

The Great Gatenby

ONE HELL OF A JOURNEY

Exploring the Text

Check with your teacher about which questions to try.

- ① Do you identify with Gatenby? In what ways?
- ② Could you define a '**granite head**'? What could you expect by way of friendship from a granite head? (p. 19).
- ③ List the people and events that caused Gatenby to remark '**Boy this is some strange school**' (p. 21).
- ④ List in order of preference the boys in the dorm you would most like as friends (if you're male) or the ones you would most like to ask to your next party (if you're female) and state why (pp. 23–6).
- ⑤ You are Gatenby or Melanie. What were your first impressions of the other at your first meeting? (pp. 28–32).
- ⑥ If you have read *Tomorrow, When the War Began*, think about Fi. In what ways are Melanie and Fi similar? How are they different?



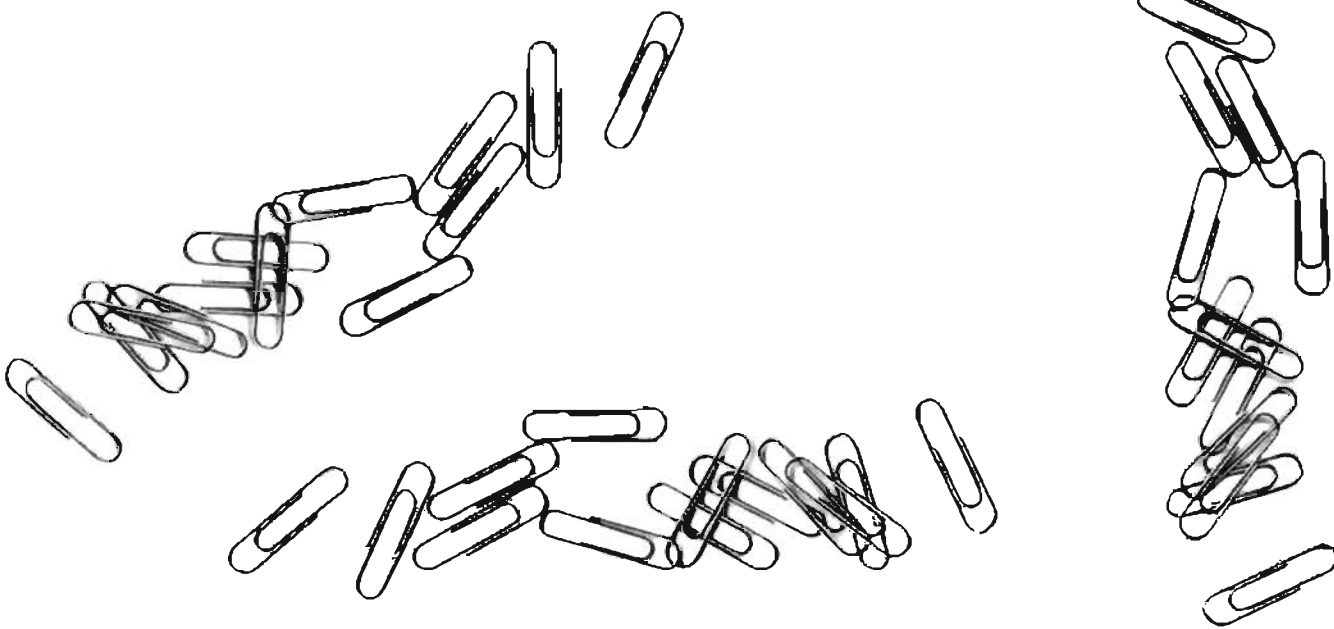
Page references are to the Pan 1989 paperback edition of *The Great Gatenby*.

- 7 In what way do Melanie's letters to Gatsby give you an insight into her character? (pp. 37–9). Would you like to be her best friend? Why or why not?
- 8 Why do you think the teachers were completely unsuccessful when they tried to part Melanie and Gatsby? (pp. 40–2).
- 9 We know why Gatsby was attracted to Melanie. What was it about Gatsby that attracted Melanie?
- 13 Gatsby talks of sport and swimming and parents and Melanie and teachers (Chapter 6). Some of it he is happy about, some of it he's not. If you were writing a chapter like this about your life, what would you write?
- 14 In the best of all possible worlds, but with just a bit of realism thrown in, what would you expect of parents and teachers?



- 10 When you hold back facts or news from your parents, what is your motive? (pp. 47–9).
- 11 Why do you think that Gatsby's dad was 'one of the main reasons' Gatsby kept swimming? (p. 48).
- 12 Gatsby went for a walk and then had a long talk with James Kramer. What do you do when you want some peace or someone to listen to you? (pp. 49–50).
- 15 Gatsby was up to his ears in plaster dust and in more trouble than he cared for (pp. 60–6). John Marsden is a master of the sense of the ridiculous in writing scenes like this. How can you tell that Gatsby feels a sense of responsibility about what happened in the midst of all his jokes? What makes him develop a reluctant appreciation for the headmaster? How serious might the consequences have been?

- 16 What would you say to Gatenby's notion that it '**seemed like the idea was to give the parents as unrealistic an idea as possible of the conditions we lived in?**' (pp. 71–2).
- 17 Gatenby's parents were wanting him home for the holidays. Gatenby could understand, '**which I guess was fair enough**' (p. 117). Do you think such an attitude was usual for Gatenby or do you think he was becoming more aware of the feelings of others?
- 18 Discuss what you consider the two most important lessons Gatenby learnt in his first term.
- 19 What did his swimming and the hike do for Gatenby?
- 20 What value do you place on success? What do you consider to be the value in effort?
- 21 Did you find yourself laughing as you read *The Great Gatenby*? How did John Marsden create the humour?
- 22 What did you learn from Gatenby? What do you think you could teach him?
- 23 You have just begun at Linley, and Gatenby has shown you around the school. What does life at Linley appear to hold for you as Gatenby's friend?




Think it through talk it over

In groups or as a class, discuss one or more of these topics.

1 Differences

What is a 'granite head'?

How do granite heads survive in a world where they are 'given heaps'?

Would you have one for a friend?

Why does society often shun those who are different?

What could you do to help one?

2 Individuals

'Gatenby, you'd better remember you're in a team now – we haven't got time for individuals around here' (p. 18).

What is the importance of being a member of a team?

Does a team member necessarily lose individuality?

How can a team member retain individuality?

What are the benefits of having time for individuals?

Is being individual the same as being different?

3 Teachers

'Mrs Murray wasn't such a bad teacher though, just boring. But I liked English, so I didn't mind ... Probably the worst teacher was Mr Swenson' (p. 57).

Discuss what you consider to be the characteristics of a great teacher?

What do teachers often fail to notice?

What would you like teachers to appreciate about you?

Does a 'good' teacher give homework?

What do you think you might fail to notice about teachers?

4 Competition

Does competition always bring out the best in people?

What is the best thing competition can do for people?

When is competition bad for people?

Would you rather compete as an individual or as part of a team?

What would motivate you to compete?

Do students compete other than in sport or school work? How?

5 Helping

Gatsby felt he could not walk another step on the hike. 'Crewcut said to me, "Come on, Erle, we'll go and get some water." ... I hate it when people make my better nature come out like that' (pp. 139–40).

Define your 'better nature'.

Your better nature is better than what?

What motivates your better nature?

What is your better nature part of: pride? competition? kindness? heart? soul?

What do you *think* if something goes against your better nature?

What do you *do* if something goes against your better nature?

6 Relationships

How important is it to have a boyfriend or girlfriend?

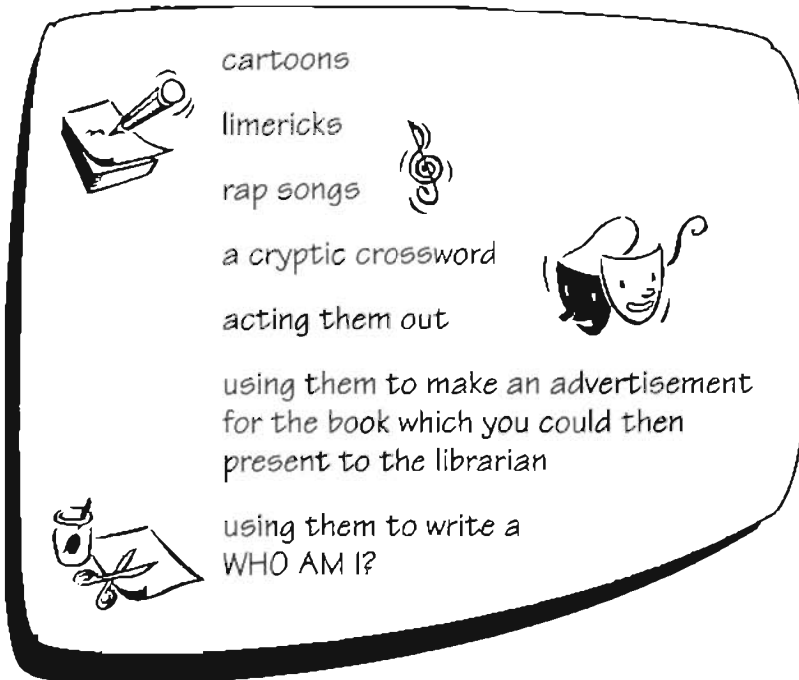
Is it the friend who is important or the fact that you can say you have a friend?

Is it devastating if a relationship breaks up?

If you felt you might be dropped, would you make the break first? Why? Why not?



John Marsden uses words to great effect when creating humour. We have to admit Gatsby has a certain style. What you have to do is find a way of presenting one or more of the following images from the story. You could try:



- 'cooler than a naked polar bear' (p. 13)
- 'like I was a camel on crutches' (p. 23)
- 'I was getting a sharper picture on my screen' (p. 24)
- 'if you didn't cut it in there, you didn't cut it anywhere' (p. 24)
- 'God, they'd crack the biggest darkest one of all time' (p. 30)
- 'she made the others look like whales in marmalade' (p. 35)
- 'She gave greasies better than Castrol' (p. 36)
- 'a flying wedge of teachers, prefects and students came bursting in through the door' (p. 62)
- 'looking at me ... like I was a yodeller in a library' (p. 64)
- 'one pickle short of a hamburger. Hell, they didn't even have the bun' (p. 67)
- 'These guys'd take a sunset and colour it grey' (p. 80)
- 'Matron was looking like she'd been in a nuclear meltdown' (p. 112)
- 'Even the door marked "Exit" goes somewhere' (p. 118)