

F. Scott Fitzgerald

# The Great Gatsby





F. Scott Fitzgerald

# THE GREAT GATSBY

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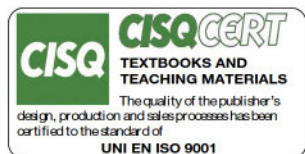
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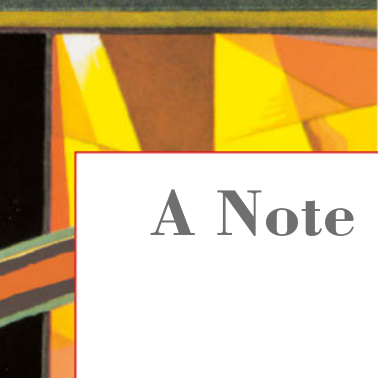


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# A Note on the Author *and his Times*

## Youth

Francis Scott Key Fitzgerald was born on September 24, 1896 in St. Paul, Minnesota. Not only was he one of America's major writers, but he was also a social historian who gave the name to the Jazz Age. Jazz became very popular in the 1920s with great musicians such as Louis Armstrong and Benny Goodman and with the invention of the phonograph record.

Fitzgerald's fiction is a rich, detailed and realistic account of American life in the 1920s. His ambition, self-confidence and passion created a writer whose intricate personal life often resembled a work of fiction. Most of his life was a struggle <sup>1</sup> between the temptation of a glamorous <sup>2</sup> and wealthy social life, and a strong desire to write.

Fitzgerald attended Princeton University but did not graduate because he often neglected his studies and spent most of his time on the football team and the social life of the university. He was an active member of the Triangle Club, which produced original university plays. Already as a university student Fitzgerald was attracted by the best things that life could offer.

In 1917 he left Princeton and joined the U.S. Army as a second lieutenant, but he never fought in the First World War. During his

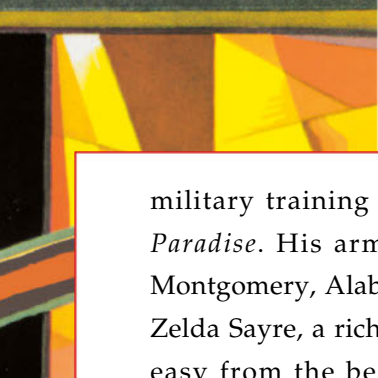
1. **struggle** : battle, fight.

2. **glamorous** : elegant, attractive.



**F. Scott Fitzgerald** photographed in 1920,  
at the very beginning of the Jazz Age.





military training he began writing his first novel, *This Side of Paradise*. His army career took him to Camp Sheridan, near Montgomery, Alabama, where he met and fell deeply in love with Zelda Sayre, a rich girl from the South. Their relationship was not easy from the beginning. They were both quite independent individuals and they both wanted social and financial success in their lives. Zelda often wondered if Fitzgerald would ever make enough money to marry her! This made a strong impression on Fitzgerald and influenced the importance he gave to money and social connections throughout his life. In fact, she married him in April 1920 only after the publication of *This Side of Paradise*. The couple went to live in New York.

## Success

Fitzgerald's first novel was immediately successful but it was not considered a very good book, although it revealed how many young people of the 1920s lived. With his good looks, popularity and social know-how, he was a sort of model for upper-class American youth. World War I had just finished and America wanted to have fun. For those who could afford it, like the Fitzgeralds, parties and drinking became a way of life. All over New York City people telephoned each other planning parties. For a while the Fitzgeralds were successful and happy as they went from one party to the next. But their expensive, superficial lifestyle <sup>1</sup> did not give them any kind of the security or stability which they both needed.

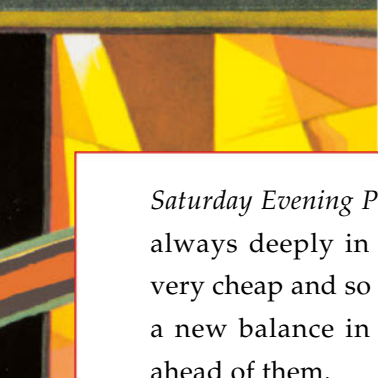
1. **lifestyle** : the way in which you live.

Although Fitzgerald earned a great amount of money, he began his lifelong practice of borrowing from his agent and his publisher. He had no control over his extravagant spending habits or Zelda's. He didn't really care enough about money—he only cared about the lifestyle money could bring. In *The Great Gatsby* Fitzgerald sympathizes with <sup>1</sup> Jay Gatsby, a tremendously successful but illegal businessman, despised by the more established wealthy families. Gatsby is the living example of the “American Dream”: a nobody from nowhere who achieves immense wealth with his own capacities. Nick Carraway says to him towards the end of the novel, “You're worth the whole bunch <sup>2</sup> of them.” It is interesting to note that both the author and his main character, Jay Gatsby, became victims of their dreams.

On October 26, 1921 Fitzgerald and Zelda's child, Frances, was born, but she was a burden <sup>3</sup> for Zelda. Fitzgerald's second novel, *The Beautiful and the Damned*, was published in 1922 but it was not very well received. It was considered a serious book, perhaps too serious. One of its major defects was the conflict between Fitzgerald's natural feelings and the fashionable attitudes of the pessimistic intellectuals of his time. In the novel he tried to show the meaning of the life he and Zelda had been living. But he was not able to create two protagonists who were beautiful and damned. Instead they were pitiful and silly.

Their grandiose lifestyle in New York became extremely costly and Fitzgerald worked for important magazines, such as the

1. **sympathizes with** : (here) shows approval, agrees with.
2. **bunch** : group.
3. **burden** : a heavy responsibility, a big problem.



*Saturday Evening Post*, to earn more money. But he and Zelda were always deeply in debt. They had heard that life in Europe was very cheap and so they moved to France, where they hoped to find a new balance in their lives. However, there was more trouble ahead of them.

## Europe

Zelda met a handsome French aviator and they fell in love. When Fitzgerald discovered what was happening, his reaction was very violent and the love affair was soon over. In Paris Fitzgerald met other important American writers such as Ernest Hemingway and Gertrude Stein.

Early in November 1924 the Fitzgeralds decided to spend the winter in Rome. They hated Rome because no one knew who they were. They started drinking heavily again and they quarreled <sup>1</sup> a lot. Fitzgerald got into a fight with a taxi driver and was badly beaten up. <sup>2</sup> From Rome they went to Capri and then back to France.

*The Great Gatsby* was published in April 1925 and it represented the high point in Fitzgerald's literary career. He was able to understand and portray the decadence, hypocrisy and materialism of the Jazz Age better than any other writer of his period. However, the initial sales of *The Great Gatsby*, about 20,000 copies, were a big disappointment for Fitzgerald. There never seemed to be enough money for him and Zelda, and their lives of constant partying and drinking had become a nightmare.

1. **quarreled** : had disagreements.

2. **beaten up** : hit violently.

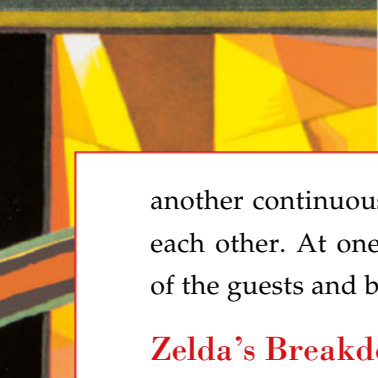


**Scott, Zelda and their daughter Scottie** photographed somewhere in Italy on one of their visits to Europe after the publication of *The Great Gatsby*.

The summer of 1925 in Paris was in Fitzgerald's words, "one of 1,000 parties and no work". In August they went to Antibes in the south of France and continued partying with many socially important people. They decided to return to the United States to start working seriously at the end of 1925. But Hollywood, where Fitzgerald was working as a scriptwriter <sup>1</sup> for United Artists, was

1. **scriptwriter** : a person who writes the stories for films.





another continuous party where people played grotesque jokes on each other. At one party Fitzgerald took the watches and jewelry of the guests and boiled them in a saucepan of tomato soup!

### **Zelda's Breakdown <sup>1</sup>**

Once again the couple attempted to put order and meaning into their lives and moved back to the East Coast in 1927. Their marriage was deteriorating, but Fitzgerald was finally able to do some work on his novel *Tender is the Night*.

As a young girl Zelda wanted to be a ballet dancer and at the age of twenty-eight she decided to start studying ballet dancing again. She and Fitzgerald spent the summer of 1928 in Paris, where she took ballet lessons. Ballet had become an obsession for Zelda.

On their return to the United States in September they were bankrupt. In 1930 Zelda suffered her first serious nervous breakdown. Fitzgerald loved his wife and he felt her suffering deeply. He also knew that one of the causes of her problems was his heavy drinking. This intensified his remorse and compassion.

In 1933 Fitzgerald finally completed *Tender is the Night*, in spite of his alcoholism and his wife's mental illness. Zelda had her third severe breakdown in 1934 and for the rest of her life she was never well again. Although she returned home occasionally, she spent most of her life in a mental hospital. Fitzgerald was desperate, in severe financial difficulty, and he drank heavily.

1. **breakdown** : an unnatural condition of deep anxiety, worrying, crying and depression that sometimes leads to mental illness.

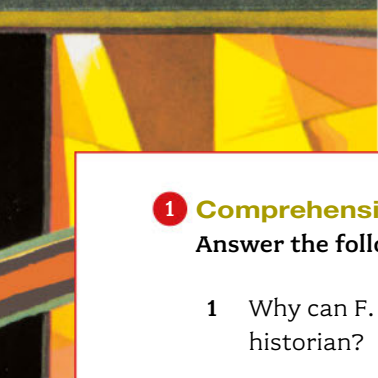
## Decline

*Taps at Reveille*, a collection of short stories, was published in the spring of 1935. These were terribly difficult years for the writer, because the quality of his work declined and he was not able to control his drinking.

In July 1937 he went to Hollywood to work as a scriptwriter again. Here he met Sheila Graham, a famous Hollywood journalist, and fell in love with her. This was a lucky meeting for Fitzgerald because at this point in his life he needed a woman to look after and worry about.

However, he was not very successful as a scriptwriter and by 1939 he was discouraged because he could not find work. He wrote the first part of his last novel, *The Last Tycoon*, sitting in bed because he was very weak. On December 21, 1940, after a second, severe heart attack, Fitzgerald died. His last novel, although unfinished, was published in 1941.

Few people came to his funeral in Hollywood—in some ways it was similar to Jay Gatsby's. Zelda died in 1948 during a fire in the mental hospital and was buried beside him.



## 1 Comprehension check

Answer the following questions.

- 1 Why can F. Scott Fitzgerald also be considered a social historian?  
.....
- 2 Why didn't Fitzgerald graduate from university?  
.....
- 3 What things were important to Zelda Sayre?  
.....
- 4 What happened to wealthy young Americans after World War I?  
.....
- 5 What were the problems with *The Beautiful and The Damned*?  
.....
- 6 Why did Fitzgerald want to make a lot of money?  
.....
- 7 Why did the Fitzgeralds move to Europe?  
.....
- 8 What personal problems did they face in Europe?  
.....
- 9 What were the Fitzgeralds' favorite social activities?  
.....
- 10 What was Fitzgerald's job in Hollywood?  
.....
- 11 What was one of the causes of Zelda's emotional breakdowns?  
.....
- 12 Describe Fitzgerald's last years.  
.....

## 2 Discussion

Is there a writer in your culture who is similar to F. Scott Fitzgerald?

## Before you read

### 1 Nick's background

Read the first part of Chapter One. For questions 1-12 complete the sentences.

- 1 Nick's father told him not to criticize anyone because .....
- 2 Nick grew up in .....
- 3 Nick's family had been important for .....
- 4 Nick graduated from New Haven University in .....
- 5 Nick felt restless in the United States because .....
- 6 Nick went East to learn .....
- 7 Instead of finding rooms in New York City, Nick rented .....
- 8 To live in his small and ugly house Nick paid .....
- 9 East Egg and West Egg were .....
- 10 Mr Gatsby's home was an imitation of a .....
- 11 Daisy was Nick's .....
- 12 Nick had known Tom in .....



Part of **New York** state. To the east of Manhattan and to the south of Westchester County you can see here the north-western part of **Long Island**, where the story is set.



## CHAPTER ONE

START

W

hen I was younger my father gave me some advice that I've been thinking about ever since. "Whenever you feel like criticizing anyone," he told me, "just remember that all the people in the world haven't had the advantages that you've had."

After spending some time in New York I came back to this Midwestern <sup>1</sup> city where I grew up. My family have been important, well-to-do <sup>2</sup> people for three generations. My grandfather's brother came here in 1851 and started the business that my father works in today.

I graduated from New Haven University <sup>3</sup> in 1915 and then took part in the First World War. I enjoyed Europe so much that I came back feeling restless. <sup>4</sup> So I decided to go East and learn the bond business. <sup>5</sup> Everybody I knew was in the bond business. Father agreed to pay for my living costs for a year and in 1922 I came East, permanently, I thought.

I intended to find rooms in New York City, but when a young man at the office suggested that we rent a house together in the country, it sounded like a great idea. He found a small house

1. **midwestern** : part of the Midwest, the central part of the US east of the Rocky Mountains.
2. **well-to-do** : upper middle-class.
3. **New Haven University** : today this university is known as Yale University.
4. **restless** : always moving, unable to stay still.
5. **bond business** : the buying and selling of certificates of debt.



to rent at eighty dollars a month, but at the last minute his company sent him to Washington and I went to the country alone. I had a Finnish woman who made my bed and cooked breakfast.

And so with the sunshine and the abundant green leaves growing on the trees, I had the feeling that life was beginning again with the summer.

There was so much to read and I bought a lot of books about banking and investments, which stood on my shelf promising to reveal the secrets of wealth.

By chance I had rented a house in one of the strangest communities in North America. It was on Long Island,<sup>1</sup> which stretches more than sixty miles east of New York City.

On Long Island there are two unusual formations of land that look almost like two eggs and are separated by a bay.

I lived at West Egg, the less fashionable of the two. My house was between two huge houses, near the sea. The one on my right was colossal. It was an imitation of a French palace with a tower on one side, a splendid swimming pool and beautiful lawns<sup>2</sup> and gardens. It was Mr Gatsby's home. My house was ugly and small, but I had a view of the water, of part of my neighbor's lawn and I lived near millionaires, all for eighty dollars a month.

Across the bay the white palaces of the fashionable East Egg shone on the water. The history of the summer really begins on the day I went to have dinner with Tom and Daisy Buchanan. Daisy was my second cousin and I had known Tom in college.

1. **Long Island** : see map on page 13.

2. **lawns** : areas of cut grass in a garden or park.



# THE GREAT GATSBY

Tom was one of the most powerful football players New Haven University had ever had. His family was extremely wealthy. Now he had left Chicago and had come East, bringing his own polo horses with him. It was hard to imagine that a man of my own age was so rich.

END

I don't know why they came East. They had spent a year in France for no particular reason and then drifted <sup>1</sup> here and there, wherever people played polo and were rich.

On the telephone Daisy said they were going to stay, but I didn't believe it. Tom would drift on forever looking for excitement.

And so it happened that on a warm and windy evening I drove over to East Egg to see two old friends I hardly knew. Their house was even more elaborate than I had expected—a red and white colonial mansion, <sup>2</sup> looking over the bay. Tom Buchanan was standing with his legs apart on the front porch. <sup>3</sup>

He was a robust man of thirty, with a rather hard mouth and an arrogant manner. His body was powerful—it was a cruel body.

His rough <sup>4</sup> speaking voice added to the impression of a bad-tempered individual. There were men at New Haven who really hated him. We had never been close friends, but I had the feeling that he approved of me and wanted me to like him. We talked for a few minutes on the sunny porch.

"I've got a nice place here," he said, his eyes moving about restlessly. "It belonged to Demaine, the oil man. Let's go inside."

1. **drifted** : moved about without a reason or purpose.

2. **mansion** : a large, expensive house with land around it.

3. **porch** : covered area at the entrance (see picture on page 17).

4. **rough** : harsh, unpleasant.





# THE GREAT GATSBY

We walked through a high hallway into a bright rosy-colored room with open French windows at each end. A breeze <sup>1</sup> blew through the room blowing the curtains like pale flags.

In the room there was an enormous couch <sup>2</sup> on which two young women, both dressed in white, were lying.

The younger of the two was a stranger to me and did not move at all when I came in.

The other girl, Daisy, made an attempt to rise and then she laughed an absurd, charming little laugh. I laughed too and came forward into the room.

"I'm so, so happy to see you." She laughed again and held my hand. She said in a soft voice that the name of the other woman was Baker.

Miss Baker's lips moved a little and she bent <sup>3</sup> her head very slightly in my direction.

My cousin started asking me questions in her low, exciting voice. Her face was sad and lovely, with bright eyes and a passionate mouth, but it was the excitement in her voice that men found difficult to forget.

"Oh, Nick, you should see the baby."

"I'd like to."

"She's asleep. She's two years old. Have you seen her?"

"Never."

Tom Buchanan, who had been moving around the room restlessly, put his hand on my shoulder.

"What are you doing, Nick?"

1. **breeze** : a light wind.

2. **couch** : 

3. **bent** : leaned.



“I sell bonds.”

“Who do you work for?”

I told him.

“Never heard of them,” he said firmly.

This annoyed me. “You will hear of them,” I said.

At this point Miss Baker suddenly came to life and stood up.

“I’m stiff,”<sup>1</sup> she complained. “I’ve been lying on the couch too long.”

I enjoyed looking at her. She was a slender<sup>2</sup> girl with gray eyes and a charming, dissatisfied face. I realized that I had seen her, or her picture, somewhere before.

“You live in West Egg. I know somebody there,” she said.

“I don’t know a single—”

“You must know Gatsby.”

“Gatsby?” demanded Daisy.  
“What Gatsby?”

Before I could say that he was my neighbor, the butler<sup>3</sup> announced dinner and Tom put his hand under my arm and moved me from the room.

We followed the two young women onto a rosy-colored porch where a table was set for dinner.



1. **stiff** : rigid, have difficulty moving.

2. **slender** : thin and graceful.

3. **butler** : a male servant.



# THE GREAT GATSBY

Miss Baker and Daisy talked together in a manner that was as cool as their white dresses. They were here and they accepted Tom and me, making only a polite effort to entertain or be entertained.

“You make me feel uncivilized, Daisy,” I said. “Can’t you talk about agriculture or something?”

My comment had a strange effect on Tom.

“Civilization is going to pieces!” he said violently. “Have you read *The Rise of Colored Empires* by Goddard?”

“Why, no,” I answered, rather surprised.

“Well, it’s a fine book and everybody ought to read it. It says that if we aren’t careful the white race will be pushed under by the colored races. It’s all very scientific.”

“Tom’s getting very profound,” said Daisy. “He reads deep books with long words in them.”

“These books are all scientific. Our race has produced all the things that make up civilization—art, science and all that. If we’re not careful these other races will control things.”

The telephone rang inside the house and the butler went to answer it. He came back, whispered something in Tom’s ear and without a word Tom went inside.

Daisy looked at me and said, “I love to see you at my table, Nick. You remind me of a—of a rose.”

This was not true. She was saying the first thing that came into her head, but her warm voice was exciting. Then suddenly she excused herself and went into the house.

Miss Baker and I looked at each other. I wanted to speak when she sat up and said, “Ssh! Don’t talk. I want to hear what Tom is saying on the telephone.”



“Is something happening?” I asked.

“You don’t know?” said Miss Baker. “I thought everybody knew. Tom’s got a woman in New York.”

“He’s got a woman?” I repeated stupidly.

“Yes. She shouldn’t telephone him at dinner, though.”

Tom and Daisy came back to the table and I avoided looking at their eyes.

After a few minutes we got up from the table and Tom and Miss Baker went inside. I followed Daisy to the front porch where we sat and talked for a while.

“Nick, do you know what I said when my daughter was born?”

“Tell me.”

“I said, ‘I’m glad it’s a girl and I hope she’ll be a beautiful little fool’<sup>1</sup>—that’s the best thing a girl can be in this world.”

Tom and Miss Baker sat on a long couch in the rose-red room and she read out loud to him from the *Saturday Evening Post*.<sup>2</sup> When Daisy and I came in she stopped reading and stood up.

“Ten o’clock,” she said. “Time for me to go to bed.”

“Jordan’s playing in a match tomorrow,” explained Daisy.

“Oh—you’re *Jordan Baker*,” I said.

Now I knew why her face was familiar. She was a well-known golf player. Her face had looked out at me from many photographs of her sports life. I had heard a story about her too, a critical, unpleasant story that I had forgotten.

“Good night,” she said. “Good night, Mr Carraway. See you soon.” She went up the stairs.

1. **fool** : idiot.

2. ***Saturday Evening Post*** : a popular American magazine.







# THE GREAT GATSBY

“Of course you will,” said Daisy. “Come over often, Nick, and I think I’ll arrange a marriage!”

“She’s a nice girl,” said Tom.

“Is she from New York?” I asked.

“She’s from Louisville, my home town. We grew up together,” said Daisy.

A few minutes later I got up to go home. Tom and Daisy came to the door with me and stood side by side in a cheerful square of light.

I was confused and a little disgusted as I drove away. It seemed to me that the thing for Daisy to do was to run out of the house with her child in her arms. As for Tom, the fact that “he had a woman in New York” was less surprising than the fact that he had been upset <sup>1</sup> by a book.

When I got home to West Egg, it was a bright, moonlit night. Twenty yards <sup>2</sup> away, in my neighbor’s mansion, a man was standing with his hands in his pockets looking up at the stars. Something in the way he stood suggested that he was Mr Gatsby himself. He stretched out his arms towards the dark water and I think he was trembling. <sup>3</sup> I looked at the sea too, but all I could see was a small, green light on the coast of East Egg.

1. **upset** : worried, anxious, troubled.

2. **yards** : measurement of length (1 yard=0.91 meters).

3. **trembling** : shaking.

## The text and **beyond**

### 1 Comprehension check

Answer the following questions.

- 1 What kind of life did Tom and Daisy lead before coming to Long Island?
- 2 What do you know about Nick? What do you know about Tom?
- 3 What kind of relationship do Tom and Nick have?
- 4 Who is Miss Baker?
- 5 Who does Miss Baker know in West Egg?
- 6 How does Tom react when Nick says the word “uncivilized”?
- 7 Who calls Tom on the telephone?
- 8 Why does Miss Baker object to the phone call that Tom receives?
- 9 Why is Miss Baker’s face familiar to Nick?
- 10 How does Nick feel when he leaves Tom and Daisy’s house?

### FCE 2 The young and the restless

You are a newspaper reporter who has visited Tom and Daisy at their home. Write a short article about what you saw and heard, but also what you think of these rich young people.

Include in your article a brief description of:

- the house
- Tom, Daisy and Miss Baker
- Tom and Daisy’s lifestyle before returning to America
- how they talk and what they talk about

Conclude your article by saying what impression these people made on you during your short visit. Write between 120-180 words.

You can begin your article like this:

#### **A Visit to an East Egg Mansion**

For our series of articles “The Young and the Restless” we visited the exclusive home of Mr and Mrs Tom Buchanan in fashionable East Egg, Long Island. Their house, which once belonged to...

### FCE 3 Sentence transformation

Complete the second sentence so that it has a similar meaning to the first sentence, using the word given. **Do not change the word given.** You must use between two and five words, including the word given. There is an example at the beginning (0).

- 0 I enjoyed Europe so much that I came back feeling restless.  
**had**  
 I came back feeling restless ..... *because I had enjoyed Europe* ..... so much.
- 1 Father agreed to pay for my living costs.  
**would**  
 Father ..... for my living costs.
- 2 A young man at the office suggested that we rent a house together in the country.  
**why**  
 A young man at the office said, "..... a house together in the country?"
- 3 On the telephone Daisy said they were going to stay.  
**are**  
 On the telephone Daisy said, "..... stay."
- 4 I drove over to East Egg to see two old friends I hardly knew.  
**not**  
 I drove over to East Egg to see two old friends ..... well.
- 5 My cousin started asking me questions.  
**ask**  
 My cousin ..... questions.
- 6 Tom said, "The white race will be pushed under by the colored races."  
**push**  
 Tom told us ..... the white race under.
- 7 I had heard a story about her that I had forgotten.  
**remembered**  
 I ..... that I had heard.
- 8 It seemed to me that the thing for Daisy to do was to run out of the house.  
**should**  
 It seemed to me that ..... run out of the house.

## Before you read

### 1 Reading pictures

Look at the picture on pages 30-31. Look closely at the buildings in the background on the left and at the billboard in the foreground on the right. (A billboard is a large board where people put posters to advertise things.) Then, in pairs or small groups, talk about the following:

- Describe the landscape. Think of one or two adjectives to describe your general impression: how does the landscape make you feel?
- Think about the people who live and work in the coffee shop and the garage. What do you think these people are like?
- What does the poster on the billboard advertise?
- What effect does the advertiser want to have on the public, do you think?
- Could the poster have a different effect from what the advertiser wanted? What effect does it have on you?

### FCE 2 Fill in the gaps

Read the text below and think of the word which best fills each space. Use only one word in each space. There is an example at the beginning (0). Then read the first part of Chapter Two to check your answers.

About half way (0) ..... *between* ..... West Egg and New York the road joins the railroad and runs (1) ..... it for a short distance to avoid a desolate area of land. This is a valley of ashes, (2) ..... the gray land is always covered (3) ..... clouds of dust.

Above the dust you (4) ..... see the gigantic blue eyes of Doctor T. J. Eckleburg painted on a big board near the road. The eyes do not look out of a face (5) ....., instead, from a pair of enormous yellow glasses. Dr Eckleburg had probably moved (6) ..... but the advertisement remained.

The train (7) ..... here and that is (8) ..... I met Tom Buchanan's mistress. Though I was interested (9) ..... seeing her, I had no desire to meet her—but I did.