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Great Gatsby Unit
Performance Activity

Acting Out the Old Sport

Abstract:

The purpose of this exercise is twofold: one, to have students make text-based interpretations in their discussion, planning, and eventual performance of scenes from *The Great Gatsby*; two, to have students see the crucial (albeit sometimes frustrating) role of Nick Carraway as the narrator of the novel. In their performance groups, one student will fill the role of “performing” (verbally) Carraway’s interior monologue as conceived by the group, so it will be necessary for students to make informed decisions on his mental commentary. In being tasked with bringing Fitzgerald’s text to life for their peers, students will also gain a deeper understanding of some of the fundamental aspects of fiction: scene, character development, plot, dialogue, and others.

Common Core Standards:

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RL.9-10.3 Analyze how complex characters (e.g., those with multiple or conflicting motivations) develop over the course of a text, interact with other characters, and advance the plot or develop the theme.

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RL.11-12.1 Cite strong and thorough textual evidence to support analysis of what the text says explicitly as well as inferences drawn from the text, including determining where the text leaves matters uncertain.

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.SL.11-12.1c Propel conversations by posing and responding to questions that probe reasoning and evidence; ensure a hearing for a full range of positions on a topic or issue; clarify, verify, or challenge ideas and conclusions; and promote divergent and creative perspectives.

Procedure:

This exercise should be done after completing the novel. Students should either be placed into, or form their own groups. Instructors should use their own discretion in deciding the most productive way groups can be formed. Size of groups will depend on class size, and how instructors chose to assign roles.

Each group will be given a scene, and the enclosed directions. Instructors can choose different scenes and adapt or adjust the instructions as desired.

Depending on the available time, students can prep their scenes during one class period, and perform them in another. Time should be allotted for a discussion at the conclusion of all the scenes. Since all students will have completed the novel prior to their performances and will be familiar with all the viewed scenes, a discussion encompassing both performance decisions as well as “narrator’s voice” decisions will be possible and beneficial.

All page numbers/quotes taken from the *The Great Gatsby*, Scribner Paperback Fiction edition, published by Simon & Schuster, 1991.

Scenes:

•The Luncheon (Chapter 5)

Start page 125: “We had luncheon....” End page 127: “...buy anything at a drug store nowadays.”

Characters: Nick, Tom, Daisy, Jordan, Gatsby, “narrator”

•Driving to New York: Awkward Car (Chapter 5)

Start page 128: “Did you see that?” End page 131: “I’ll send it over tomorrow afternoon.”

Characters: Tom, Jordan, Nick, “narrator,” Wilson

•You’re an Oxford Man (Chapter 5)

Start page 135: “...you’re an Oxford man.” End page 138: “...in my heart I love her all the time.”

Characters: Tom, Gatsby, Daisy, “narrator”, Jordan, Nick

•Gatsby is Snubbed (Chapter 6)

Start pg. 108: “I’m delighted to see you,”.... End page 110: “...in hand came out the front door.”

Characters: Gatsby, Nick, Tom, Mr. Sloane, woman, “narrator”

•Daisy is so Maternal (Chapter 6)

Start page 121: “Madame expects you in the salon!” End page 124: “Goodbye, sweetheart!”

Characters: Nick, Gatsby, Jordan, Tom, Daisy, “narrator,” [daughter], [nurse], [butler]

[]= character can be doubled up with another character

Directions for Groups:

For each scene, you have to make certain decisions about how each character speaks their line and, crucially, WHY. Because we are more interested in each character’s particular motivation and how that inner drive causes them to speak and to react to the characters around them, don’t concern yourselves too much with movement (blocking) or props. If you want to arrange chairs to simulate a car or a table or couches, that’s fine—but focus primarily on the emotions and the tone. Sometimes we are given the inflection or tone, other times, we aren’t.

The “narrator” role is to fill in the gaps between conversation—essentially, you are Nick’s interior monologue. It isn’t necessary to fill in EVERYTHING (ex.” he said”, “she said”) but

you'll want to provide enough of that interior monologue to move the scene along. Don't deviate from the text: everything they say, you have to say. Everything you say has to be present in the text.

Materials:

Students should have a copy of *The Great Gatsby*. Instructor can either project or pass out scene details and instructions.