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Contains 9 sets of engaging discussion questions for The Great Gatsby with 8 open-ended questions and 2 key excerpts for each chapter. Use the PDF as-is or customize to suit your needs. At the very start of the novel, Nick Carraway explains a quality imparted by his father. What is the quality? Do you think that this trait is a blessing or a curse? What does the narrator mean in saying, "...now I was going to ... become again that most limited of all specialists, the 'well-rounded man'"? (6) Based on Nick's description, what is your initial impression of Tom Buchanan? Nick explains that "Almost any exhibition of complete self-sufficiency draws a stunned tribute from me." (12) What does he mean? What does this comment indicate about Nick? After the birth of her daughter, Daisy says, "And I hope she'll be a fool—that's the best thing a girl can be in this world, a beautiful little fool." (20) What does she mean by this? How does Nick's speech to others differ from his narration? (Note his response to Daisy when she asks if Chicago misses her.) What can we make of this difference? Is Daisy's marriage really on the rocks or is she being dramatic? Explain your view. How does Fitzgerald create a sense of mystery and anticipation at the close of Chapter 1? EXCERPT ANALYSIS: What makes the excerpt important or interesting? You might analyze imagery, theme, symbol, word choice, characterization, plot / conflict, or point of view. From Chapter 1: ... I wanted no more riotous excursions with privileged glimpses into the human heart. Only Gatsby, the man who gives his name to this book, was exempt from my reaction—Gatsby who represented everything for which I have an unaffected scorn. If personality is an unbroken series of successful gestures, then there was something gorgeous about him, some heightened sensitivity to the promises of life, as if he were related to one of those intricate machines that register earthquakes ten thousand miles away. ... No—Gatsby turned out all right at the end; it is what preyed on Gatsby, what foul dust floated in the wake of his dreams that temporarily closed out my interest in the abortive sorrows and short-winded elations of men. (2) From Chapter 1: The only completely stationary object in the room was an enormous couch on which two young women were buoyed up as though upon an anchored balloon. They were both in white and their dresses were rippling and fluttering as if they had just been blown back in after a short flight around the house. I must have stood for a few moments listening to the curtains and the caught wind died out about the room and the curtains and the rugs and the two young women ballooned slowly to the floor. (8) What is "the valley of ashes?" (26) Describe the scene in plain language. According to our narrator, Tom has always wanted Nick to like him. Why might someone like Tom Buchanan care if someone such as Nick Carraway liked him? Myrtle Wilson's appearance is unlike that of her "mildly handsome" yet "anemic" husband. How is Myrtle seemingly attractive while being unattractive? Describe Myrtle's personality and values. Use details from Chapter 2 in your response. Tom and Myrtle admit to despising them? Based on his tone, what does Nick think of the guests visiting Tom and Myrtle's apartment? (Refer to textual evidence.) What do you think Tom Buchanan reacts so violently to Myrtle saying his wife's name? What do you think Tom Buchanan reacts so violently to Myrtle saying his wife's name? What do you think Tom Buchanan reacts so violently to Myrtle saying his wife's name? What do you think Tom Buchanan reacts so violently to Myrtle saying his wife's name? What do you think Tom Buchanan reacts so violently to Myrtle saying his wife's name? What do you think Tom Buchanan reacts so violently to Myrtle saying his wife's name? What do you think Tom Buchanan reacts so violently to Myrtle saying his wife's name? 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This is a valley of ashes—a fantastic farm where ashes grow like wheat into ridges and hills and grotesque gardens where ashes take the forms of houses and chimneys and rising smoke and finally, with a transcendent effort, of men who move dimly and already crumbling through the powdery air. Occasionally a line of grey cars crawls along an invisible track, gives out a ghastly creak and comes to rest, and immediately the ash-grey men swarm up with leaden spades and stir up an impenetrable cloud which screens their obscure operations from your sight. (23) From Chapter 2: ... I wanted to get out and walk eastward toward the park through the soft twilight but each time I tried to go I became entangled in some wild strident argument which pulled me back, as if with ropes, into my chair. Yet high over the city our line of yellow windows must have contributed their share of human secrecy to the casual watcher in the darkening streets, and I was him too, looking up and wondering. I was within and without, simultaneously enchanted and repelled by the inexhaustible variety of life. (35) Which details stand out to you in the descriptions of Gatsby's parties? What impression of the parties does Fitzgerald create generally? Find two examples of figurative language in Chapter 3. (Metaphors, similes, and idioms are plentiful.) Interpret the meaning of each. Why do you think "Owl Eyes" makes such a big deal over Jay Gatsby's personal library? (Hint: David Belasco was a celebrated theatrical producer and set designer.) Nick notes that Gatsby's "elaborate formality of speech just missed being absurd" and that Gatsby "was picking his words with care" in casual conversations. What does this imply? Review the section describing the car crash at the end of Jay Gatsby's epic party (54-55). Is this just meant to be humorous or is it more meaningful? Explain. How does Fitzgerald make Gatsby seem both unremarkable and extraordinary? What are your initial thoughts on Nick Carraway? Do you like him? Would you trust him? EXCERPT ANALYSIS: What makes the excerpt important or interesting? You might analyze imagery, theme, symbol, word choice, characterization, plot / conflict, or point of view. From Chapter 3: ... Laughter is easier, minute by minute, spilled with prodigality, tipped out at a cheerful word. The groups change more swiftly, swell with new arrivals, dissolve and form in the same breath—already there are wanderers, confident girls who weave here and there among the stouter and more stable, become for a sharp, joyous moment the center of a group and then excited with triumph glide on through the sea-change of faces and voices and color under the constantly changing light. (40-41) From Chapter 3: He smiled understandingly—much more than understandingly—the whole external world for an instant, and then concentrated on YOU with an irresistible prejudice in your favor. It understood you just so far as you wanted to be understood, believed in you as you would like to believe in yourself and assured you that it had precisely the impression of you that, at your best, you hoped to convey. (48) What do you think draws such a wide variety of people to Gatsby's house every weekend? The narration informs us that some of Gatsby's guests will come to bad ends. What details are provided? What is the intended effect of providing these details? Why are the people in the novel so fascinated by the mystery surrounding Gatsby's may be fabricated? Why would Gatsby care if Nick Carraway believes his professed life's story? Identify the odd aspects of Wolfshiem." The German / Norwegian root "heim" (not an exact match) means home or world. What might be the meaning behind this? Why does Fitzgerald include lyrics from the 1921 jazz hit "Sheik of Araby" in Chapter 4: What purpose might this inclusion serve? Which part of Chapter 4 is a structural element known as flashback? EXCERPT ANALYSIS: What makes the excerpt important or interesting? You might analyze imagery, theme, symbol, word choice, characterization, plot / conflict, or point of view. From Chapter 4: "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." With an effort I managed to restrain my incredulous laughter. The very phrases were worn so threadbare that they evoked no image except that of a turbaned "character" leaking sawdust at every pore as he pursued a tiger through the Bois de Boulogne. (66) From Chapter 4: We passed a barrier of dark trees, and then the facade of Fifty-ninth Street, a block of delicate pale light, beamed down into the park. Unlike Gatsby and Tom Buchanan I had no girl whose disembodied face floated along the dark cornices and blinding signs and so I drew up the girl beside me, tightening my arms. Her wan, scornful mouth smiled and so I drew up the girl beside me, tightening my arms. Her wan, scornful mouth smiled and so I drew up the girl beside me, tightening my arms. he saw the publisher's cover art (Celestial Eyes by Francis Cugat) before completing his final draft and had "written it into the book." (Kriticos) What is strange about Gatsby's behavior at the start of Ch. 5? Why is he acting this way? Describe Gatsby's convoluted (overly complex) plan for reuniting with Daisy. What might be the reasons behind him taking this approach? Gatsby has gone to a great deal of trouble to orchestrate his reunion with Daisy. Why is he so miserable and awkward when the moment finally arrives? What does the narrator mean by saying, "Americans, while occasionally willing to be serfs, have always been obstinate about being peasantry"? (88) Do you agree? Throughout The Great Gatsby, Fitzgerald gives great attention to Daisy's unusual voice. What impression does he create? (See the very end of Chapter 5.) What does Daisy react so insanely to Gatsby's shirts? What is going on here? Fitzgerald creates vivid imagery, descriptions that enable the reader to imagine with their senses. Identify and explain two examples of imagery from the novel so far. EXCERPT ANALYSIS: What makes the excerpt important or interesting? You might analyze imagery, theme, symbol, word choice, characterization, plot / conflict, or point of view. From Chapter 5: "If it wasn't for the mist we could see your home across the bay," said Gatsby. "You always have a green light that burns all night at the end of your dock." Daisy put her arm through his abruptly but he seemed absorbed in what he had just said. Possibly it had occurred to him that the colossal significance of that light had now vanished forever. Compared to the great distance that had seemed very near to her, almost touching her. It had seemed as close as a star to the moon. Now it was again a green light on a dock. His count of enchanted objects had diminished by one. (92-93) From Chapter 5: ... I saw that the expression of bewilderment had come back into Gatsby's face, as though a faint doubt had occurred to him as to the quality of his present happiness. Almost five years! There must have been moments even that afternoon when Daisy tumbled short of his dreams—not through her own fault but because of the colossal vitality of his illusion. It had gone beyond her, beyond everything. He had thrown himself into it with a creative passion, adding to it all the time, decking it out with every bright feather that drifted his way. No amount of fire or freshness can challenge what a man will store up in his ghostly heart. (96) Describe Gatsby's true origins. Did the reality match your expectations? Explain. Do you find the arrangement between Jay Gatsby and James Cody believable as described by Nick? Why or why not? Would James Gatz have become Jay Gatsby to her dinner party; everyone is shocked when he takes her seriously. What is going on here? What is the unspoken message? How does Daisy's presence diminish Gatsby's party for Nick? Have you ever experienced a change in perspective like this? Why does Gatsby insist on introducing Tom as "the polo player?" Why does Tom object to this epithet (descriptive phrase)? What does this friction reveal about the two men? Nick and Gatsby disagree about recapturing the past. What is your view? EXCERPT ANALYSIS: What makes the excerpt important or interesting? You might analyze imagery, theme, symbol, word choice, characterization, plot / conflict, or point of view. From Chapter 6: ... The truth was that Jay Gatsby, of West Egg, Long Island, sprang from his Platonic conception of himself. He was a son of God—a phrase which, if it means anything, means just that—and he must be about His Father's Business, the service of a vast, vulgar and meretricious beauty. So he invented just the sort of Jay Gatsby that a seventeen-year-old boy would be likely to invent, and to this conception he was faithful to the end. (105) From Chapter 6: ... Out of the corner of his eye Gatsby saw that the blocks of the sidewalk really formed a ladder and mounted to a secret place above the trees—he could climb to it, if he climbed alone, and once there he could suck on the pap of life, gulp down the incomparable milk of wonder. His heart beat faster and faster as Daisy's white face came up to his own. He knew that when he kissed this girl, and forever wed his unutterable visions to her perishable breath, his mind would never romp again like the mind of God. So he waited, listening for a moment longer to the tuning fork that had been struck upon a star. Then he kissed her. At his lips' touch she blossomed for him like a flower and the incarnation was complete. (118-119) Nick says that Gatsby's "career as Trimalchio was over." (120) Why does Gatsby end his partying lifestyle so completely and so suddenly? Daisy's daughter pops into Chapter 7 to say hello even though she plays no role in the plot. Why does Fitzgerald include the daughter at all? In Chapter 7 as in Chapter 2, Fitzgerald gives inordinate attention to a random billboard for an optometrist (Dr. T.J. Eckleburg). What could possibly be the meaning of this emphasis? Tom and Gatsby battle for Daisy's love in the hotel parlor. Who wins? Explain your view. Why does Gatsby continually call people "old sport?" Why does Tom make this an issue? What details indicate that Gatsby's personality has a darker side? What clues in Chapter 7 hint that something terrible will happen? What is the overall effect of Fitzgerald's foreshadowing in the novel? Chapter 7 hint that something terrible will happen? What is the overall effect of Fitzgerald's foreshadowing in the bushes and Tom and Daisy talking over cold chicken. Nick does not know what they are saying. What do you make of this ambiguous ending? EXCERPT ANALYSIS: What makes the excerpt important or interesting? You might analyze imagery, theme, symbol, word choice, characterization, plot / conflict, or point of view. From Chapter 7: "She's got an indiscreet voice," I remarked. "It's full of—" I hesitated. "Her voice is full of money," he said suddenly. That was it. I'd never understood before. It was full of money—that was the inexhaustible charm that rose and fell in it, the gingle of it, the cymbals' song of it.... High in a white palace the king's daughter, the golden girl.... (128) From Chapter 7: A moment later she rushed out into the dusk, waving her hands and shouting; before he could move from his door the business was over. The 'death car' as the newspapers called it, didn't stop; it came out of the gathering darkness, wavered tragically for a moment and then disappeared around the next bend. Michaelis wasn't even sure of its color—he told the first policeman that it was light green. The other car, the one going toward New York, came to rest a hundred yards beyond, and its driver hurried back to where Myrtle Wilson, her life violently extinguished, knelt in the road and mingled her thick, dark blood with the dust. (146-147) In Chapter 8 Gatsby reveals the truth he has worked for years to conceal. Why does Gatsby suddenly decide to tell Nick Carraway the truth about his past? Nick explains that Gatsby "might have despised himself" for dating Daisy. What does he mean? What was despicable about Gatsby refuse to accept that Daisy ever loved Tom Buchanan? Of Gatsby Nick says, "...I disapproved of him from beginning to end." Yet, he is glad he told Gatsby, "You're worth the whole damn bunch put together." (164) What can we make of this? Why does Mr. Wilson conclude that the driver of the car that killed Myrtle was her lover? Toward the end of Chapter 8, there is some mystery about how Wilson came to find Gatsby. What do you think happened in those missing hours? Chapter 8 includes some great figurative language. Find and explain three examples. What foreshadowing does Fitzgerald include to suggest that tragedy is imminent? EXCERPT ANALYSIS: What makes the excerpt important or interesting? You might analyze imagery, theme, symbol, word choice, characterization, plot / conflict, or point of view. From Chapter 8: "I spoke to her," he muttered, after a long silence. "I told her she might fool me but she couldn't fool God. I took her to the window—"With an effort he got up and walked to the rear window and leaned with his face pressed against it, "—and I said 'God knows what you've been doing, everything you've been doing, everything you've been doing. You may fool me but you can't fool God!" Standing behind him Michaelis saw with a shock that he was looking at the eyes of Doctor T. J. Eckleburg which had just emerged pale and enormous from the dissolving night. "God sees everything," repeated Wilson. (170) From Chapter 8: There was a faint, barely perceptible movement of the water as the fresh flow from one end urged its way toward the drain at the other. With little ripples that were hardly the shadows of waves, the laden mattress moved irregularly down the pool. A small gust of wind that scarcely corrugated the surface was enough to disturb its accidental burden. The touch of a cluster of leaves revolved it slowly, tracing, like the leg of compass, a thin red circle in the water. (173) Do you think Daisy knew of Gatsby's death before she left town with Tom? Explain. Nick does not really care about Daisy, Tom, or Jordan. Why does he care about Daisy, Tom, or Jordan. Why does he care about Daisy, Tom, or Jordan. Why does not really care about Daisy, Tom, or Jordan. Why does not really care about Daisy, Tom, or Jordan. Why does not really care about Daisy, Tom, or Jordan. Why does not really care about Daisy and the care about Daisy and the care about Daisy. changed? Nick chooses not to tell Tom the truth about the driver of the car that killed Myrtle. Why? Why do you think people who have "old money" are sometimes prejudiced against those with "new money?" Afterall, wealth is something that they have in common. In The Great Gatsby, color is more than color (especially green, white, gray, and yellow). How does Fitzgerald use color in the novel? Many consider The Great Gatsby "the great American novel." What do you think inspires some to hold this high opinion of Fitzgerald's work? EXCERPT ANALYSIS: What makes the excerpt important or interesting? You might analyze imagery, theme, symbol, word choice, characterization, plot / conflict, or point of view. From Chapter 9: "You said a bad driver was only safe until she met another bad driver, didn't I? I mean it was careless of me to make such a wrong guess. I thought you were rather an honest, straightforward person. I thought it was your secret pride." "I'm thirty,' I said. 'I'm five years too old to lie to myself and call it honor." (189-190) From Chapter 9: And as I sat there brooding on the old, unknown world, I thought of Gatsby's wonder when he first picked out the green light at the end of Daisy's 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. Gatsby believed in the green light, the orgastic future that year by year recedes before us. It eluded us then, but that's no matter—tomorrow we will run faster, stretch out our arms farther.... And one fine morning—— So we beat on, boats against the current, borne back ceaselessly into the past. (193) These prompts can serve in various modes (guided reading, independent study, etc.), but they have been organized with collaborative groups or in mind. Serving suggestion: Assign each group one prompt from each of the three levels. Each group responds to two questions and one quote (3 responses total). You might allow students to pick their own items (one from each level). To close the activity, have the groups share their responses with the class so that all topics have been explored. 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