

Symbolism in *The Great Gatsby*

⇒ Choose one symbol used by F. Scott Fitzgerald in the novel so far. Find a passage in which this symbol is used to communicate something about the characters, setting, mood, or anything else that you might find interesting.

Analyze the passage by examining the specific lines that contain the symbol and the context in which it is used, then explain the symbol's significance (what it means). If there's more than one possible interpretation of the symbol, discuss that as well.

Your assignment should contain at least 2 paragraphs:

Paragraph 1 (10 points):

- Identify the symbol.
- Quote a specific line that contains the symbol (or lines, if necessary).
- Describe the context in which it's used (tell what's happening at the time).

Paragraph 2 (20 points):

- Identify at least one meaning for the symbol in the story so far. (What is the author suggesting through the use of that symbol?) Refer back to the passage you have quoted to justify your interpretation if necessary.
- Provide at least 2 specific examples in the story to support your interpretation of the symbol and quote lines for these examples. What are two or more situations in the story that provide evidence of your interpretation?

Of course, you can write more than two paragraphs. (When in doubt, explain more!) Be thorough in your analysis of your chosen symbol.

⇒ Include a proper MLA heading (DO NOT use header function)

⇒ Type and double-space your work (12 point font)



The example on the back is provided for your guidance; you cannot use the valley of ashes for your assignment, however. Choose any other symbols you'd like to write about.

Sally O'Malley

Mrs. Mitchell

IB English HL

5 April 2016

The Valley of Ashes

At the beginning of chapter two, Fitzgerald writes that there is an area halfway between West Egg and New York City called "the valley of ashes." He describes it as "a fantastic farm where ashes grow like wheat into ridges and hills and grotesque gardens; where ashes take the forms of houses and chimneys and rising smoke, and, finally, with a transcendent effort, of men who move dimly and already crumbling through the powdery air" (23). At this point in the story, Nick has just met Tom and Daisy for the first time in many years, and he has also learned that Tom is cheating on Daisy. Although Nick doesn't realize it yet, the valley of ashes is where Tom's mistress lives, and he is about to meet her.

The valley of ashes symbolizes poverty, hopelessness, and the death of dreams. It is a poverty-stricken area where people like George Wilson work hard but never get ahead enough to pursue their dreams. Their dreams have been quashed by the bleak reality of their situation and lay dormant under the ash and grime that covers everything in their midst; as Fitzgerald writes, the men (and women) who live there "move dimly and already crumbling through the powdery air" (23). Their situation is made worse by the wealthy people who pass through and ignore them or treat them with disrespect as if they aren't even human beings. One example of this is George Wilson. He is described as being "a blond, spiritless man, anaemic, and faintly handsome" (25). This description suggests that he lacks energy and life because of the poverty in which he lives. Another example of this symbolism is Myrtle. She stands out from her surroundings in the valley of ashes because her relationship with Tom gives her hope; she wants to escape from the ashes and believes that Tom will help her rise from her poverty. Fitzgerald describes her as having "an immediately perceptible vitality about her" (25), which suggests that she has not yet given up hope and allowed herself to blend into her surroundings.