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ENG4U1 Period 2

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The Great Gatsby by Scott Fitzgerald

1. Choose three themes from the novel that you believe are most significant and briefly explain each theme. (5-6 sen per theme):

Failure of an American Dream:

The American Dream is the idea that anyone, regardless of their social status, has the opportunity to make their dream life come true. Throughout the book, Gatsby believed in this concept. He left his poor family when he was a teenager and worked hard to become wealthy. He fell in love with Daisy, although she was of a different social status from him. However, he thought they could marry if he worked harder and made more money. Gatsby did everything he could, including buying a castle where he could see Buchanan's mansion over the lake, throwing big parties with the hope that Daisy would show up, and eventually sacrificing his life in the end. Gatsby's American Dream fails as he cannot make his dream life with Daisy come true, no matter how hard he tries. At some point, he thinks he has reached his goal, but the audience can see that he doesn't have a chance, and his money will not make the wealthy class accept him.

Superficiality vs. Truth:

In *The Great Gatsby*, superficiality versus truth can be seen when characters pretend to be someone they are not. When Myrtle buys a puppy on their trip to New York, she does not really care about the pet itself, but she wants to show off and claim that she belongs to the wealthy class. The truth is that she belongs to the Valley of Ashes,

and it is just because of her affair with Tom that she has the opportunity to experience wealthy people's habits. Gatsby is also very superficial, as he hides the truth about his past from everyone, and he lies about his intention to throw lavish parties. Nick is able to guess the truth about Gatsby when he tries to buy his friendship with money. The eyes of Doctor T. J. Eckleburg symbolize God and how no one can hide the truth from him. Throughout the book, whenever characters pretend to be someone whom they are not, the author mentions the eyes of Doctor T. J. Eckleburg, and his ethical message is that God always observes.

Classism:

Classism is the idea that wealth creates different social classes in a society, and the richer an individual is, the higher their status will become. In *The Great Gatsby*, Valley of Ashes demonstrates the middle and poor class. They work hard but are still not wealthy, and the author's message is that they cannot change their social class with hard work. Another way that Fitzgerald demonstrates the theme of classism is through the story's geography. The East Egg represents the old money, while the West Egg represents the new money. Gatsby, who became wealthy recently, lives in the West Egg, while Tom Buchanan lives in the East Egg. The author's intention in distinguishing old money and new money people is to show that people with old money have more experience and, on average, are more educated. Although Gatsby has as much money as Tom, he is not wealthier. Although Gatsby has a big library and more books than Tom, he is not more educated. Although Gatsby has a business relationship with many different cities, Tom has more life experience. Through the different personalities of Tom and Gatsby, the author demonstrates the differences between old money and new money.

2. Explain how one of the themes holds personal significance to you. (6-7 sen; personal connection)

Failure of an American Dream:

In my country, Iran, the education system has taught us that everyone has an equal chance of success regardless of where and in what family we are born. The dream they put in our heads differs from the American Dream. The books and teachers define success as serving the country and people, and personal dreams are counted as pointless compared to the nation's glory. Although the idea is acceptable, the government refuses to spread educational equality. Many cities and villages do not have even a single school. There are countless students whose parents cannot afford their education fees, and therefore, they are forced to enter the job market at young ages. I had a friend called Parsa who moved from a small village to the capital of Iran with his family because they thought a brighter future awaited him there. Although he was one of the top students in our school, the amount of effort he put into reaching a goal was incomparable to other students. He was successful in his lessons, not because of educational equality but because of his consistent effort. This example was just in high school; sometimes, when I think of how someone who did not have access to enough resources is capable of competing with others in universities, it becomes clear to me that the idea of equal chance for everyone is not realistic.

3. Write three thematic statements, 1 per theme. Discuss each theme using one to two relevant quotes from the novel (last name pg#).

Thematic statement #1: The American Dream motivates the middle class, but its unrealistic nature will eventually lead to mental damage.

Evidence:

The American Dream will give hope to the middle class to work harder. In *The Great Gatsby*, James Gatz believed that he could be successful with hard work, and by choosing a new name for himself, he created a new character that he always wanted to be. “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” (Fitzgerald 105). Gatsby first imagined the picture of the person he was going to become, and then he tried hard to reach his goal. He was born into a poor family, but the hope that the American Dream gave him helped Gatsby gain wealth and become successful. His situation is an example of how the American Dream will inject hope into the poor and middle class of society to work tirelessly.

Believing in the American Dream will make individuals think they can make the impossible, and after they are not able to reach their goal no matter how hard they try, the feeling of disappointment will take over the artificial hope of the American Dream. In *The Great Gatsby*, when Nick finds Gatsby near the lake, he says, “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” (Fitzgerald 24). Gatsby holds the dream of his life with Daisy for a long time, and even after he finds out that she is married, he does not give up. The quote resembles Gatsby's mental pressure as his hand shakes while he tries to reach the

green light (which is a symbol of his dream). The American Dream made him think he had a chance, but the pressure of the process caused him to collapse internally.

Thematic statement #2: One's external appearance can differ from their true nature, and consistently pretending to be someone else can have dire consequences that often lead to tragic endings.

Evidence:

The appearance of individuals can deceive others into believing they are something they genuinely are not. If they keep doing this for a long time, they will also believe in it. In *The Great Gatsby*, Myrtle is a poor class worker who has an affair with Tom, but because of how Tom treats her and supports her, she starts to feel like she is a wealthy and respectable lady. On the night of their trip to New York, she says, “‘Daisy! Daisy! Daisy!’ shouted Mrs. Wilson. ‘I’ll say it whenever I want to! Daisy! Dai——’ Making a short deft movement Tom Buchanan broke her nose with his open hand” (Fitzgerald 41). In this scene, Myrtle forgets her place, and impudently, she argues with Tom. Behaving like a wealthy person made her believe she was one, although all of the opportunities she was given were because of her affair with Tom. Myrtle’s superficiality triggered Tom, and he broke her nose, which resembles the violent consequences of prioritizing appearance over substance.

Being superficial can sometimes have a violent outcome. In the book, after Wilson finds out about Myrtle’s affair, she attempts to escape, but she is struck by a car and dies. “Her life violently extinguished, knelt in the road and mingled her thick, dark blood with the dust” (Fitzgerald 147). The quote describes how violent this accident was. By using the word “dust”, the author mentions Myrtle’s social class and how she got into

all these troubles because of being superficial. Myrtle was married to Wilson and belonged to the Valley of Ashes, where the poor class of society lived. By pretending to be a high-status like Tom, she ends up dying in a road accident. Her story is an example of how being superficial and pretending to be something more than what she was resulted in a terrible outcome, which, in this case, was her death.

Thematic statement #3: Although an individual's fate is directly affected by their social class, earning more money is not equivalent to having a higher status.

Evidence:

Although humans are all born physically similar, social status plays an essential role in determining their future. In *The Great Gatsby*, when Gatsby meets Daisy for the first time, he is financially poor but still thinks he has a future with Daisy. After Gatsby fails at having her in the first place, the author says, "She vanished into her rich house, into her rich, full life, leaving Gatsby—nothing" (Fitzgerald 159). Although they loved each other, Gatsby knew that Daisy's parents would not let their daughter marry him because of his social class. Fitzgerald is trying to demonstrate the importance of social classes to a person's fate. By stating that Daisy left nothing for Gatsby after she vanished, Fitzgerald demonstrates how their future is separated only because of their social status.

Being wealthy is not enough to have a high status in the society. In *The Great Gatsby*, Tom symbolizes a respectful nobleman with old money, and Gatsby is someone who just got rich recently. After Tom finds out about Gatsby's affair with his wife, he says, "I suppose the latest thing is to sit back and let Mr. Nobody from Nowhere make love to your wife. Well, if that's the idea you can count me out" (Fitzgerald 138). By questioning Gatsby's past and the social class of his family, Tom questions his nobility

and education. The author is trying to convey that although Gatsby has as much wealth as Tom does, this does not mean he belongs to the same social level as Tom. Throughout Tom and Gatsby's characters, Fitzgerald distinguishes the status of individuals with similar amounts of wealth.

4. List 2 significant symbols from the novel that can be used to represent each theme. For each symbol, explain using 2-4 sentences.

Failure of an American Dream:

- The Green Light: The electrical lamp, which is supposed to light up the boat dock of Buchanan's Mansion, symbolizes success. In the early chapters, Nick finds Gatsby trying to reach the Green Light in the dark. For Gatsby, the Green Light represents his dream of having Daisy. The love of Daisy is the reason Gatsby tries hard to make his American Dream come true.
- Gatsby's Mansion: The mansion that Gatsby bought in the West Egg symbolizes his wealth. Although the West Egg is for new money people like him, he can still afford the whole mansion. The mansion shows that Gatsby's American Dream was not fully unsuccessful, and hard work paid him back even though money was not what he sought.

Superficiality vs. Truth:

- Gatsby's Library: Although there is a huge library in Gatsby's mansion, he does not read the books, and he is not as educated as he claims he is. The theme of superficiality versus truth shows itself when Nick realizes the truth about Gatsby and that the whole library and his stories about his education were wrong.

- Myrtle's Puppy: The puppy demonstrates Myrtle's superficiality. On their trip to New York, Myrtle buys a puppy cause she thinks it is cute, but the pet is not really important to her. Because of her affair with Tom, she had the opportunity to live rich, but the truth is she belongs to the Valley of Ashes.

Classism:

- East Egg and West Egg: The author distinguished the new money and old money social classes throughout the story's geography. West Egg is where people like Gatsby who have new money live. East Egg, on the other side, is where Tom lives, and it is the neighborhood of old money people. One element that shows the difference between Tom and Gatsby is their social level, and Fitzgerald demonstrated this under the geography of the story.
- The Valley of Ashes: The Valley of Ashes symbolizes society's poor and middle class. Wilson and others hardly work there but will always remain in the middle class and in the Valley of Ashes. By using the word "Ash", the author argues that the people's dreams there have died.
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Work Cited

Fitzgerald, F. Scott. *The Great Gatsby*. Scribner, 2004.