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Great Gatsby Unit
Character Analysis

Nick Carraway—Narrator Extraordinaire!

Abstract:

This exercise gives students further practice with both the skills of close reading and character analysis. In *The Great Gatsby*, readers are introduced to Nick Carraway by Nick Carraway, and many take his words as law. Yet there are also constant inklings that Nick may not be the most neutral of narrators after all. This exercise allows students to look closely at characters in the novel as they are introduced by Nick, and examine the divide between Carraway’s version of the character and the reader’s own impression. Students will only have the text, and their analysis, to guide them. While this lesson focuses on the first three chapters of the novel, the close textual reading and character analysis urged here is, and can be, applicable to other novels and short stories. This exercise can be done either in small groups, or individually, at the instructor’s discretion.

Common Core Standards:

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RL.9-10.3 Analyze how complex characters (e.g., those with multiple or conflicting motivations) develop over the course of a text, interact with other characters, and advance the plot or develop the theme.

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RL.11-12.1 Cite strong and thorough textual evidence to support analysis of what the text says explicitly as well as inferences drawn from the text, including determining where the text leaves matters uncertain.

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.SL.11-12.4 Present information, findings, and supporting evidence, conveying a clear and distinct perspective, such that listeners can follow the line of reasoning, alternative or opposing perspectives are addressed, and the organization, development, substance, and style are appropriate to purpose, audience, and a range of formal and informal tasks.

Procedure:

Students will most benefit from this lesson after reading (at least) the first few chapters of the novel. For the purposes of the exercise, reading the first three chapters, at minimum, allows the introduction of all the major characters in *The Great Gatsby*.

Students will be gathering evidence from the text in the forms of short passages, quotes, and lines of dialogue. Students should use only their texts for examination and analysis, no outside research or secondary texts are to be utilized. (If students are working in a computer lab, it might be helpful to have them turn away from computers, in order to ensure they are not receiving any extra “assistance” from Internet sources).

Either in small groups (each group receiving one character) or individually (each student might get 2-3 characters to examine, depending on time), assign the characters.

[Tom Buchanan, Daisy Buchanan, Jordan Baker, Gatsby, Nick Carraway, Myrtle Wilson]

In their examination, students should consider the following questions:

- What is specific about the character? Personality traits, behavior, etc.
- How does **Nick** portray the character?
- What are some of the “facts” we are TOLD about the character from the text?
- Does the way that Nick describes the character contradict other clues or information we receive from the text?
- How does the **reader** come to know the character? In other words, what clues do we get to form an opinion about the character that may be different than Nick’s perception?
- As Nick is one of the characters for analysis, consider how he represents himself. Do we see any information in the first three chapters that contradicts the way Nick portrays his own beliefs, behavior, reactions to other characters?

Suggestions for areas to examine: Nick’s description of himself, meeting between Nick and Daisy, Nick’s view of Tom, how Nick views Myrtle and George .

Depending on the size of groups and the number of characters assigned to each group or individual, students should be given approximately 15-20 minutes to work on this exercise. At the conclusion of that time, groups or individuals can report their findings back to the class. Additional ways to adapt this exercise to your classroom would be to have students or groups pair up with a corresponding group to compare findings on characters who form interesting, implied, or obvious pairs in the novel. Students could also use this in-class exercise to form the basis of research for later written work.

Materials:

Students should have a copy of *The Great Gatsby*, and should have read (at minimum) the first three chapters prior to class. Paper, pencils, pens would also be necessary for writing down findings.