

Intertextuality and the context of reception: *The Great Gatsby* - chapter 8 by F Scott Fitzgerald

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Lesson plan

Resources and preparation needed

- ❖ **Resource A** – Images of the Valley of Ashes
- ❖ **Resource B** – Film Clip – *The Great Gatsby*
- ❖ **Resource C** – Extracts from *The Great Gatsby* chapter 8 with corresponding Bible passages
- ❖ **Resource D** – Literal and symbolic meanings table
- ❖ **Resource E** – Interpreting characters

Learning objectives

- ❖ To consider the links between places and ideology, and characters and ideology
- ❖ To develop different interpretations of a text
- ❖ To study chapter 8 and its symbolic possibilities

Starter activity – paired brainstorming of places and meanings

- ❖ Working in pairs, students list all the places mentioned in the novel. For example:
 - West Egg, Long Island
 - East Egg, Long Island
 - Tom and Daisy's house
 - Gatsby's mansion
 - Nick's house
 - The apartment in New York (Tom and Myrtle)
 - George Wilson's gas station
 - The Valley of the Ashes
 - Oxford University, England
 - Yale University
 - Gatsby's swimming pool
 - The Midwest
- Compare the list with another pair and add ideas as necessary.
- ❖ For each place identified, can students speculate on the symbolic significance of the place? (E.g. East

- ❖ Egg represents old money, the desire to be European; West Egg represents new money, the new American Dream, the new 'going West', etc.)
 - Feed back responses as a whole class.

Introduction/recap

- ❖ Teacher explains that a biblical reading of chapter 8 facilitates an understanding of additional levels of symbolic significance of some of the places, characters and ideas
 - Recap the settings and events of chapter 8 (the first part concerns Gatsby's recollections of his earlier relationship with Daisy as he speaks to Tom at Gatsby's house, the second part is George Wilson's reaction to Myrtle's death in the Valley of the Ashes, before he travels to Gatsby's to kill him. Wilson appears like a mad man but a lot of the description surrounding him and the Valley of the Ashes is endowed with symbolic significance).

Main activity 1 – considering links to the Bible

- ❖ View images of the Valley of the Ashes [**Resource A**] – these could be either printed out, or copied onto a powerpoint and projected
 - Elicit responses from the students about possible religious interpretations. (These may have already been introduced during a reading of chapter two where the place is first introduced, but will no doubt take on a new significance after Myrtle's death.)
- ❖ Watch the Film clip [**Resource B**]. Elicit initial responses
 - Are we surprised that Wilson's words and Gatsby's death allude to the Bible?
 - How does it affect their significance?
 - How does this impact on the reader? etc.

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- ❖ Give out copies of extracts from chapter 8 with biblical allusions [**Resource C**] and literal and symbolic meanings tables [**Resource D**].
 - Teacher models filling in first row of table. For example:

Extract	Literal meaning	Additional symbolic meaning
1	Description of the ash heaps, with some movements (wind?)	A place of death. But also a place where God is present. The valley stops being just an unpleasant poor place and becomes a place of divine judgement.

- Assign extracts 2-7 to pairs/groups (as some of these are more difficult than others, these can be differentiated as appropriate). Students discuss their extract then fill in their row of the table
 - Feed back to the class and discuss so all students have completed the whole table.

Main activity 2 - interpretations of characters

- ❖ Give out interpreting characters handouts [Resource E]. Teacher leads whole class discussion on how a biblical understanding of the characters can create different interpretations of them. For example, ask:
 - Is Wilson just a mad man?
 - Does Wilson represent a moral voice?
 - Does Wilson see things that we see?

- Is there any nobility in Gatsby's death? (is it sacrificial in any way?)
- Is Gatsby's death divinely ordained?
 - For further levels of interpretations for a bright class, discuss how the biblical readings can be ironic (i.e. the eyes aren't God's eyes, thus underlining the absence of God, therefore Wilson is mistaken – a deluded zealot; Gatsby is not Jesus-like – the comparison highlights his deficiencies rather than elevating him; why is Wilson compared to Judas – doesn't Gatsby deserve that comparison? etc.)

Plenary – reflections

- ❖ What have we learnt about the symbolic possibilities of places and characters?
- ❖ How does Fitzgerald use the Bible to highlight some of his themes and messages?

Homework

- ❖ Students to write a paragraph of analysis of a biblical interpretation of a character or place in chapter eight.

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Resources

Resource A – images of the valley



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Resource B – <http://www.crossref-it.info/articles/471/The-Great-Gatsby-~-chapter-8>

Resource C

The Great Gatsby chapter 8

- 1) Wilson's glazed eyes turned out to the ash-heaps, where small gray clouds took on fantastic shape and scurried here and there in the faint dawn wind.

Ezekiel 37: 1-2 ¹ [a] valley ... full of bones, ²And ... lo, they were very dry

Psalms 23:4 I walk through the valley of the shadow of death

- 2) '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. You may fool me, but you can't fool God!" '

Galatians 6:7 Be not deceived; God is not mocked: for whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap.

- 3) 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.

'That's an advertisement,' Michaelis assured him. Something made him turn away from the window and look back into the room. But Wilson stood there a long time, his face close to the window pane, nodding into the twilight.

Proverbs 15:3 ³The eyes of the LORD are in every place, beholding the evil and the good

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- 4) At two o'clock Gatsby put on his bathing-suit and left word with the butler that if any one phoned word was to be brought to him at the pool. He stopped at the garage for a pneumatic mattress that had amused his guests during the summer, and the chauffeur helped him pump it up. ... Gatsby shouldered the mattress and started for the pool.

John 19:17 ¹⁷And [Jesus] bearing his cross went forth...

- 5) Once he stopped and shifted it a little, and the chauffeur asked him if he needed help, but he shook his head and in a moment disappeared among the yellowing trees. ...

Luke 23: ²⁶As they led [Jesus] away ... ²⁷there followed .. women, which .. bewailed and lamented him. ²⁸But Jesus ... said ... 'Weep not for me...'

- 6) He must have looked up at an unfamiliar sky through frightening leaves and shivered as he found what a grotesque thing a rose is and how raw the sunlight was upon the scarcely created grass. A new world, material without being real, where poor ghosts, breathing dreams like air, drifted fortuitously about . . . like that ashen, fantastic figure gliding toward him through the amorphous trees.

The chauffeur ... heard the shots... I drove from the station directly to Gatsby's house and ... four of us, the chauffeur, butler, gardener, and I, hurried down to the pool...

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. ... The touch of a cluster of leaves revolved it slowly, tracing, like the leg of compass, a thin red circle in the water.

John 19:33-4 ³³.. When they came to Jesus, and saw that he was dead already ... ³⁴one of the soldiers with a spear pierced his side, and forthwith came there out blood and water.

- 7) It was after we started with Gatsby toward the house that the gardener saw Wilson's body a little way off in the grass, and the holocaust was complete.

Matthew 27: 3-5 ³Then Judas, which had betrayed him, ... ⁵went and hanged himself.

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Resource D

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Extract	Literal meaning	Additional symbolic meaning
1		
2		
3		
4		
5		
6		
7		

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Resource E



George Wilson



Jay Gatsby