

# Great Gatsby Discussion Questions

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## 1 Chapter 1 Question

What implicit judgements does Nick make about the Middle West and the East?

Is there any indication that his views have changed during his life?

So far, Nick seems to feel that the Middle West is significantly more low-key than the East. This opinion may be justified by his upbringing: his father owns a hardware store, while he goes out East to go into the bond business. Reflected throughout the book, he seems to feel that family loyalties are much more important in the Midwest—his family there is a clan, while in the East virtually everyone he meets is cheating on somebody or another.

I don't see any indication that his views have changed significantly in his life before Chapter 1. I think that his views change quite a lot, though, by the end of the book. He realizes that having a stable family is a great privilege.

## 2 Other Questions

### 2.1 Question No. 3

Each major character in the novel seems childlike in some way. Choose at least three characters to describe in these terms.

Daisy is, to me, the most obvious choice for a childish character. An easy example is found in her driving. She is a careless driver, by her own admission, and wants everyone else to make up for that fact. This hypocrisy would be immediately evident to anyone who is at all mature, and while hypocrisy and inconsistency are inherent in any human mind (I could discuss my opinions on those characteristics for a long while but it's off-topic), to not be able to see one's own hypocrisy when it is pointed out is rather uncommon, at least when it is not deeply rooted in one's psyche. Perhaps now that she's killed someone she'll start concentrating a bit more.

Gatsby is childish in that he seems to stick to the notion of running off with Daisy like gum to a camel's fur. In this respect, he is more adolescentish than childish. If I could say any one thing to Gatsby, it would probably be, "There are lots of good fish in the sea (some of which aren't already married)." Gatsby, however corrupt, is also naïve to some extent, assuming that Daisy never loved anybody but himself. It probably would have been a good idea for him to ask her about it before asserting it before Tom and sending everything down the tubes.

On to Tom. Tom Buchanan seems quite a lot like a high school football player. While he has a mistress (who is also someone else's wife), he expects his wife (who is also someone else's

mistress) to remain faithful. Here's more hypocrisy, although I'll admit that this example is probably easier to overlook than my Daisy example, from the point of view of a character in the book. Also, his lack of faithfulness is childish—in slightly odder words, adultery is childish.

## 2.2 Question No. 6

Often personal loyalty gets in the way of what seems to be clearcut moral issues.

What do you think was Gatsby's motivation in shielding Daisy? What do you think he should have done? Do you think Nick should have told the authorities what he knew about the accident?

What may seem to be a clearcut moral issue to an observer may seem to be a legalistic assault on a friend to someone participating in the action. With that possibility in mind, Gatsby's motivation in shielding daisy was probably friendship: Gatsby has the means to guard a friend, and the money to get himself out of a jam, while Daisy doesn't. In addition, Nick observes that if Tom found out that Daisy was driving, he would assume that Daisy had found out about his mistress and had killed her on purpose. While it might actually have been in Gatsby's interest to split Tom and Daisy, this way apparently did not appeal to him.

It is deceptively easy to second-guess someone, especially a fictional character whose conduct is purposefully written to be bad. In any case, I think that Gatsby should have been driving. Failing that, he should have let it be known that Daisy was driving, perhaps with her permission. This action would have caused the rift he had been waiting for between

Tom and Daisy, probably saved Gatsby's life, and otherwise made the mess a lot easier to clean up.

### 2.3 Question No. 8

One of the points of the novel seems to be that both the desire for money and money itself corrupt. Discuss Gatsby's dream, his use of money, and the hints about how he got it. What, if any, corruption do you think is coexistent with the wealth?

Gatsby is only corrupted by money to the extent that he is pure before he gets rich. If he is impure before he gets rich, it is probably because of something like the desire for Daisy. His desire for money is secondary to his desire to his extreme devotion to Daisy. Gatsby wants money because Daisy declines to marry him because he is poor, and he thinks that she will forget the several intervening years, drop everything, and marry him, just because he has come into the big money. Perhaps this perversion of sense is corruption. In that case, I would say that it is blind love that corrupts, not money. In that opinion, I would be supported by a long line of cynics and people who couldn't get dates.

Daisy seems not to be corrupted by the desire for money. If she is, she certainly doesn't let on when Tom Buchanan gives her the 350-thousand dollar pearl necklace. If she were corrupted by the desire for money, I would think that she would be a bit more graceful about receiving it (this point might not be relevant—the letter she receives might be the cause of her drunken stupor).