*The Great Gatsby* Socratic Seminar Questions

Chapter 1

Characterization

1. The opening lines of the novel start with Nick Caraway giving very intimate information to the reader about his life.

 "In my younger and more vulnerable years, my father gave me some advice that I've been turning over in my mind since. 'whenever you feel like criticizing anyone,' he told me 'just remember that all the people in this world haven't had the advantages that you've had.' He didn't say anymore...In consequence, I'm inclined to reserve all judgments, a habit that has opened up many curious natures to me and also made me the victim of not a few veteran bores. The abnormal mind is quick to detect and attach itself to this quality when it appears in a normal person..."(Fitzgerald 1).

1. What does Nick's father's advice mean in relationship to his role in the novel? I.E. How does this effect Nick's motivation as a character and a narrator?
2. Nick uses diction with negative connotation, such as ‘vulnerable’ and ‘abnormal.’ What does this tell you about how he views the situation he's found himself in? How might this fuel his actions, or inaction, later in the novel?
3. "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” (Fitzgerald 2).

What does Nick mean by "abortive sorrows" and "short-winded elations of men"? Do you believe that Nick feels Gatsby "turned out all right"? What might this phrase mean to first time readers? What does it mean to people who already know the ending?

1. "He had changed since his New Haven years. Now he was a sturdy straw-haired man of thirty with a rather hard mouth and a supercilious manner. Two shining arrogant eyes had established dominance over his face and gave him the appearance of always leaning aggressively forward. Not even the effeminate swank of his riding cloths could hide the enormous power of that body—he seemed to fill those glistening boots until he strained the top lacing, and you could see a great pack of muscle shifting when his shoulder moved under his thin coat. It was a body capable of enormous leverage—a cruel body" (Fitzgerald 7).
2. This description of Tom Buchanan, Daisy's husband, is NOT straight forward. Fitzgerald uses imagery to try and paint a picture of Tom's character. Why? How might this choice affect first time readers? What does this descriptive language really tell you about Tom? What does it tell you about our narrator, Nick?
3. Read from the bottom of page 8 (“The other girl, Daisy…”) through page 9. What do you learn about Daisy? What figurative language do you see? What kind of comment is Fitzgerald saying about women through characterizing Daisy in this way?
4. How does chapter 2 further characterize Tom besides the obvious (that he hits women)? Consider the very beginning of the chapter and what Nick says about Tom's thought process. Also, look at the comment about Daisy being Catholic.
5. How is Nick characterized in chapter 2? What does he say that further illustrates his place as a bridge between different people?

Setting

1. Re-read the description of West Egg and East Egg on page 5. What do you think these different neighborhoods symbolize? What language (metaphors, vivid adjectives, descriptors) stand out to you? What questions do you have? Why do you think Fitzgerald had Nick and Gatsby live next to each other on West Egg? Why not have everyone living on East Egg? What's the point of this separation? How does this choice affect how a first-time reader might see Gatsby and Nick versus Tom and Daisy? What about the Valley of Ashes and Myrtle and George?

Symbolism and Style

1. What colors are used to describe Daisy and Jordan and the room on page 8? What color is used to describe the house on page 8? Why? What might this mean?
2. What is the reason for and effect of the shift in verb tense which occurs in the fourth paragraph in chapter three? (Fitzgerald 40)
3. Look at the first paragraph in chapter three. Explain the following: 1. its contrast with the previous scene (look especially at irony) 2. the sentence which creates a magical tone-- How? 3. the overall effect of Fitzgerald’s choice of verbs (Fitzgerald 39).
4. From chapter three, pick one or two sentences you really like, write them, and describe Fitzgerald’s style.

Overarching

1. *b“*I [Nick) decided to call on him. Miss Baker had mentioned him at dinner, and that would do for an introduction. But I didn’t call on him, for he gave a sudden intimation that he was content to be alone—he stretched out his arms toward the dark water in a curious way, and, far as I was from him, I could have sworn he was trembling. Involuntarily I glanced seaward—and distinguished nothing except a single green light, minute and far away, that might have been the end of a dock. When I looked once more for Gatsby he had vanished, and I was alone again in the unquiet darkness” (Fitzgerald 20-21).

What do you learn about Gatsby? Think setting, character motivation, symbolism, and figurative language.

1. Why does Tom want Nick to meet Myrtle? What does this say about the culture?
2. What is the point of chapter 2?
3. Explain the point of Owl-Eyes’s admiration for Gatsby’s library (Fitzgerald 45-46).