

Unit: Literary Essay

Grade: English 10

Summative Assessment Task:

How is a theme developed across a text using various literary techniques? After reading a whole class novel or independent novel of your choice, write an argumentative literary essay that addresses the question and support your position with evidence from the texts. Be sure to acknowledge alternate themes developed in the novel.

This prompt is from the MAISA English 10 Literary Essay unit. Students had the option to use the paragraph styles taught in the unit: Thesis paragraph, extended example, connected example, literary device, and conclusion.

The Great Gatsby: A Euphoric Fortune

In his great American novel, *The Great Gatsby*, F. Scott Fitzgerald writes about the Roaring 20's, in all its wealth, glamour, and inevitable ruin. Nick Carraway, a young man on the rise, moves to New York in the summer of 1922. He rents a small cabin-like house on the very tip of West Egg. Right across the Long Island Sound is West Egg, where his second cousin and her husband, Daisy and Tom Buchanan, live. Nick's neighbor is a mysterious and enigmatic man by the name of Jay Gatsby, about whom everyone has some speculative theory. Over the summer, Nick grows to be acquainted with Gatsby. Slowly, the two become friends. Nick learns from Gatsby of an old romance that took place five years ago between a young, broke Gatsby and the charming, rich Daisy. They fell in love with each other, but Gatsby left for the war, and Daisy, unable to wait, married rich. Since then, Gatsby has amassed a prodigious fortune of his own. Now, his goal is to prove to Daisy that he and his wealth are worth her love and happiness. Gatsby throws immense, luxurious parties, showing off his wealth, all in the hopes that Daisy might notice and be allured to him. Finally, with Nick's help, he obtains her and her love,

Comment [1]: Attempts to name the essay something interesting and connected to the claim.

Comment [2]: Thesis paragraph begins with a text reference and author's full name.

Comment [3]: Places the time period of the work. The writer is assuming the audience is unfamiliar with the text, and therefore will proceed with a summary of the novel.

Comment [4]: Summary of the story, which includes characters' names. The summary is slanted towards the writer's claim and evidence; the nonessential information is omitted.

Comment [5]: As part of the summary, the writer is emphasizing the central problem for Gatsby.

but this leads only to his tragic demise. Fitzgerald, through these characters, communicates to the world that wealth alone will never bring happiness.

Comment [6]: As part of the summary, the writer includes the resolution/solution of Gatsby's problem.

When Daisy had her little girl, she realized that by marrying Tom for money instead of Gatsby for love, she plunged herself into a life of wealth and false content.

Comment [7]: Claim includes evidence the writer will use ("these characters") and thematic statement about the novel. This claim isn't as unique as it could be, but it is possible to prove with the text.

Daisy chose the grand estate, empowered husband, and beautiful daughter. Yet, even with all this, she has been unable to find any real happiness. Nick comes to visit Daisy one day

Comment [8]: This is a topic sentence for the extended example paragraph. It tells the reader when the character experiences a revelation and connects it to the claim.

and sees this malcontent in her. In a private moment, Daisy tells Nick what she said after her daughter was born, "I woke up out of the ether and asked the nurse right away if it was a boy or girl. She said it was a girl, and so I turned my head away and wept... 'I'm glad it's a girl. And I hope she'll grow up to be a fool—that's the best thing a girl can be

in this world, a beautiful little fool,'" (17). This shows the reader exactly how Daisy must feel for herself. She thinks the only way to have any sort of happiness is to be a fool, to trick herself into thinking that she is happy. Daisy has more wealth than she could possibly need, but she is not happy. She needs more out of life. She wants Gatsby, but she knows that what she wants cannot be achieved. So, she has to be "a little fool," ignore her other wants, and believe that she is happy in her life with all her wealth. Daisy's choice of marrying Tom left her richer, but this wealth could not bring her happiness.

Comment [9]: Evidence: In this extended example paragraph, the evidence should be one significant passage from the text to support the topic sentence. This is the moment for Daisy that she understands what it means to be a wealthy woman in her society—when she gives birth to a daughter. The quote is embedded with the writer's own words and is cited in MLA style. (See the MAISA literary essay unit for more details about this type of paragraph)

Gatsby's journey with his wealth, from the time he was a poor soldier to when he died in his swimming pool, showed him that he could not be happy with his wealth alone.

Comment [10]: Warrant: The analysis and the thinking about the quote is adequate, but it could be more specific. The statement Daisy makes about her daughter connects back to herself. The writer tries to explain what Daisy means by the word, "fool."

Gatsby grew up in an impoverished family, but he believed he was destined for much greater. When he was a soldier, he met Daisy and many other people of a higher class.

Comment [11]: Concluding sentence: Echoes the claim without being too redundant.

They all liked Gatsby and treated him as an equal, while Daisy even fell in love with him.

Comment [12]: Topic sentence for the connected example paragraph references the three key moments from across the text that support the claim of wealth alone does not bring happiness.

Gatsby was poor, of the lowest class, but his uniform veiled him and enabled him to be

with the wealthy and be treated as one. Because of his uniform, no one could tell who Gatsby really was or how much money he had to his name. However, Gatsby knew that, "...he was at present a penniless young man without a past and at any moment the invisible cloak of his uniform might slip from his shoulders," (149). Eventually, he would have to take off the uniform, and would go back to his poor life. It is at this moment that Gatsby decided to make a fortune of his own. He believed that in order to be happy, which for him was synonymous with being among the upper class, he needed to acquire a grand fortune. So, over the course of three years, Gatsby works hard, and with some illegal methods, he earns a colossal fortune. He buys an estate on West Egg, a huge, magnificent mansion with, "...period bedrooms swathed in rose and lavender silks and vivid with new flowers, [with] dressing-rooms and poolrooms, and bathrooms with sunken baths," (91). Gatsby's house is rich and grand, and everything in it screams so. However, Gatsby never uses his wealth. He never swims in his swimming pool, never reads any of the hundreds of books in his library, and never even attends his own lavish parties. He is content with just having this wealth and with his dream of Daisy, for whom all this is meant. Gatsby remained separate from his wealth, happy without actually using it. However, at the very end of his story, Gatsby decides to go for a swim. He tells Nick, "You know, old sport, I've never used that pool all summer?" (153). With this sudden whim, Gatsby dons his swimsuit and climbs into the pool on the last day of summer. In this symbolic action, as Gatsby immerses himself in the pool's water, he immerses himself in his wealth. However, almost immediately upon entering the pool, Gatsby is shot dead. Surrounded by the wealth of his pool and house, Gatsby lies dead. Wealth left Gatsby with his demise, bringing him not happiness, but ruin.

Comment [13]: Context for the first quote is sufficient. It unpacks the forthcoming quote without sounding too much like a basic summary.

Comment [14]: Evidence: The writer chooses a quote that uses a great metaphor about Gatsby's uniform. The quote is not very long, but lends itself to analysis.

Comment [15]: Warrant: Could be more substantial. The writer is just skimming the surface of what the uniform could represent.

Comment [16]: This sentence functions as both context for the next quote and a transition.

Comment [17]: Evidence: A stronger quote could have been used, but I understand the writer's thinking: This shows that Gatsby goes from being poor to having all of these things.

Comment [18]: Perhaps obvious, but the thinking that follows about Gatsby not using his wealth for personal gain, with the exception of gaining Daisy's affection.

Comment [19]: Evidence: The writer could have chosen a quote that illustrates more for the reader. The writer is thinking in the right direction, however, and with feedback, could revise this section to be stronger.

Comment [20]: Warrant: This analysis is good because most readers don't understand why Gatsby would just choose to go for a swim at this point in the novel, and the writer is trying to make sense of it.

Fitzgerald uses a necklace of pearls as a symbol of wealth devoid of happiness. After Gatsby left for the war, Daisy married Tom Buchanan. Tom, on the day before the wedding, "...gave her a string of pearls valued at three hundred and fifty thousand dollars," (76). This is an extremely lavish gift, a reminder that Tom essentially is buying Daisy's love. On this same day, Daisy receives a letter, presumably from Gatsby asking her to wait for him. Daisy read the letter and then threw the pearls in the trash. She, for a brief moment, chose the love and happiness in Gatsby's letter over the wealth in Tom's pearls. In this moment, Daisy seems happy. She is alone in her bedroom, drinking wine, the bottle in one hand and the letter in the other. It is as if she is celebrating her choice of love and happiness. However, soon enough, Daisy is brought to her senses and begins to cry. She realizes that she has to marry Tom, because it is what is expected of her and what is best for her. Upon this realization, Daisy put her dress back on and, "she didn't say another word... when [she] walked out of the room, the pearls were around her neck and the incident was over," (76). Daisy had completely accepted her fate. She could not wait for Gatsby. She needed to pick the logical option, the security of the pearls over the letter. However, she was unhappy. She did not speak the whole time and stood as rigid as a statue. She forced herself into believing she could learn to love Tom. She made the choice of the pearls, but it left her with a miserable life.

The Great Gatsby proves that great wealth has never resulted in great happiness. From Daisy's pearls to Gatsby's mansion, we see that wealth leaves only a miserable life and an ultimate death. Wealth is needed. Without it, a life is difficult and unpleasant. However, so much is missing from a life filled with only wealth. Fitzgerald ends the book with Nick looking back at all the mansions and grand houses seen from the beach of West

Comment [21]: Topic sentence for a literary device paragraph tells the reader that the pearls in the story are symbolic, and the writer connects them to the claim. (See the MAISA literary essay unit for more details about this type of paragraph)

Comment [22]: Evidence: Drives home the fact that these pearls are very expensive.

Comment [23]: Warrant: Writer is showing that the gifting of the pearls is important, but the throwing away of the pearls by Daisy is more important.

Comment [24]: The pearls only show up once in the text, and both quotes in this paragraph come from that one page. This is a struggle sometimes when teaching this paragraph format because it is a challenge for students to determine how often a literary device should show up to make it "significant." There is no one, clear answer for the teacher to give them.

Comment [25]: It is difficult to begin a conclusion without sounding redundant. Here the writer just changes the verb of the claim.

Egg. Nick sees the land under those houses as it once was, as a beautiful, untouched, unspoiled island. He sees the world before wealth corrupted it, and how beautiful and peaceful it once was. It is true; a wealth-filled, glamorous life often lacks this beauty, lacks true happiness, and lacks blissful euphoria.

Comment [26]: This is evidence of the writer putting to use the technique used in the unit to write a good conclusion: Reread the last few paragraphs of novel. (See the MAISA literary essay unit for more details about this type of paragraph)

Comment [27]: The writer tries to end with personal commentary and bookend the paper by tying her thoughts to the thesis paragraph and her title.

Teacher’s Final Summative Comment:

This tenth grade writer shows command of the moves required to write a literary essay. She has a clear understanding of how to vary her paragraph structure to suit a purpose, and her evidence and thinking supports her them that “wealth alone will never buy happiness.” The paper could be improved by going through one more feedback and revision loop; however, the paper was written at the beginning of the first semester, and the writer was already able to organize and compose a paper that meets (and sometimes exceeds) expectations for tenth grade writers.

RUBRIC	High	Medium	Low
Fluency	The essay includes multiple, well-developed paragraphs. The sentences are easy to follow and help to make the essay understandable.	The essay includes multiple paragraphs, but they are not well-developed or the language is choppy.	The essay does not include multiple paragraphs or the chopiness of the language distracts from the meaning.
Development	The essay includes a clear claim. It includes specific, well-chosen evidence from the text that supports that claim. The interpretation makes sense and clearly supports the claim.	The essay includes a relatively clear claim. Some pieces of evidence support the claim. The interpretation may not make sense or does not clearly support the claim.	The essay lacks a clear claim. It lacks evidence or does not support the claim at all. The interpretation does not make sense and does not support the claim.
Organization	The essay includes the types of body paragraphs that best support the claim. The transitions between examples and paragraphs make for smooth reading.	The essay includes at least one of the best types of body paragraphs to provide basic support for the claim. The transitions might make the essay easier to read.	The essay does not include the best types of body paragraphs to provide enough support for the claim. The transitions between examples and between paragraphs are choppy and distract from

			meaning.
Editing/ Correctness	The essay is essentially error-free. There is a sense of careful editing. Appropriate format for literary essay is used.	The essay includes occasional errors. Some sense of editing is obvious. Some errors in formatting a literary essay are present.	The essay includes multiple errors. Little or no sense of editing is present. Rules for formatting a literary essay are not followed.