essay will argue convincingly by applying a solid **knowledge** of the text, using **appropriate terminology** and **embedded quotations**. For example, if you think that Gatsby is a victim of his idealism, rather than his idealism oppressing other characters, namely Daisy, where in the text can you find evidence to **support** this?

REMEMBER: **Always** keep the **essay title** in mind! After each paragraph, ask yourself, 'Does this answer the question?'

TOP TIP

5

Understand structure, form and language

Familiarise yourself with the specific techniques used by Fitzgerald with regards to **structure**, **form** and **language**, and their **effect**. For example:

- ✓ Can you explain the effect of the **metaphors** in the novel?
- ✓ What about the effect of a **first-person narrator**?
- ✓ Does Fitzgerald ever 'vary' Nick's voice? If so, how?
- ✓ How is the way in which Jay Gatsby is presented linked to the **structure** of the novel?
- ✓ Look at **cinematic techniques** Fitzgerald uses. How are these reflected in the **form** of the novel? Do they also tell us something about the **historical context**?

REMEMBER: By asking yourself the simple questions, **how?** and **why?**, you can start to reveal the **mechanics** behind Fitzgerald's writing.

TOP TIP

6

Intricate patterning

There are many instances in *The Great Gatsby* where certain words, images or events are repeated and **foreshadow** later events or outcomes. You need to be a bit like a **detective** when trying to identify these – like Nick Carraway, who is on a mission to decipher the real Gatsby. Ask yourself:

- ✓ What is the effect of this **foreshadowing**?
- ✓ How do the **shifting contexts** in which the repeated **words** appear reinforce some of the **themes**? For example, the word 'white' and the theme of 'disillusionment'?

By identifying these **patterns** through **specific examples**, you will show how you come to conclusions through **close textual analysis**. This is key to a **sophisticated, focused** and **considered** response.



TOP TIP

7

Engage with the critics!

Look at what other people are saying/have said about *The Great Gatsby*, i.e. get familiar with **literary criticism**.

As a starting point, familiarise yourself with some of the most well-known schools of thought, such as **Marxist**, **Feminist**, and **Psychoanalytic** criticism.

Before you look at how these have been applied to *The Great Gatsby*, get to grips with their principal beliefs and concerns. Try using the **Critical wheel** in the **Online guide** to help you. You will then be in a great position to apply these theories to *The Great Gatsby*.

For example, a Marxist literary critic may focus upon the lives of the George and Myrtle Wilson to highlight the **oppression** of the working classes in 1920s America.

TOP TIP

8

Use what you know!

in your exam, you will need to make reference to what **other critics** think of *The Great Gatsby*. Using other literary critics will help you to structure your argument, resulting in a **sophisticated** presentation of your ideas.

Over the course of the year, develop a **bank of critical points of view** that you could use. Don't go overboard, and make sure that you **understand** the **criticism** that you do **use**!

Forcing a critic into your essay will not get you any extra marks. Rather it is the ability to critically **engage** with what they are saying and how that relates to your **essay title** that will boost your grade. For example: 'Marius Bewley developed the idea that Jay Gatsby is the "mythic" embodiment of the American Dream, which I agree with because ...'

REMEMBER: Literary criticism can be used to **bolster** your argument as well as providing something to **argue against**! Be brave and argue well!

TOP TIP

9

Social and historical background

The roaring 20s, prohibition, the development and expansion of New York and the prevalence of the American Dream are all central to *The Great Gatsby*.

Knowing the **context** and being able to **apply** it to the themes and plot of the novel will **elevate** your answer to the next level. Ensure you have a good knowledge of:

- ✓ Advertising and the mass market
- ✓ The Jazz Age
- ✓ Conspicuous consumption
- ✓ The First World War
- ✓ The Lost Generation
- ✓ Prohibition and organised crime

TOP TIP

10

Know your literary background!

Explore Fitzgerald's notable **influences**: Conrad, Henry James and T. S. Eliot. Look at the emerging trends in literature, for example, the 'international theme'.

Why not read the **letters** between Fitzgerald and his editor, Maxwell Perkins, which reveal a great deal about the author's motives, desires and intentions when writing *The Great Gatsby*?

This **extra context** will help to unlock the novel further, as well as to provide an opportunity for informed, well-rounded and original interpretations of this famous text.

REMEMBER: Don't shoehorn **contextual references** in to an argument – only mention them if they are **relevant** to your essay title!