

English 213: Modern and Postmodern Literature

The Great Gatsby Essay

Length and Due Dates

Length: 5 pages, formatted as described in the "Essays" portion of the syllabus
First Draft Due: Friday, October 22, **by 12:00 p.m.** via E-Submit or in hard copy at Padelford A-305

Revised Draft Due: Friday, October 29, **by 12:00 p.m.** via E-Submit or in hard copy at Padelford A-305

Assignment

For this essay, you may write on one of the following topics:

1. How is *The Great Gatsby* "about" the construction of Gatsby's identities?
2. How does *The Great Gatsby* connect individual and national identity?
3. Critics have read *The Great Gatsby* as a commentary on a segment of American society. What critique does the novel offer? How does the text convey a position on the U.S. of the 1920s or a particular social class?
4. Is *The Great Gatsby* a modernist novel? Why or why not?
5. In our discussion of *The Great Gatsby*, we have touched on the uncertainty of language and narrative, truth, and identity. Analyze how one type of uncertainty functions in the novel. Why do you think the text underscores a particular type of uncertainty?

Guidelines

1. Although I have posed specific questions, you will need to focus the topic and develop a clear, defensible argument that you can support with selected references to the text. For example, an essay on Gatsby's identities could concentrate on the identity Nick creates for Gatsby via narration, Gatsby's own constructions of his identity, or other's stories about Gatsby.
2. Let your argument dictate the organizational format of your essay. Just because the novel has a particular narrative order does not mean that your essay must follow that order.
3. Close textual analysis will serve as your main source of evidence. In supporting your argument, you will need to pay attention to the text's language, imagery and structure.
4. Remember that you are writing to an audience who has read *The Great Gatsby*. Therefore, you do not need to summarize the plot in your essay. Instead, you should incorporate summary, paraphrase, or quotation into an analysis. Each reference to the text should support your argument.

5. When writing about literature, use the present tense (for example, "Nick refuses Jordan's invitation" or "Gatsby displays his shirts to Daisy").
6. Do not forget the arguments posed in class or the electronic bulletin board. A review of the postings and in-class discussion may help you to ask key questions and shape your analysis. You will, of course, cite specific words and interpretations borrowed from classmates. The course web site has information on when and how to cite sources.
7. If you're having difficulty devising an approach to the essay, or if you want to discuss ideas-in-progress, come to my office hours or email me to set up an appointment.