

First and Last Name

Professor

Class

Themes in Chapters 1-4 of *The Great Gatsby*

Wealth and class take center stage in the first four chapters of *The Great Gatsby* (Love, Wealth, and Recreation). Nick Carraway is self-aware enough to know that all of his advantages come from his status as a wealthy person, but he doesn't let wealth influence his opinions of others. Instead, he is "inclined to reserve all judgments" (Fitzgerald 3). Early in the book, Fitzgerald introduces readers to the concept of old money versus new money. Those with new money recently acquired their wealth, while those with old money have seemingly always been wealthy. Although Nick comes from old money, he is willing to cross class lines by renting a house in West Egg village (Fitzgerald 7). Fitzgerald uses George and Myrtle Wilson to represent the working class. Myrtle desperately wants to be part of high society, but money and privilege are beyond her reach. She has to settle for having an affair with Tom Buchanan. In the first four chapters, Fitzgerald shows that people of all economic backgrounds use each other in some way. Tom uses Myrtle to fulfill his own selfish desires, Myrtle uses Tom to get a glimpse of his privileged world, and people use Gatsby for his hospitality and lavish parties.

Although Nick Carraway is not the title character, he is arguably the most interesting person in the first four chapters of the book. As an old-money Yale graduate with an interest in finance, Nick could have chosen to be selfish and judgmental. However, his father advised him to be tolerant of others, saying, "Whenever you feel like criticizing anyone, just remember that all the people in this world haven't had the advantages that you've had" (Fitzgerald 3). Because

Nick listened to his father's advice, he had many opportunities to connect with people outside his social circle. Nick doesn't seem concerned with material wealth, but he does acknowledge the ways in which wealth shapes society. Although East Egg is the more fashionable of the two villages, Nick chooses to rent a small house in West Egg. He describes it by saying, "My own house was an eye-sore, but it was a small eye-sore..." and then says that he is in the "consoling proximity of millionaires" (Fitzgerald 7). In contrast, Gatsby's mansion is a "colossal affair" with a marble swimming pool and more than forty acres of lawn (Fitzgerald 7).

As the narrator of *The Great Gatsby*, Nick Carraway plays an important role. Because he is a tolerant person who avoids snap judgments, he provides detailed insight into the dynamics at play between the old-money citizens of East Egg and the new-money citizens of West Egg. He also provides insightful descriptions of George and Myrtle Wilson, people with vastly different outlooks on the issues of wealth and class. While George is beaten down and feeling defeated, Myrtle is desperate to associate with the wealthy and privileged. Although Nick comes from old money, he is the only character who seems to understand that Tom and Daisy are caught up in the idea of the American dream. Nick's unique perspective allows Fitzgerald to address issues of wealth and class without judging the wealthy or assigning jealousy to no-money characters.

Works Cited

Fitzgerald, F. Scott. *The Great Gatsby*. New York: Scribner, 1995. Print.

“Love, Wealth, and Recreation: Examining ‘The Great Gatsby’.” *ASU Now*. 11 Apr. 2016. Web.

