

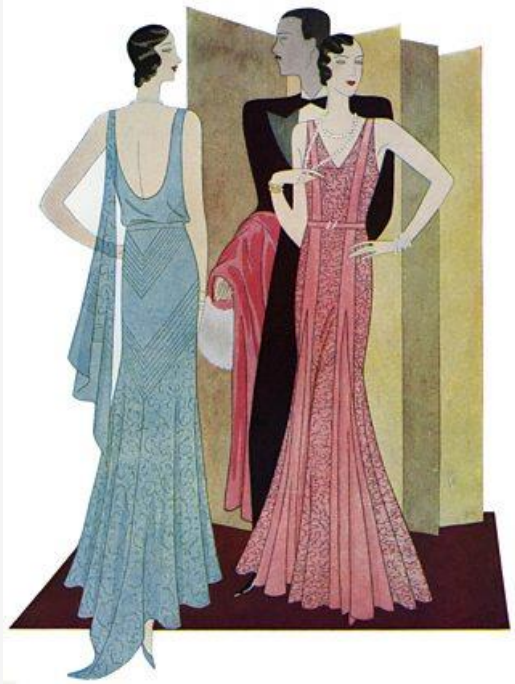
THE GREAT GATSBY

CONTEXT – THE ROARING TWENTIES



LO: To consolidate an understanding of the context of the novel.

The Roaring Twenties



Although the USA did not enter World War One until April 1917, the conflict cast a shadow over American society that would take a while to pass. There was a brief economic recession at the start of the 1920s, but, as the decade moved **On**, the economy boomed and America began the age of **consumerism** - many Americans bought cars, radios, fridges etc.

Major cities such as New York and Chicago grew rapidly and the building of skyscrapers like the Empire State Building, which was completed in 1931, seemed to show the self-confidence of American society.

How would you define consumerism?

Consumerism

Consumerism is the idea that increasing consumption of goods and services purchased in the market is always a desirable goal and that a person's wellbeing and happiness depends fundamentally on obtaining consumer goods and material possessions.



The Roaring Twenties



At the same time, many Americans wanted to enjoy themselves as much as they could by perhaps listening to the new **jazz music**, or doing the new dances such as the Charleston and the black bottom. Crowds flocked to watch film stars like Charlie Chaplin and baseball stars like Babe Ruth. The emphasis on having fun and spending money has led to the 1920s being called **the Roaring Twenties**.

The Roaring Twenties

The spirit of the Roaring Twenties was marked by a general feeling of novelty associated with modernity and a break with tradition.

Everything seemed possible through modern technology such as automobiles, moving pictures, and radio, which brought "modernity" to a large part of the population. Formal decorative frills were shed in favour of practicality in both daily life and architecture. At the same time, jazz and dancing rose in popularity, in opposition to the mood of World War I. As such, the period often is referred to as the Jazz Age.

Criticism of the Roaring Twenties

How can you link this to the novel?

As the average American in the 1920s became more enamoured of wealth and everyday luxuries, some began satirising the hypocrisy and greed they observed. Of these social critics, **Sinclair Lewis** was the most popular. His popular 1920 novel *Main Street* satirised the dull and ignorant lives of the residents of a Midwestern town. He followed with *Babbitt*, about a middle-aged businessman who rebels against his dull life and family, only to realize that the younger generation is as hypocritical as his own.



The Roaring Twenties...

In the novel



Though the 1920s were a time of great optimism, **Fitzgerald portrays the much bleaker side** of the revelry by focusing on its **indulgence, hypocrisy, shallow recklessness**, and its **perilous**—even *fatal*—*consequences*.

Roaring Twenties Evidence

"And I hope she'll be a fool — that's the best thing a girl can be in this world, a beautiful little fool."

(Daisy – Chapter 1)

But above the grey land and the spasms of bleak dust which drift endlessly over it, you perceive, after a moment, the eyes of Doctor T. J. Eckleburg. The eyes of Doctor T. J. Eckleburg are blue and gigantic—their retinas are one yard high. They look out of no face but, instead, from a pair of enormous yellow spectacles which pass over a nonexistent nose. Evidently some wild wag of an oculist set them there to fatten his practice in the borough of Queens, and then sank down himself into eternal blindness or forgot them and moved away. But his eyes, dimmed a little by many countless days under sun and rain, brood on over the solemn dumping ground.

(Chapter 2)

On buffet tables, garnished with glistening hors d'oeuvre, spiced baked hams crowded against salads of harlequin designs and pastry pigs and turkeys bewitched to a dark gold. In the main hall a bar with a real brass rail was set up, and stocked with gins and liquors and with cordials so long forgotten that most of his female guests were too young to know one from another.

(Chapter 3)

Task: In pairs, discuss how your chosen quotation reflects The Roaring Twenties in the novel. What is Fitzgerald's message?

The Roaring Twenties

Through his presentation of The Roaring Twenties in the novel, what is Fitzgerald suggesting about the purity and longevity of the relationships he presents?

You could consider the following relationships:

Tom and Daisy

Daisy and Gatsby

Tom and Myrtle

