

# The Great Gatsby Reading/Annotation Guide

You will annotate your book when you see examples of the underlined following (and their subtopics)

## Historical Background of the 1920's:

- A response to WWI -- The "Roaring Twenties;" The "Jazz Age;" The "Age of Intolerance;" The "Age of Wonderful Nonsense"
- Consumerism
- The 18<sup>th</sup> Amendment (prohibition) 1919-1933 → led to Organized Crime & The *Nouveaux Riches* (newly rich)
- The 19<sup>th</sup> Amendment (women's right to vote) → led to immorality, challenging traditional notions of femininity
- Economic policies
- Immigration
- The Lost Generation
- The Black Sox fix of 1919

## Motifs

- Geography → represents social classes
- Weather → reflects human conditions
- Light & dark imagery

## Symbols

- Eyes of Dr. T.J. Eckleburg
- time

## Themes

- The Decline of the American Dream  
Discovery, individualism & pursuit of happiness are corrupted by easy money & relaxing of social values.  
People cannot capture that elusive dream
- The Stratification of the Social Classes  
Old money, new money, and no money  
(Connected to the motif of geography)
- The Hollowness of the Upper Class  
Both the newly rich and the old rich are spiritually and emotionally hollow  
However newly rich may look good on the outside – it's just as empty on the inside  
However nice old rich may seem, they also lack heart, are careless, and inconsiderate
- Social issues: racism, domestic violence, moral corruption
- Innocence vs. Experience
- Appearance vs. Reality
- Time: Change and Loss
- Culture Clash: Differences between "the East" and "the West"

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## Character Archetypes

- **The Antihero (or Byronic hero)**  
*Larger-than-life, flawed, a rebel who obsessively follows a quest that is doomed to failure*  
*Often ends up dead at the end of the story (either unintended or intended)*  
Exhibits conflicting emotions and excessive moodiness  
Is passionate about a particular issue/idea  
Can be introspective & critical of himself  
Struggles with his own sense of integrity  
Operates largely within his own set of rules & principles  
Rejects accepted codes and norms of society  
Is fiercely independent & strongly individual  
Is a loner (whether imposed by society or self-imposed)  
Displays a lack of respect for rank and privilege  
Has a troubled or mysterious past  
Can be cynical, demanding, and arrogant  
Exhibits self-destructive tendencies and behavior
- **Tragic Hero**  
A man who rises to a high position and then falls from that high position, usually to desolation or death  
Influenced by fate and a tragic flaw (hamartia)  
20<sup>th</sup> century understanding of the term: the tragic hero exemplifies our underlying fear of being displaced...torn away from our chosen image of what or who we are in this world."
- **The Wild West Hero/Cowboy Legend**
- **Old Rich (Aristocracy)**
- **New Rich (the Nouveau Riche)**
- **No Money**
- **The Mob/Gangsters**
- **The Liberated Woman**
- **The Villain**
- **The User/Moocher**