

# Gatsby and the American Twenties Newspaper

**Subject:** Secondary Language Arts

**Grade level:** 9-12

**Rationale or Purpose:** Students will create a newspaper to learn more about the American Twenties and its impact on American society. The newspaper project will assist students in organizing and synthesizing material into news articles that illustrate the time period while using technology in both the creation and presentation of the final project. This can be done either prior to reading Fitzgerald's *The Great Gatsby* or in conjunction with reading the novel to facilitate students' understanding of "the lost generation", and the experiences and dilemmas faced by the characters in the novel and provide students with the tools to make stronger connections between the novel and the time period.

**Materials:** *The Great Gatsby*, computer with internet access, Microsoft publisher or a comparable program, computer paper, writing paper, pen or pencils.

**Lesson Duration:** Several class blocks. Students will need time to use *Teaching the American Twenties* online to research the time period, synthesize material and write individual articles. The groups will then need time to format articles into newspapers with interesting and effective graphics and illustrations. Time should also be allowed for groups to share their newspapers with the entire class.

**Objectives:** English III

- 1A-C The student writes in a variety of forms appropriate to audience and purpose.
- 2A-E The student pre-writes, organizes, proofreads, edits and revises, using technology to publish texts.
- 4A-F The student uses writing as a tool for learning.
- 7A-H The student comprehends selections using a variety of strategies.
- 8A-B The student will read extensively, including American literature to interpret influences of the historical context on literary works.
- 13A-E The student reads in order to research assigned and self-selected topics.
- 19A-C The student understands and interprets visual representations.
- 20A-F The students analyze and understand the importance of visual representations.
- 21A-E The student produces visual representations that communicate with others

**Activity:**

Step 1: Introduce students to the Ransom Center online education module, *Teaching the American Twenties*, using computers with internet access. Share with students the research tools that are available to them within the online collection that will assist in their understanding the time period. Use the opportunity to discuss some of the events illustrated in the collection and their impact on American society. Students should use any remaining time to look at the collection, taking notes of important events

and information.

- Step 2: Assign individual students different historical and cultural categories to research. For example some students may research politics or government, others may research women's roles. Some students may research fashion, others economy, or entertainment. Students may also need to use additional internet research sources to locate information. Advise students that they will be writing two different articles about their category, so they will need to collect enough information in order to do this. Tell students they may use the dates 1915-1930. You may want to model a sample article for them.
- Step 3: Students will use the information they have researched to write two separate news articles of the time period. Articles must answer the questions: who, what, when, where, and why and include illustrations appropriate to the time period and subject. Students should be free to be creative as long as the information used is accurate. For example, they could make-up people being arrested for breaking prohibition here in Austin, as long as prohibition facts are used correctly.
- Step 4: Assign students different characters from the novel, *The Great Gatsby*. Students will use these characters and the novel to create news articles about the events in the novel, using the newspaper article format. They can assume, for the purposes of the paper, that everything is being published on the same day. Their articles should be both creative and interesting. Students should also locate illustrations to further highlight their articles.
- Step 5: Students will now work collectively in groups, putting together their individual articles, to create an American Twenties newspaper. Each paper should have a world news section, local news section (*Gatsby* novel articles), editorials, and a variety of other articles such as: fashion, entertainment, sports, politics, cartoons, word games, obituaries and so forth. Students should use the articles they have already created individually as well as any additional material they want to include. They should be as creative as possible in making their newspaper interesting and complete and accurate for the time period. The group will be responsible for locating graphics and illustrations for their paper, as well as editing and revising all writing done by individual students, so that the paper is as error free as possible. Students will invent a unique name for their paper and assume for the purposes of the paper, that everything, regardless of the date it occurred, will all be published on the same date. Students will use Microsoft Publisher or a comparable product to format and publish their paper in newspaper format.

**Modification:** For students with learning difficulties, limit the number of articles they are required to research and write. Be sure to give them categories that are easier to research. You might also consider pairing them with another student in the researching and writing process.

For the gifted student, part of their assignment should include an editorial, representative of their time period. They might even write an article as one of the characters in the novel, *The Great Gatsby*. How would Tom Buchanan react to women voting? What would Daisy have to say about women's suffrage, or Jordan, or Myrtle? What would Gatsby have to say about prohibition? You might also have the gifted student compile a particular type of newspaper, for example, students could satirize *The National Enquirer*, or *People Magazine* or *Time*. Their articles and newspaper could be written from a particular political viewpoint. For assessment purposes, they could contrast their newspapers and "how" they presented the various events.

**Student Product:** Each group of students will create an American Twenties newspaper that reflects the culture of the decade, as well as the characters and events from the novel, *The Great Gatsby*.

**Closure:** Students will share and discuss their finished products. Some questions to ask might be, how do these papers reflect the novel, what are some things that were happening during the time period? Why would this be important?

**Assessment or evaluation:** After groups share their newspapers with the class, class discussion should make connections between the 1920s and the novel, *The Great Gatsby*. In what ways does the novel reflect the time period? Do students see any connection between the 1920s and America today?

Sandra Ann Bird  
Westwood High School  
RRISD