

Jennifer Costabile
Teaching Homestead Using *The Great Gatsby*
English Language Arts
New York

Introduction: 12th-grade ELA students will read F. Scott Fitzgerald’s classic novel *The Great Gatsby* as an anchor text to explore various concepts inherent in the fabric of American society then and now.

Overview: Within the context of reading chapters #1 and #2 of F. Scott Fitzgerald’s classic novel *The Great Gatsby*, students will address how the 1920s social and economic structure evident in the story can be found in Homestead that preceded it.

Students will explore eugenics, nativism, Social Darwinism, white supremacy, and America’s immigration policies in relation to the novel and Homestead. Students will also compare and contrast the social and economic structure of society in Long Island, New York with that of the impoverished suburb of the Valley of Ashes. Students will then compare and contrast the social and economic structure in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania between the industrialists Carnegie and Fricke and the laborers working in their steel mills. Within the context of reading chapters #1 and #2 of F. Scott Fitzgerald’s classic novel *The Great Gatsby*, students will address how the 1920s social and economic structure evident in the story can be found in Homestead that preceded it. As a culminating research and writing assignment, students will adapt what they learned to their local communities in order to understand how eugenics, immigration policies, and the ideologies responsible fuel the social and economic structures in society today.

Rationale: To explore eugenics in F. Scott Fitzgerald’s novel *The Great Gatsby* and how it relates to the ideology nativism used as a means of the social and economic system in Homestead and its steel mills

Unit Goals: Students will be able to understand the following as they apply to *The Great Gatsby* as well as America today:

- Eugenics, nativism, Social Darwinism, white supremacy, the Great Migration, and the National Origins Act of 1924
- The history of what it meant/means to be white in the United States, the concept of “otherness”, and its historical and current impact on immigration policies
- The difference between primary and secondary sources, and how to access and utilize them
- Compare and contrast the social and economic hierarchy in *The Great Gatsby* with Homestead

- Compare and contrast the living conditions in the Valley of Ashes, an impoverished area in *The Great Gatsby*, with the living conditions among the steelworkers in Homestead
- Adapt and synthesize the impact of America's historical ideologies regarding eugenics and immigration on students' local communities through writing

NYS Standards:

11-12R1: Cite strong and thorough textual evidence to support analysis of what the text says explicitly/implicitly and make logical inferences, including determining where the text is ambiguous; develop questions for deeper understanding and for further exploration.

RH1: Cite specific textual evidence to support analysis of primary and secondary sources, connecting insights gained from specific details to an understanding of the source as a whole.

11-12R2: Determine two or more themes or central ideas in a text and analyze their development, including how they emerge and are shaped and refined by specific details; objectively and accurately summarize a complex text.

RH2: Determine the central ideas or information of a primary or secondary source; provide an accurate summary that makes clear the relationships among the key details and ideas.

RH3: Evaluate various explanations for actions or events and determine which explanation best accords with textual evidence, acknowledging where the text leaves matters uncertain.

RST3: Analyze how and why scientific ideas and reasoning are developed and modified over the course of a text, source, argument, etc.; analyze/evaluate the results and conclusions based on explanations in the text.

RH5: Analyze in detail how a complex primary source (text, image, map, graphic, etc.) is structured, including how key sentences, paragraphs, and larger portions of the source contribute to the whole.

11-12R6: Analyze how authors employ point of view, perspective, and purpose, to shape explicit and implicit messages (e.g., persuasiveness, aesthetic quality, satire, sarcasm, irony, or understatement). RH6: Compare the point of view of two or more authors for how they treat the same or similar topics, including which details they include and emphasize in their respective accounts. RH6: Evaluate authors' points of view.

11-12R7: In literary texts, analyze multiple adaptations of a source text as presented in different formats (e.g., works of art, graphic novels, music, film, etc.), specifically evaluating how each version interprets the source. In informational texts, integrate and evaluate sources on the same topic or argument in order to address a question, or solve a problem.

11-12R9: Choose and develop criteria in order to evaluate the quality of texts. Make connections to other texts, ideas, cultural perspectives, eras, and personal experiences.

RH9: Integrate information from diverse sources, both primary and secondary, into a coherent understanding of an idea or event, noting discrepancies among sources

RST9: Compare and contrast findings presented in a source to those from other sources (including their own experiments), noting when the findings support or contradict previous explanations or accounts.

11-12W6: Conduct research through self-generated questions, or solve a problem; narrow or broaden the inquiry when appropriate. Synthesize multiple sources, demonstrating understanding and analysis of the subject under investigation. WHST6: Gather relevant information from multiple authoritative print and digital sources, using advanced searches effectively; assess the usefulness of each source in answering the research question and the accuracy of each source by applying discipline-specific criteria; integrate information into the text selectively to maintain the flow of ideas, avoiding plagiarism and following a standard format for citation. 11-12W7: Gather relevant information from multiple sources, using advanced searches effectively; assess the strengths and limitations of each source in terms of the task, purpose, and audience; integrate information into the text selectively to maintain the flow of ideas; avoid plagiarism, overreliance on one source, and follow a standard format for citation. WHST7: Draw evidence from informational texts to support analysis, reflection, and research.

Daily Lessons:

Guiding Questions for the unit

1. How does eugenics play a role in F. Scott Fitzgerald's novel *The Great Gatsby* and how does it relate to the ideology of nativism used as a means of the social and economic system in Homestead and its steel mills?
2. How has white supremacy affected immigration policies in the United States in the past and now?
3. What does the novel *The Great Gatsby* and the Homestead Steel Strike reveal about ethnicity in America?

Day #1: Students will have read Chapter #1 of Fitzgerald's *The Great Gatsby*.

Do Now Question: What does Tom Buchanan reveal about himself in chapter #1 of the novel he says, "Civilization's going to pieces," broke out Tom violently. "I've gotten to be a terrible pessimist about things. Have you read *The Rise of the Colored Empires* by this man Goddard? ... Well, it's a fine book, and everybody ought to read it. The idea is if we don't look out the white race will be – will be utterly submerged. It's all scientific stuff; it's been proved ... This fellow has worked out the whole thing. It's up to us, who are the dominant race, to watch out or those other races will have control of things ... The idea is that we're Nordics. I am, and you are, and ... And we've produced all the things that go to make civilization – oh, science and art, and all that. Do you see?" Chapter 1 - In my younger and more vulnerable years my father gave

Activity:

- Students will pair share thoughts about what Tom Buchanan has said.
- Whole-group discussion on pair share; ask students to comment on Tom's dialogue in the context of the 2020s- 100+ years later.
- Note Taking & discussion of terms: white supremacy, eugenics, nativism, social Darwinism, the Great Migration, and the National Origins Act of 1924. Also, discuss Lothrop Stoddard's book written in 1920 *The Rising Tide of Color: The Threat Against White World Supremacy*. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Lothrop_Stoddard
- Exit Ticket/Assessment: What is one term/concept that you learned today? Comment or ask a further question about it.
- Homework: Read chapter #2 of *The Great Gatsby* for Day #5. <https://gifs.africa/wp-content/uploads/2020/05/English-The-Grest-Gatsby-Chapter-2-4-Summaries-and-Questions-Seconda>

Days #2 & 3: Watch a series of videos/documentaries on eugenics & white supremacy.

Do Now (Day #2): Where and/or how else has eugenics been used? Explain.

Activity:

1) Watch the PBS documentary "The Eugenics Crusade" as well as video clips on eugenics advocates Charles Davenport (cousin to Charles Darwin), Thomas Hunt Morgan, and John Harvey Kellogg, and complete the accompanying worksheet as you watch.

<https://www.pbs.org/search/?q=The+Eugenics+Crusade>

<https://www.pbs.org/video/eugenics-charles-davenport-hva5wm/>

<https://www.pbs.org/video/eugenics-thomas-hunt-morgan-hephsi/>

<https://www.pbs.org/video/eugenics-john-harvey-kellogg-muqibf/>

2) Have students peruse the Eugenics Archive online site with a partner.

<http://www.eugenicsarchive.org/eugenics/list3.pl>

Day #3 Exit Ticket/Quick Write: What are your thoughts about what you have learned via the videos about America's history with eugenics, social Darwinism, white supremacy, and nativism? Be specific by referring to a specific part of a film, an event, or a person of discussion, and then discuss the impact on your thinking.

Day #4:

Do Now: short quiz on Chapter #1 of *The Great Gatsby* focusing on the key terms and concepts explored and associated with eugenics and white supremacy.

Essential Question: How do you notice the concepts of eugenics and white supremacy reflected in the actions, dialogue, and description in chapter #1 of *The Great Gatsby*?

Activity: Socratic Seminar based on the aforementioned Essential Question.

Day #5: Students will have read chapter #2 of Fitzgerald's *The Great Gatsby*.

Do Now/Quick Write: Juxtaposing settings- In a detailed paragraph of five or more sentences, compare/contrast the Valley of Ashes in chapter #2 to East Egg and the Buchanan mansion in chapter #1.

Essential Question: How do the juxtaposing settings in chapters #1 & #2 reflect the characters that live there?

Activity: In small groups, each group will explore how the setting in which the main characters- Tom, Daisy, Jordan, Nick, Wilson, and Myrtle- live, speaks to their social and economic hierarchy in the novel. Share out.

Day #6: Analyze America's historical immigration trends according to ethnicity.

Essential Question: What do you suppose were the ethnic trends in immigration to the United States in the 1920s?

Activity: In small groups, complete the following: A) analyze the attached graph regarding immigration trends to the United States and B) read the corresponding explanation regarding the various waves of immigration C) Answer the questions:

1. Who were the first group of immigrants to come to the U.S.?
2. Who were the second group of immigrants to go to the U.S. and what obstacles did they face?
3. Who were the third group of immigrants to come to the U.S. and how were they regarded?
4. Who were the fourth group of immigrants who came to the U.S. and what has their experience been?
5. *The Great Gatsby* is set in the 1920s and what do you notice about immigration in the 1920s?
6. Obviously, the Buchanans are established and not new immigrant arrivals to this country. In what wave of immigration do you suppose their family came to this country?

7. In what wave of immigration do you suppose the Wilsons came to the U.S.? What makes you think this?

<https://www.prb.org/resources/trends-in-migration-to-the-u-s/>

Assessment: Groups share out.

Days #7 & #8: Introduce students to the Homestead Steel Mills & Strike and focus on the living conditions there using primary sources.

Essential Questions: What parallels can be made between Homestead and the Valley of Ashes and the people/characters who live there? What parallels can be made between East Egg, Long Island, and the homes of the Industrialists of Pittsburgh?

Day #7-Do Now: What is a primary source? What is a secondary source? How do you tell the difference between primary and secondary sources?

- Activities:
- 1) Show students various examples of primary and secondary sources.
 - 2) Analyze the pictures of Homestead to determine the living conditions of the workers in the Homestead Steel Mills. (Primary Source pictures can be found within Margaret Byington's book *Homestead: The Houses of a Mill Town*, which can be found in the Database JStor: <https://www.jstor.org/stable/j.ctt6wrcmk>)
 - 3) Analyze the pictures of Flushing Queens in the 1920s, and the actual Valley of Ashes in Flushing Meadows in Queens, New York to determine the living conditions of the immigrant population who lived there. *Students can simply Google "Flushing Meadows garbage dumps" or "Flushing Meadows ash piles" to see historical images.
 - 4) Students will share their thoughts.

Day #8

Do Now: What was the Gilded Age and how do the mansions on Long Island, New York in *The Great Gatsby* emulate that time period and lifestyle?

Activities: 1) Have students peruse the Google Arts and Culture site to view the Gold Coast Mansions of the 1920s. <https://artsandculture.google.com/story/gold-coast-mansions-of-gatsby%E2%80%99s-long-island-wnet-new-york-public-media/ZAVR0r>

- 2) Have students peruse Pittsburgh Industrialists- Carnegie, Fricke, Westinghouse, Mellon- homes of the Gilded Age on Google.

3) Assessment/Quick Write: Describe the obvious differences between the dwellings of the impoverished that you viewed yesterday and with mansions you saw today. What are your thoughts about the immense contrasts in lifestyles? Should people live either way? Why or why not? Is this enormous gap between the rich and the poor (the Haves and have-nots) still a phenomenon today? Explain.

Day #9- Working Conditions

Do Now: Think about your intended profession or even the job you have right now. When you consider the workplace, think about and write down five things you expect and five things you don't feel you should tolerate.

Activities:

- 1) Share out Do Nows.
- 2) Have students read the brief article "The Steel Business" from American Experience to get a sense of the working conditions in words.
<https://www.pbs.org/wgbh/americanexperience/features/carnegie-steel-business/>
Also, read some snippets from Thomas Bell's *Out of this Furnace* in order to share the working conditions with students.
- 3) Show students secondary source images of the Homestead Steel Mills via the Promethean Board from the computer using photographs taken of the artwork at the Museum as well as from the artbook purchased at the museum.
- 4) Have students write down ideas and thoughts based on at least five of the images; share out.

Day #10: Analyze the graph of the steel mills' hierarchy of laboring men.

Essential Question: How do the ethnic makeup and ethnic hierarchy of the mills parallel the philosophy of eugenics and nativism of the time period?

Do Now: Do you think that a hierarchy among laborers based on ethnicity existed in the steel mills of the 1890s? Did a hierarchy exist in other workplaces of that time period and beyond? Does a hierarchy based on ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation, etc exist in workplaces today?

Activities: 1) Have students in small groups analyze the following graph to ascertain the hierarchy of workers based on ethnicity in the steel mills in the late 1800s. Share out observations. 2) Powerpoint showing the correlation between the hierarchy in the mills with the graph on waves of immigration from Day #6.

<https://www.prb.org/resources/trends-in-migration-to-the-u-s/>

3) Have each group share their thoughts about how the hierarchy in the workplace/workforce has paralleled waves of immigration.

Day #11: The Homestead Steel Strike/Black Steel Workers

Essential Question: Were the steelworkers justified for striking in 1892?

Activities: 1) Watch the synopsis video of the Homestead Steel Strike.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PeNNYVmgNCo>

2) Review the Great Migration of African-Americans to northern cities and have students read the article about black steelworkers in western Pennsylvania.

<http://paheritage.wpengine.com/article/black-steelworkers-western-pennsylvania/>

Quick Write: If you worked in the conditions that the steelworkers at Homestead had to work, would you have participated in the strike? Explain why or why not.

Day #12:

Assign students a research paper for which they will be able to exercise choice regarding immigration or migration (to be researched and completed independently). The purpose of this assignment is to create a personal and/or meaningful connection to the students' local community by understanding how immigration or migration shaped the local history and the current state of where they live

Research Topic: Select a group of immigrants or migrants who have come to live in Newburgh, New York (substitute anytown USA). Explore the following:

- when and why the said group chose to reside in Newburgh
- If and how they fit into the fabric of the community
- types of dwellings in which they reside/living conditions
- employment opportunities/working conditions/pay
- pre-existing familial, if any, connections to the community
- access to community and recreational spaces
- access to education
- assimilation to community
- changes in hierarchical status and relation to the fabric of the community over time
- Is there a personal connection to the group of people either by blood or friendship? Explain.

Formal and Informal Assessment:

- Whole group reading discussion
- Pair Shares
- Do Nows
- Chapter #1 & #2 reading/concept quizzes
- Quick writes/Writing Prompts
- Primary & secondary source activity
- Research assignment

Technological Needs:

- Chromebooks/Computers
- Databases: Gale, JStor, InfoBase History Research, Britannica School, Citation Wizard, Homestead/Pittsburgh (for Primary sources related to Homestead)

Materials:

- F. Scott Fitzgerald's *The Great Gatsby* [The Great Gatsby \(text\).pdf - Google Docs](#)
- American Experience documentary "The Eugenics Crusade"
- National Origins Act of 1924 <https://history.house.gov/Historical-Highlights/1901-1950/The-Immigration-Act-of-1924/>
- Handouts (on the ethnic breakdown of mills)
- Stoddard's *The Rise of the Colored Empires*
https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Rising_Tide_of_Color_Against_White_World-Supremacy
- Media Center/MLA Format

Other sources to consider:

The Immortal Life of Henrietta Lacks by Rebecca Skloot (to explore scientific gene research and heredity)

Video Clip "Genetic Screening: Controlling Heredity"

<https://www.pbs.org/video/eugenics-genetic-screening-controlling-heredity-rgwdyn/>