

Bringing Gatsby into the EFL/ESL Classroom

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How do you motivate students to read? While the exercises and drills offered in standard textbook serve a purpose, it is important to encourage students to read outside the textbook.

Introduction

Appreciation for real literature may be seen as out of reach for many EFL/ESL readers, but with careful scaffolding teachers can activate a student's schemata. *The Great Gatsby* is one of the most influential American novels. It can open up a whole new world of cultural information for our students. The complex characters with the backdrop of the roaring 20's are definitely topics of interest. In a five unit lesson plan under the headings of 1) setting the scene, 2) character exploration, 3) visualization, 4) understanding the climax, and 5) student presentations, *The Great Gatsby* can take on meaning and understanding for EFL/ESL students.

Level

- high beginner to intermediate

Aim

- To encourage students to cultivate the habit of reading English novels outside the classroom.
- To introduce the use of adjectives for describing characters.

Materials

- *The Great Gatsby* by F. Scott Fitzgerald (Penguin)
- DVD : *The Great Gatsby* (1974) Directed by Jack Clayton
- U.S.A. Map
- Colored pencils (optional)

List of Major *The Great Gatsby* Characters

It is important to provide character descriptions that are both stimulating and accessible to the EFL/ESL reader. While there are several online sources available, it is best to go with descriptions that are applicable to your class level. Please see the appendix for a suggested character list.

Lesson 1

Setting the Scene

Step 1

- Explain the roaring twenties, prohibition, bootlegging, and the jazz age.
- Using a U.S. map, introduce place names: New York, Long Island, West Egg, East Egg, Valley of Ashes, Midwest, and Louisville.

Step 2

- Pass out the character list to students (see example 1 below).
- Give students time to read and check meanings. Discuss vocabulary as needed.

Step 3

- Do a choral reading of the character list.

- Ask students to watch the first thirty minutes of *The Great Gatsby*. It may be helpful to the students to point out and name characters as they appear on the screen.
- Stop the DVD at the end of Tom and Myrtle's Party scene.

Homework

Read *The Great Gatsby* page 72-75.

Lesson 2

Character Exploration

Step 1

- Review character list and then do a choral reading.

Step 2

- Do a who's who in Gatsby?
 - Who is Daisy's cousin?
 - Who is Tom's girlfriend?
 - Who is Daisy's friend?
 - Who is Myrtle's husband?
 - Who is Nick's neighbor?

Step 3

- Introduce adjectives that may be used for describing characters.
 - (Suggested adjectives: kind, reserved, cold, sweet, arrogant, effervescent, calculating, selfish, honest, and superficial).
- Give students time to look up any adjective they may not understand.
- Do a choral reading of the adjectives.
- Ask students questions: Which character do you think is reserved? Which character do you think is kind?

Step 4

- Distribute character description sheets (see example 2 below).
- Explain that each student should pick one character and write down adjectives that best describe each character. Explain that each adjective must be justified by an example from the movie or the book. Also explain that in lesson five they will be asked to present their character sketch to the class.
- Read pages 72-75 aloud to students and stop frequently to make comments and as well as to clarify student comprehension.

Step 5

- Ask students to watch the next thirty minutes of the movie; from the end of Tom and Myrtle's party to the scene when Daisy sees Gatsby in Nick's mirror.

Homework

- Ask students to begin writing the character description.

Lesson 3

Visualization

Step 1

- Do a choral reading of the character list.
- Questions
 - Who asked Nick to introduce Daisy to Gatsby?
 - What adjectives would you use to describe Jordan Baker's character? Why?

Step 2

- Ask students to go to page 89.
- Ask students to read from: "He took a pile of shirts ... to cry stormily."

Step 3

- Questions
 - What does "one by one" mean?
 - What kind of shirts does Gatsby have? Material? Colors? Styles?
 - What is a monogram?
 - What does "with a strained sound" mean?

Step 4

- Give students time to write down the answers.
- Have a class discussion about their answers.

Step 5

- Ask students to draw a picture of this paragraph. If they do not have colored pencils, ask them to write the color on the details of their picture.

Step 6

- Ask students to watch the movie from the party scene; when Daisy first sees Gatsby to when Daisy and Gatsby sneak away together.

Homework

- Read pages 94-97.
- Ask students to work on character descriptions.

Lesson 4

Understanding the Climax

Step 1

- Do a Who's Who?
 - Whose party did Tom and Daisy attend?
 - Who did Daisy leave with?
 - Who stayed with Tom?

Step 2

- Read pages 94-97 aloud to students and stop frequently to make comments and to clarify student comprehension.
 - What is Gatsby's real name?
 - Did Gatsby come from a rich family?
 - Did Gatsby go to Oxford?
 - Why did he leave college?
 - Who did Gatsby work for?

Step 3

- Ask student to watch the conclusion of *The Great Gatsby*.

Homework

- Ask students to prepare their character descriptions.

Lesson 5

- Have the students' present their character descriptions.

Appendix

Example 1 - Character List

- Jay Gatsby - self made millionaire with shady business connections.
- Daisy Buchanan - carefree and charismatic individual, former sweetheart of Jay Gatsby.
- Tom Buchanan - millionaire from old money who just happens to be Daisy's husband.
- Nick Carraway - Daisy's cousin and Tom's former classmate.
- Jordan Baker - pro-golfer and Daisy's long time friend.
- George Wilson - a local mechanic who often does business with Tom Buchanan .
- Myrtle Wilson - wife of George Wilson.

Example 2 - Using Adjectives to Describe Characters

Character Name: Gatsby

Action	Adjective
Gatsby invited Nick to his party	kind

Extra Activities

Discussion

“What a tangled web we weave, when we practice to deceive”

Sir Walter Scott.

Explain this quote to students and ask them to think how it relates to *The Great Gatsby*.

What would happen if Daisy decided to end her marriage with Tom and begin a new life with Gatsby?

What would happen if Nick refused to have Daisy and Gatsby meet at his cottage?

Using the song, *Ain't We Got Fun* (by Richard A. Whiting, lyrics by Raymond B. Egan and Gus Kahn), ask students to find similarities between the message of the song and *The Great Gatsby*.

Have students do an online search on the personal life of F. Scott Fitzgerald. Ask them to discuss whether there are any similarities between Daisy and Zelda Sayre Fitzgerald.

Conclusion

Character exploration and background reading enriches the appreciation and understanding of any novel. These activities are designed to encourage students to read real literature and to understand the importance of reading for meaning as well as the fulfillment in the visualization of the written word. Additionally, students will have the chance to use their newly acquired vocabulary in their character description presentations.

<http://iteslj.org/Lessons/Doiron-Gatsby.html>