

In what ways do you find the opening to the great gatsby effective

[Literature](#), [American Literature](#)



The opening to “The Great Gatsby” is undoubtedly effective as it successfully introduces both the main protagonists, Nick Carraway, a traditional and open minded narrator who comes from a “prominent, well-to-do” family” and Gatsby, an elusive and as yet, un-introduced character who is undoubtedly the main subject of the book, and the ideas and concerns that are prominent throughout the novel, such as the relationship between geography and social values.

This opening also allows the reader to gain a clear sense of the writers’ style and Fitzgerald employs a narrative hook of the mysteries surrounding Gatsby to entice the reader to continue the novel. Fitzgerald uses lots of exposition in this opening which is a necessity as for an effective opening of a novel you need to have the setting clearly defined and a sense of who the characters are. We are introduced to Nick, a highly moral and open minded man who moves East because his experiences in the War have broadened his perspectives and he couldn’t settle in the West and he joins the bond business in order to make money.

We are also introduced to Tom Buchanan, a selfish and arrogant and ridiculously wealthy man who is married to Daisy. At Yale, Tom was “one of the most powerful ends that ever played football” but his sporting success at college makes everything else feel like an “anti-climax”. He is physical and always likes to be control, “Turning me around by one arm”. Fitzgerald uses a narrator, Nick Carraway, to tell the story retrospectively. Instead of writing as an omniscient narrator, Fitzgerald uses a narrator who doesn’t know all the facts.

In this way, he sketches Gatsby as a shadowy figure that the reader can only glimpse through Nick's memories. Nick has all of this knowledge at the time of writing, but he chooses to order the narrative so that the reader only learns about Gatsby's life before West Egg bit by bit. This makes Gatsby seem more mysterious as Nick hides parts of Gatsby's identity until he chooses to let the reader know. Gatsby may be the "man who gives his name to this book", but Nick is the one who controls it.

Nick seems like a trustworthy narrator and claims that he is "inclined to reserve all judgements", open-minded and a good listener. Nick shows that he is well educated and articulate with his use of Latinate diction ('infinite' and 'fundamental') and he shows his diverse vocabulary which gives the novel a fluent and poetic tone and sets his style of verbose diction. He also uses colloquial language, "The Carraways are something of a clan", which makes the character's speech sound more natural and informal. However some may argue Carraway occasionally contradicts his claims of "fundamental decencies".

This is possibly suggested when he comments himself on the topic of Tom's "acute limited excellence": "I felt Tom would drift on forever seeking... for the dramatic turbulence of some irrecoverable football game". Also as the novel is written a year after the events happens which calls into question the narrators reliability to remember accurately. From the outset of the novel, it is clear that there is a big gap between the rich and the poor. Most of the characters in the novel are very wealthy and live a life of luxury.

The rich and glamorous atmosphere defines the novel's tone – the focus on the upper-class lifestyle gives the novel a mood of lively extravagance. However, this society is contrasted with the poverty of those living nearby in the valley of ashes. Nick is confused about how to respond to wealth and decadence. When he begins his banking career he suggests his role models are “Midas and Morgan and Maecenas”. At the same time Nick says that Gatsby's empty display of wealth, “represented everything for which I have an unaffected scorn”.

Money also causes a social divide between the people who live in East Egg who come from old, wealthy families and have inherited money and those from West Egg which is the home of the ‘new money’ who tend to ostensibly display their wealth. Fitzgerald creates a narrative hook by shrouding Gatsby in mystery. Nick Carraway states both that Gatsby was “exempt from his” scorn and yet that Gatsby represents “everything for which [Nick has] unaffected scorn” for. This raises the question as to what happened between now and when Nick is narrating the novel to make Gatsby and his experiences shallow.

At this point Nick is writing in an upbeat and positive manner which raises the question: ‘what goes wrong’. This makes the opening effective as it intrigues the reader and makes them want to continue. Nick is clearly a romantic idealist and his writing contains both classical allusions and odd epigrammatic phrases, “life is much more successfully looked at from one single window”. Nick states that his family pretends that they were “

descended from the Dukes of Buccleuch” to give them a romantic heritage but in fact they are descended from an owner of a mundane hardware store.