

Notes on Dreams in *The Great Gatsby*

We are often unable to attain our dreams.

- Gatsby is unable to be with Daisy despite years of effort and great success in other areas.
- Nick goes to the East to find success and prosperity, but ends up returning to the Middle West (now called the Midwest).
- Myrtle dreams of being with Tom and enjoying his wealth, but she never escapes her miserable life with her husband.

Our dreams often turn out to be empty and unfulfilling—not what we thought they were.

- Gatsby has an idealized view of Daisy, but she is revealed to be a rather ordinary, weak person (even if Gatsby never realizes this).
- Nick is disillusioned by what he experiences in the East; he loathes its emptiness and corruption.
- The rich, powerful, and popular people in the novel are not portrayed in a positive light; even though they have achieved the “American Dream,” they fight, they treat people badly, they’re unhappy and shallow, and many of them drink and attend parties in order to distract themselves from the emptiness of their lives - see examples in Tom’s behavior especially, but also other characters in the novel (or even people who just appear briefly).

Our dreams make us heedless of the consequences of our actions; we become so obsessed with them that we are willing to do anything to attain them, and in the process we become immoral, shallow, and uncaring.

- Gatsby gets involved in illegal business activities (e.g., making liquor during Prohibition; other things are hinted at in the novel—we know his involvement with Wolfsheimer implies that he’s a criminal).
- Gatsby gets involved in a superficial, materialistic world and contributes to people’s shallow behavior.
- Gatsby abandons his name and his parents in the pursuit of his dream because they will hold him back (because they are poor, and also because of discrimination against Jews).
- Daisy gives up the deeper feelings she has for Gatsby in order to be with Tom, who is wealthier and is from the upper class.
- Jordan is suspected of cheating at golf (she competes in tournaments).
- Myrtle comes to hate her husband, treats him coldly, and cheats on him.
- None of the people to whom Gatsby gave so much bother to attend his funeral.