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# REVIEWS

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*The Great Gatsby*. CD-ROM. Films for the Humanities and Sciences, 1999.

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After the mandatory fussin' and fightin' that must accompany the installment of any new software, I was finally able to load and begin to examine just what sort of academic tool this CD might be. It is difficult to tell from its packaging whether it is to be used as a companion to Fitzgerald's oft-taught novel, or whether it is more to help teachers explicate and frame the novel historically. As it turns out, this disc accomplishes both ends. Although not necessarily intended for use in a college classroom, this disc has a number of features that will facilitate students' understanding of the text as well as help instructors generate meaningful class discussions and assignments.

First, the disc provides a large array of historical and biographical data to help any reader of the book understand the lifestyles portrayed in the novel, as well as the environment in which Fitzgerald wrote. Real-time films portraying roaring-'20s-type scenes accompany most of the sections, and jazz music samples are also available throughout. The information on Fitzgerald is not by any means all-encompassing, but it does give a budding academic a few insights into the author's mind by providing information on his childhood, writing style, and his tempestuous marriage to Zelda.

Another important section discusses the cultural background of *The Great Gatsby*. Rather than providing a tedious text-only listing, the "Cultural Background" section is divided into four subsections: travel, politics, social issues, and arts. From these a student or teacher may draw information on everything from the development of airlines, to the role of Coolidge's presidency, to flapper fashions, to Prohibition, to Valentino, to the rise of jazz. When taken as the whole, the information provided in this section goes a long way toward helping a student understand more wholly the ideas and issues that drove one of the most energetic periods in American history.

Finally, the CD also serves as a form of Cliff's Notes, providing chapter-by-chapter summaries, as well as (very) short discussions on three major themes of the book: Love and Illusion, Wealth and the American Dream, and Social Ambition. At the end of each chapter summary and theme essay are questions that can

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help the reader reflect on what he has read as well as help teachers develop assignments that can help students better engage with the text. Also included are character profiles on Nick Carraway, Tom and Daisy Buchanan, Jordan Baker, George and Myrtle Wilson, and the omnipresent T.J. Eckleburg. Another interesting feature is a discussion entitled “Who is Jay Gatsby?” All of these profiles come with questions at the end that force readers to identify what roles these characters play in the development of the novel, and to understand how Fitzgerald uses them to convey meaning.

*The Great Gatsby* CD-ROM is more than a mere study aid and certainly more than a teacher’s guide, and I see it as being an excellent source of information on the novel, its author, and his world. Still, it should not be used as the lone guide; teacher guidance, as always, is a requisite when examining a novel such as *The Great Gatsby* in the classroom. ✨