



New Perspectives on The Great Gatsby's Daisy Buchanan

OVERVIEW

ESSENTIAL QUESTION

Does Lana Del Rey's "Young and Beautiful" help humanize Daisy Buchanan of *The Great Gatsby*?

OVERVIEW

*In this lesson, students will compare Lana Del Rey's "Young and Beautiful" with chapters 1-7 of *The Great Gatsby* to form their own characterization of Daisy. Students will view the music video for "Young and Beautiful" and analyze advertisements and headlines from 1918-1922 to consider the potential influence of imposed cultural values and expectations on women like Daisy as they relate to gender, class, and race. Finally, using excerpts from the novel, the song, and the advertisements, students will work in groups to create an identity chart for Daisy.*



Photo: Jaguar MENA

In F. Scott Fitzgerald's 1925 novel, *The Great Gatsby*, Daisy Buchanan—wife, mother, girlfriend, individual—is a controversial character. Described as a young and beautiful socialite hailing from "old money," Daisy is a woman of the roaring 1920s. She is repelled by the thought of being a quiet homemaker, and often chooses to follow her heart. But her actions demonstrate a disregard for the well-being of others, including Jay Gatsby, her husband Tom, and even her daughter, Pammy. Though her character has often been accused of being shallow, or even villainous, that is not the only possible reading.

The character of Daisy Buchanan is almost 100 years old. When she was imagined by Fitzgerald in 1925, women were not permitted to vote. They were not even allowed to open a bank account without their husband's signature. Given such circumstances, how might we reevaluate Daisy Buchanan's character from a 21st century perspective?

Lana Del Rey's 2013 hit song "Young and Beautiful," written to accompany the 2013 film production of *The Great Gatsby*, grants such an alternative, more modern view of Daisy Buchanan. Composed and performed from the perspective of Daisy, the song depicts the character as vulnerable and longing for the type of long-term unconditional love that might remain after her youth and beauty is gone. Rather than a shallow, self-serving character, Del Rey presents Daisy as a young woman who is afraid she will be used and then disposed of.

While Del Rey's perspective is fresh and exciting, does it serve the text? Considering the decisions Daisy makes throughout the novel, one may ask: does Daisy deserve sympathy? And, considering the imposition of the cultural values, gender role expectations, sexual orientation and sexuality norms of the 1920s, is Daisy a victim, a perpetrator, or a product of her time?

OBJECTIVES

Upon completion of this lesson, students will:

1. KNOW (KNOWLEDGE):

- Indirect and direct characterization of Daisy Buchanan in *The Great Gatsby*
- Cultural values and expectations related to gender in the 1920s
- Lana Del Rey's Gatsby-themed song "Young and Beautiful"

2. MASTERY OBJECTIVE:

- Students will be able to develop their own characterization and opinion of Daisy Buchanan supported by quotes from *The Great Gatsby*, the song "Young and Beautiful" by Lana Del Rey, and advertisements from the 1920s.

ACTIVITIES

ENTRY TICKET ACTIVITY

1. Have students read chapters 1 through 7 of F. Scott Fitzgerald's *The Great Gatsby*, and ask each student arrive to class ready to share four references to the text that they feel describe the character Daisy Buchanan. (*Alternatively, the teacher can supply students with quotes by distributing Handout 1 - Daisy Buchanan Quotes. The class can also read the entirety of the book together.*)

MOTIVATIONAL ACTIVITY

1. Invite students to share one of their text references to Daisy's character, having them articulate how that passage reinforces their overall opinion of the character. Write students responses on the board and save them until the end of the lesson.
2. Ask students:
 - What is your general feeling about Daisy? What in the text leads you to feel this way?
 - In what ways might Daisy's character be shaped by the time period in which she lived? Do you think someone like Daisy could exist today?
 - How do you think the time period in which you live affects your interactions with those around you? Do you feel there are similarities between Daisy's world and yours?

- Who is the narrator of *The Great Gatsby*? What effect might this have on how Daisy is portrayed?
- To the female identified students in the class: Do you think you have more or less freedom than Daisy? How? Why?

PROCEDURE

1. Play Lana Del Rey's "Young and Beautiful," which was written for the 2013 film adaptation of *The Great Gatsby*. (Note: This links to the official video on YouTube, which may begin with an advertisement. We suggest loading the video before class). Distribute **Handout 2 - Lana Del Rey, "Young and Beautiful" Lyrics** and have students follow the text while also taking notes on Del Rey's facial expressions, attire, and the setting of the video. Ask students:

- Do you see any connections between this song and video and *The Great Gatsby*? (Note: There's limited imagery in the video that makes an obvious connection to Daisy.)
- In whose perspective do you think the song is written? Is Del Rey taking the role of a character from the novel? What leads you to that conclusion?
- How does this song portray Daisy? Do you agree with this portrayal?

2. Tell students they will consider Daisy in the context of when the book was written (the 1920s) by analyzing a variety of advertisements from that period. Show **Image 1, "What's Wrong with this Picture?"** Ask students:

- What do you think the author's intent is in this article?
- What sort of emotional response might the author be trying to evoke in the first paragraph of the article? (If the students

are unable to read the small text, you may recite it. The first paragraph reads: "It is a mark of extreme good breeding and culture to be able to do at all times exactly what is correct. This is especially true in public where strangers judge us by what we do and say. The existence of fixed rules of etiquette makes it easy for people to know whether we are making mistakes or whether we are doing the thing that is absolutely correct and cultured. They are quick to judge—and quick to condemn. It depends entirely upon our knowledge of the important little rules of etiquette whether they respect and admire us, or receive an entirely wrong and prejudiced opinion.")

- Do you think this article was written with men, women, or both in mind?
 - How might "rules of etiquette" tie people to particular social roles? (Encourage students to consider, for example, the differing ways men and women might be asked to act, according to etiquette.)
3. Show **Image 2, "Resinol Soap,"** and ask students:
 - What is this advertisement trying to sell? What customer base is the advertisement aimed at? How do you know?
 - What is going on in the picture? Who is the woman looking at the mirror, and who is the woman in the mirror? What is the implication in this image?

- What is this advertisement telling its audience? How is it convincing them to buy the product?

4. Show **Image 3, “No Place for Gray Hairs.”** Ask students:

- What is this advertisement trying to sell? What customer base is the advertisement aimed at?
- Read the first paragraph. How is this advertisement trying to sell its product? *(If students cannot make out the writing, you may recite it to the class: “The woman who wants to succeed, especially in business, should first of all get rid of that gray hair! Don’t dye it—crude, greasy dyes are repulsive and liable to criticism.”)*
- According to this advertisement, what helps a woman succeed in business? Do you think the same qualification applies to men?
- Do you think this advertisement serves to empower women or shame them?

5. Show **Image 4, “Must I Go to Work?”** Ask students:

- Read the title, subtitle, and section headings. What does this article reveal about women entering the workplace? What kind of work were they entering?
- Does this article present work more as a right for women, or as an obligation? How do you know?

6. Show **Image 5, “Baby’s Busy Day.”** Ask students:

- What is this advertisement trying to sell? What customer base is the advertisement aimed at?

- According to the advertisement, what are the expectations of a mother? What do you think the expectations of fathers are?

7. Show **Image 6, “Modern Girls.”** Ask students:

- Does this article portray “flappers” in a positive or negative light?
- How does the first paragraph characterize a flapper? *(If students cannot make out the writing, you may recite it to the class: “Girls with no aim in life but to walk up and down the streets, satisfied if they can get enough money to take them to picture palaces and keep them supplied with high heeled shoes.”)*
- Based on this article how might flappers have been perceived by the rest of society?

8. After seeing all the images, ask students:

- After seeing these advertisements and articles, can you draw some generalizations on the expectations placed upon women in the 1920s?
- What are some values promoted in the ads? What makes these values “feminine” rather than “masculine”? Would you find these ads in a magazine geared towards men?
- In what ways do you think Daisy meets, rejects, or struggles with the expectations and values presented in these ads?

9. Have students break into groups of 3 or 4 to create an identity poster for Daisy. Give each group a large piece of chart paper. If you have not already, hand out to each group **Handout 1 - Daisy Buchanan Quotes**. Ask students to make drawings, write adjectives, cut and paste lines from Handout 1, or write down lyrics

that reveal Daisy's personality. Encourage students to be creative with the posters. In the middle of the chart paper, students may illustrate their interpretation of Daisy. (If it is

helpful, show students the above example of an identity chart for Daisy.)

10. Have groups present their posters to the class.

SUMMARY ACTIVITY

1. Have students compose a short essay that draws on passages from the text and the classroom discussion to summarize their feelings on Daisy, based on the following prompts:
 - Is Daisy a tragic character, a grifter, a villain, or something else altogether?
 - In what ways might Daisy's life be different in 21st century America?
 - Has your opinion of Daisy changed from the beginning of class? How so?
 - In what ways are the expectations and cultural norms for how to behave impacting you in the 21st century, or even in just your community?

EXTENSION ACTIVITIES

1. Using Lana Del Rey's "Young and Beautiful" as inspiration, write a song that presents a new perspective on another character in *The Great Gatsby*, or any other work you've read.
2. Find modern advertisements designed for a female identifying audience. In a paper, describe the advertisement, and consider how it compares to the earlier advertisements showcased in this lesson? Are the advertisements saying different or similar things?

STANDARDS

COMMON CORE STATE STANDARDS

College and Career Readiness Anchor Standards for Reading (K-12)

Reading 1: Read closely to determine what the text says explicitly and to make logical inferences from it; cite specific textual evidence when writing or speaking to support conclusions drawn from the text.

Reading 3: Analyze how and why individuals, events, or ideas develop and interact over the course of a text.

Craft and Structure 6: Assess how point of view or purpose shapes the content and style of a text.

Integration of Knowledge and Ideas 7: Integrate and evaluate content presented in diverse media and formats, including visually and quantitatively, as well as in words.

Integration of Knowledge and Ideas 9: Analyze how two or more texts address similar themes or topics in order to build knowledge or to compare the approaches the authors take.

College and Career Readiness Anchor Standards for Writing (K-12)

Text Types and Purposes 1: Write arguments to support claims in an analysis of substantive topics or texts using valid reasoning and relevant and sufficient evidence.

Production and Distribution of Writing 4: Produce clear and coherent writing in which the development, organization, and style are appropriate to task, purpose, and audience.

College and Career Readiness Anchor Standards for Language (K-12)

Language 1: Demonstrate command of the conventions of standard English grammar and usage when writing or speaking.

Language 2: Demonstrate command of the conventions of standard English capitalization, punctuation, and spelling when writing.

College and Career Readiness Anchor Standards for Speaking and Listening (K-12)

Comprehension & Collaboration 1: Prepare for and participate effectively in a range of conversations and collaborations with diverse partners, building on others' ideas and expressing their own clearly and persuasively.

Comprehension & Collaboration 2: Integrate and evaluate information presented in diverse media and formats, including visually, quantitatively, and orally.

Comprehension & Collaboration 3: Evaluate a speaker's point of view, reasoning, and use of evidence and rhetoric.

Presentation of Knowledge 4: Present information, findings, and supporting evidence such that listeners can follow the line of reasoning and the organization, development, and style are appropriate to task, purpose, and audience.

SOCIAL STUDIES – NATIONAL COUNCIL FOR THE SOCIAL STUDIES (NCSS)

Theme 1: Culture

Theme 2: Time, Continuity, and Change

Theme 3: People, Place, and Environments

Theme 4: Individual Development and Identity

NATIONAL STANDARDS FOR MUSIC EDUCATION – NATIONAL ASSOCIATION FOR MUSIC EDUCATION (NAFME)

Core Music Standard: Responding

Analyze: Analyze how the structure and context of varied musical works inform the response.

Interpret: Support interpretations of musical works that reflect creators' and/or performers' expressive intent.



RESOURCES

HANDOUTS

- Handout 1 - Daisy Buchanan Quotes
- Handout 2 - Lana Del Rey, "Young and Beautiful" Lyrics