

Chapter 2

But above the grey land and the spasms of bleak dust which drift endlessly over it, you perceive, after a moment, the eyes of Doctor T.J. Eckleburg. The eyes of Doctor T.J. Eckleburg are blue and gigantic—their retinas are one yard high. . . . his eyes, dimmed a little by many countless days under sun and rain, brood on over the solemn dumping ground.

Vocabulary:

Choose the correct meaning of the underlined word in each sentence below based on how that word is used in the sentence. You may need to use a dictionary.

1. . . . ashes take the forms of houses and chimneys and rising smoke and finally, with a transcendent effort, of men who moved dimly and already crumbling through the powdery air.

In the context of this passage, *transcendent* means:

- a. extreme
- b. performed
- c. beyond comprehension
- d. confusing

2. The only building in sight was a small block of yellow brick sitting on the edge of the waste land, a sort of compact Main Street ministering to it and contiguous to absolutely nothing.

In the context of this passage, *contiguous* means:

- a. indicative
- b. adjacent
- c. opposing
- d. compared

3. It had occurred to me that this shadow of a garage must be a blind and that sumptuous and romantic apartments were concealed overhead . . .

In the context of this passage, *blind* means:

- a. window shade
- b. obstruction
- c. decoy
- d. darkness

4. . . a tin of large hard dog biscuits—one of which decomposed apathetically in the saucer of milk all afternoon.

In the context of this passage, *apathetically* means:

- a. impassively
- b. endlessly
- c. disgustingly
- d. loosely

5. She came in with such a proprietary haste and looked around so possessively at the furniture that I wondered if she lived here.

In the context of this passage, *proprietary* means:

- a. uninterested
- b. aggressive
- c. planned
- d. owned or managed

6. The intense vitality that had been so remarkable in the garage was converted into impressive hauteur.

In the context of this passage, *hauteur* means:

- a. performance
- b. arrogance
- c. frivolity
- d. intensity

7. “My dear,” she told her sister in a high mincing shout, “most of these fellas will cheat you every time.”

In the context of this passage, *mincing* means:

- a. dainty or delicate
- b. irritating/annoying
- c. concise or pithy
- d. youthful/childish

8. “Crazy about him!” cried Myrtle incredulously. “Who said I was crazy about him? I never was any more crazy about him than I was about that man there.”

In the context of this passage, *incredulously* means:

- a. nervously
- b. amazingly
- c. ironically
- d. skeptically

Questions:

1. List some of the descriptive words and phrases used to describe the setting in the first two paragraphs of Chapter 2.
2. Who, or what, is “Doctor T.J. Eckleburg”? Where is he seen? What does Doctor T.J. Eckleburg stare over?
3. What is the proximity between the Wilsons’ home and the “valley of ashes,” or the “waste land?” What do you think this relationship says about their lives?
4. What does Myrtle’s sister tell Nick about Gatsby? What impression of Gatsby does this give you?
5. Why does Tom break Myrtle’s nose?

Analysis:

6. A *symbol* is something physical that represents something abstract. We identify symbols in literature through the author’s emphasis and the author’s use of repetition. We understand what symbols mean through the author’s tone and imagery.

In the beginning of Chapter 2, considerable time is spent describing the “valley of ashes.” What ideas or concepts does one generally associate with ashes? What do you think the “valley of ashes” between West Egg and New York symbolizes?

7. Many analyses of *The Great Gatsby* suggest that the eyes of Doctor T.J. Eckleburg are a symbol for God. What evidence in Chapter 2 is there to support this idea? If this is “God” in the novel, what do you think Fitzgerald is saying by depicting God as a man-made advertisement overlooking a valley of ashes?

8. Twice Nick mentions the photograph on the wall of Myrtle's apartment. How does he characterize or personify the photograph? How is the photograph similar to the eyes of Dr. T.J. Eckleburg?
9. What books and magazines does Nick find at Myrtle's apartment? What might the titles of these books and magazines suggest?
10. *Dramatic irony* is when the reader sees a character's mistakes which the character is unable to see himself. What is ironic about Myrtle's negative attitudes toward the "lower classes"?
11. An author's *tone* is the way he presents his subject matter to readers. Through his use of language, the author can influence the way readers view certain characters or events in a novel. Examine the tone with which Fitzgerald writes about George Wilson. How does he present George Wilson to the reader? Do you think Fitzgerald wishes for readers to sympathize with George Wilson? Explain your answer with examples from the book.

Dig Deeper:

12. Three times during Chapter 2 Nick finds himself unable to leave the company of Tom and Myrtle. First, when the train stops on the way to New York, then in the taxicab on the way to the apartment, and finally during the party. How is Nick unable to leave in each case?
13. How do these three attempts to leave show a progression toward Nick becoming a willing participant in the clandestine meeting?
14. Using evidence from the novel, analyze the relationship between Tom and Myrtle. Why are Tom and Myrtle having an affair? What do you think they are hoping to gain from it? Do you think it has made them happier?

Chapter 3

It was one of those rare smiles with a quality of eternal reassurance in it, that you may come across four or five times in your life. It faced—or seemed to face—the whole external world for an instance, and then concentrated on you with an irresistible prejudice in your favor. It understood you just as 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.

Vocabulary:

Explain the meaning of the underlined word in each sentence below based on how that word is used in the sentence. You may need to use a dictionary.

1. On buffet tables, garnished with glistening hors d'oeuvre, spiced baked hams crowded against salads of harlequin designs and pastry pigs and turkeys bewitched to a dark gold.
2. The bar is in full swing and floating rounds of cocktails permeate the garden outside until the air is alive with chatter and laughter and casual innuendo and introductions forgotten on the spot and enthusiastic meetings between women who never knew each other's names.

permeate

innuendo

3. Laughter is easier, minute by minute, spilled with prodigality, tipped out at a cheerful word.
4. A momentary hush; the orchestra leader varies his rhythm obligingly for her and there is a burst of chatter as the erroneous news goes around that she is Gilda Gray's understudy from the "Follies."

obligingly

erroneous

5. . . . wandered around rather ill at ease among swirls and eddies of people I didn't know . . .

6. Instead of rambling this party had preserved a dignified homogeneity, and assumed to itself the function of representing the staid nobility of the country- side—East Egg condescending to West Egg, and carefully on guard against its spectroscopic gayety.
homogeneity
staid
spectroscopic

7. I had expected that Mr. Gatsby would be a florid and corpulent person in his middle years.
florid
corpulent

8. The hall was at present occupied by two deplorably sober men and their highly indignant wives.

Questions:

1. What rumors do people at the party tell about Gatsby?

2. Why do you think that the man with the “owl-eyed spectacles” is so surprised to find real books in Gatsby's library?

3. What was the story involving a golf tournament that Nick had heard about Jordan? What does Nick say about Jordan's honesty?

Analysis:

4. In the fourth paragraph of Chapter 3, Fitzgerald abruptly changes his gram- matical style, writes differently for three paragraphs, and then abruptly changes back to his previous style. Identify the change that takes place in these para- graphs. Give several examples that demonstrate this

grammatical change.

5. Generally, a grammatical change like this is considered a mistake and poor writing, but Fitzgerald obviously did it on purpose and for a very specific effect. Why did Fitzgerald change his grammatical style?
6. The party sequence in Chapter 3 is really made up of a series of vignettes, short scenes, connected only by Nick's wandering around the party. What mood does this give the chapter? Compare this to the scenes in the last page or two of the previous chapter. What connection might there be?
7. How have all the rumors and stories about him developed the character of Gatsby? Why do you think an author would keep his title character a mystery?
8. A *paradox* is a statement that seems contradictory, but actually presents a truth. What might be the truth in Jordan's paradox: "I like large parties. They're so intimate"? How can large parties be intimate?
9. In the following passage, what might Fitzgerald be saying about the significance of the gathering and the lives of those there?

We were sitting at a table with a man of about my age and a rowdy little girl who gave way upon the slightest provocation to uncontrollable laughter. I was enjoying myself now. I had taken two finger bowls of champagne and the scene had changed before my eyes into something significant, elemental and profound.
10. Nick says that the three parties central to the first three chapters of the novel were "merely casual events in a crowded summer," and that they "absorbed me infinitely less than my personal affairs." Nevertheless, what is suggested about the novel's plot by focusing the action of the story on these parties? Why do you think Fitzgerald chose to structure the first three chapters in this way?

11. If no one seems to appreciate Gatsby for his parties and Gatsby doesn't seem to know most of the people attending or participate much, why do you think he holds such huge, lavish gatherings?