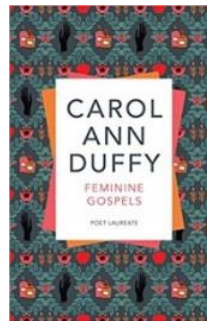
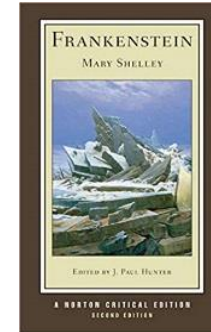
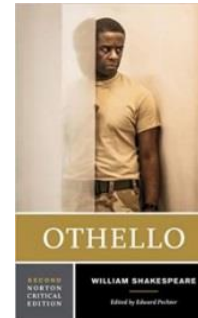
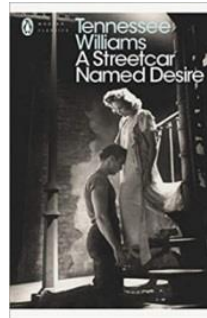
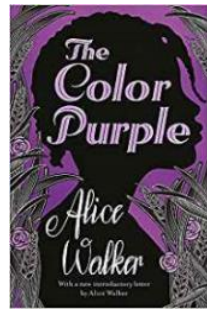
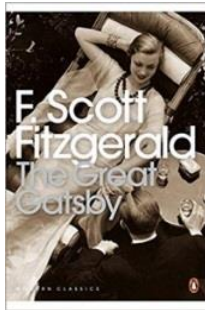


# A-Level English Literature

## Taster Session



[Specification: AQA A-Level English Literature A](#)

**1:** Literary conventions are defining features of genres found in texts, such as the novel, short story, ballad, sonnet, and play.

A convention is characterised by the inclusion of, or adhering to, certain rules. A novel for example will be written in prose using sentences, paragraphs and chapters. The inclusion of identifiable character types or symbols and objects are the conventions of that genre

**Convention- n.**  
(kon-ven-shun)

The conventions of a sonnet are 14 lines, made of 3 quatrains (ABAB, CDCD, EFEF) and a final Couplet (GG).

A convention of the science fiction genre is futuristic technology

A conventional Greek tragedy is split into three acts

**Synonyms:** Trope, cliché, rule

This use of convention is different to a gathering of people with a specific interest e.g. a comic book convention

**Antonyms:** disagreement, unusual, strangeness

**1:** Difficult to interpret or understand;  
mysterious.  
Enigma- n.)

Likely to be a character, problem or puzzle  
that leaves the reader or other characters  
questioning how to understand or define  
the *enigma*

The word *enigma* originally referred to  
words that formed a riddle or complicated  
metaphor that tested the listener's or  
reader's alertness. *Enigma* comes from a  
Greek word that means "to speak in  
riddles."

**Enigmatic- adj**  
(eh-nig-mah-tic)

"Her *enigmatic* art quickly drew attention  
both at home and abroad"

A person who is described as an enigma is  
a bit of a mystery. You never know what  
that person is really thinking, or what his  
or her motives for doing something are.

**Synonyms:** cryptic, puzzling, mystery

"The enigma was a mystery" (here enigma  
is by definition a mystery- you need not  
describe it as such)

**Antonyms:** Clear, explicit, known

**Voyeur- n.**  
(voy-urh)

**1:** one obtaining sexual gratification from observing unsuspecting individuals who are partly undressed, naked, or engaged in sexual acts *broadly* : one who habitually seeks sexual stimulation by visual means  
**2:** a prying observer who is usually seeking the sordid or the scandalous

*Voyeur* is a fairly recent addition to English; our earliest written evidence for the word dates from the beginning of the 20th century. It comes directly from a French noun meaning, literally, "one who sees." Initially, *voyeur* referred to someone who derived sexual pleasure from watching others undress or engage in intimate acts but by the middle of the 20th century, its meaning had broadened to "an unduly prying observer," particularly one interested in squalid or shocking details.

"A good biographer is always in some sense a *voyeur*"

"Some shots seem to be from the perspective of a *voyeur*, standing in a dark room, squinting through a house plant to peep at what's happening yonder."

**Synonyms:** ogler, peeper, watcher

*Voyeurism- n*

*Voyeuristic- adj*

Voyeur is not just the act of watching something- there must be some enjoyment or undue interest on the part of the watcher. It cannot be used as a verb.

e.g. "*I voyeured the piece of art*" is wrong in both contexts

**Antonyms:** Disclosed, open, in view, participant

- 1: emptied of or lacking content
- 2: marked by lack of ideas or intelligence :
- 3: devoid of serious occupation

"Vacuous" shares the same root as "vacuum"-the Latin adjective *vacuus*, meaning "empty" as well as the verb "evacuate" (originally meaning "to empty of contents"). Its predecessor, the verb "vacare," is also an ancestor of the word "vacancy" as well as "void." All of these words suggest an emptiness of space. It acquired its figurative usage, describing one who is lacking any substance of the mind, in the mid-1800s.

Vacuous- adj  
(vak-yoo-uh-s)

"A dull and *vacuous* movie"

"He had a *vacuous* expression on his face."

**Synonyms:** bare, blank, clean, devoid, empty,

Vacuous cannot be used as a verb and is much more likely to be used figurately.

"All of my ideas were vacuous" is incorrect because by definition there is *something there* if you have an idea. Vacuous means empty.

**Antonyms:** complete, full, knowledgeable

A bit of  
background...



**The Roaring Twenties** were a period in history of dramatic social and political change.

For the first time, more Americans lived in cities than on farms. The nation's total wealth more than doubled between 1920 and 1929, and this economic growth swept many Americans into an affluent but unfamiliar "consumer society."

Many Americans were uncomfortable with this new, urban, sometimes racy "mass culture;" in fact, for many—even most—people in the United States, the 1920s brought more conflict than celebration.

However, for a small handful of young people in the nation's big cities, the 1920s were roaring indeed.

[More on the 1920s USA here](#)



Coles Phillips first *Life* cover appeared in early 1908 which pioneered what came to be his signature design—a human figure with a detailed face, hands, and feet, and with clothing in the same shade as the background.

This design, called “**The Fadeaway Girl**” took the illustration world by storm, and Phillips’ work soon appeared on books, calendars, postcards sold internationally, and a profusion of other covers for *Life*.



Why choose this title? What are its implications?

Examine the body language and position of the characters- what do they tell us?

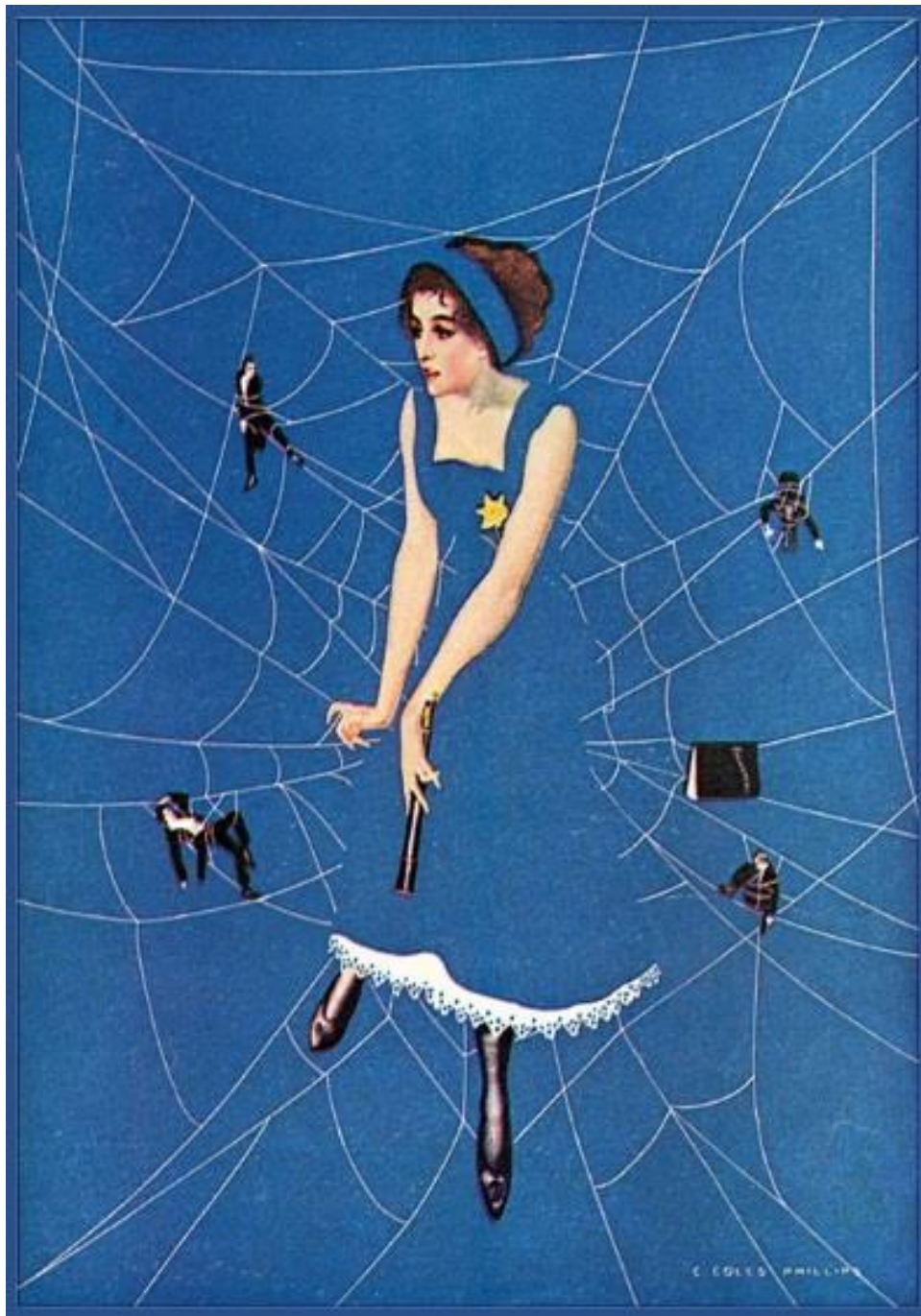
Who are these characters?

What tone do you think these pictures set?

Contextually, what do these images represent?

Can we make assumptions about the life of women at the time through these images?





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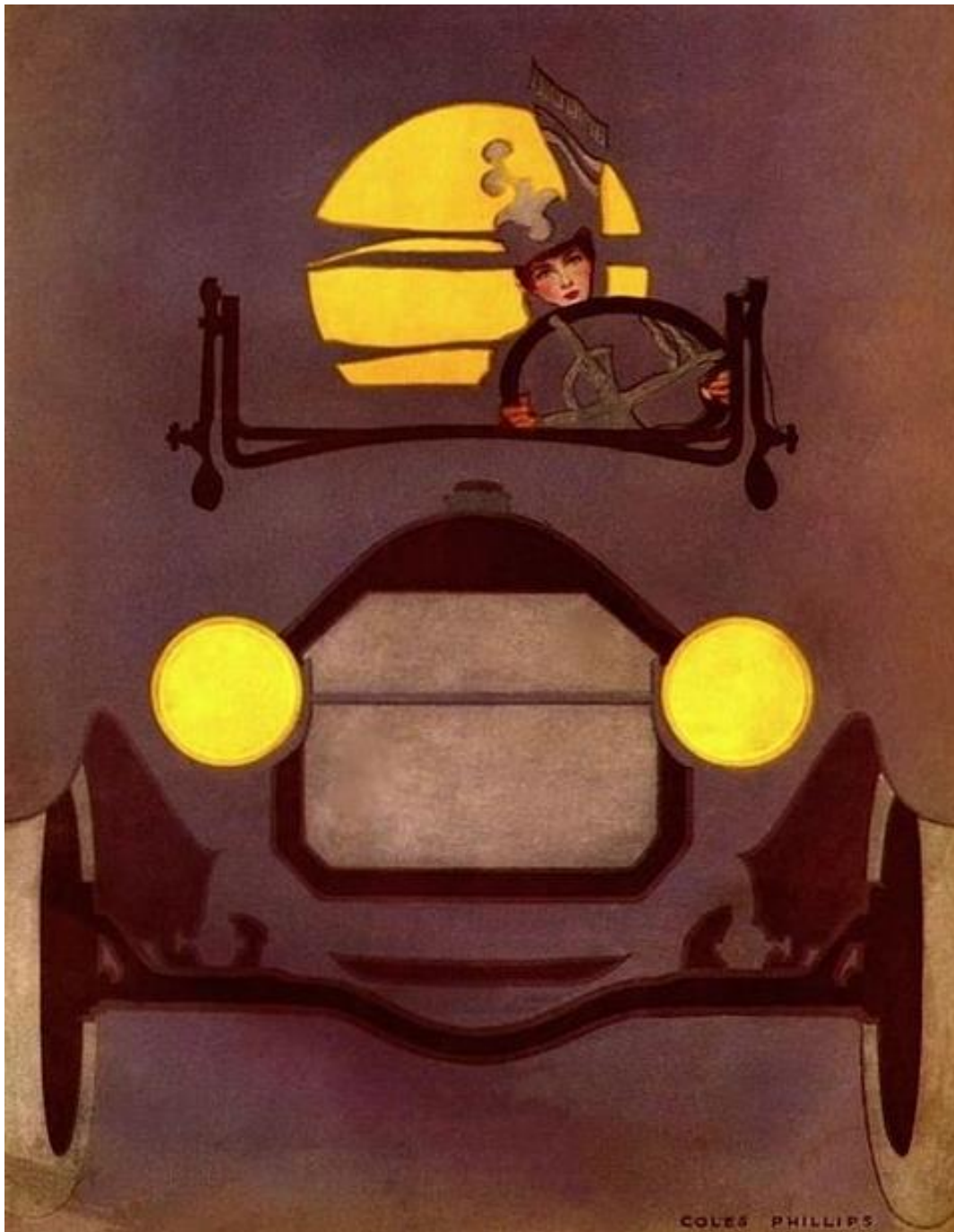
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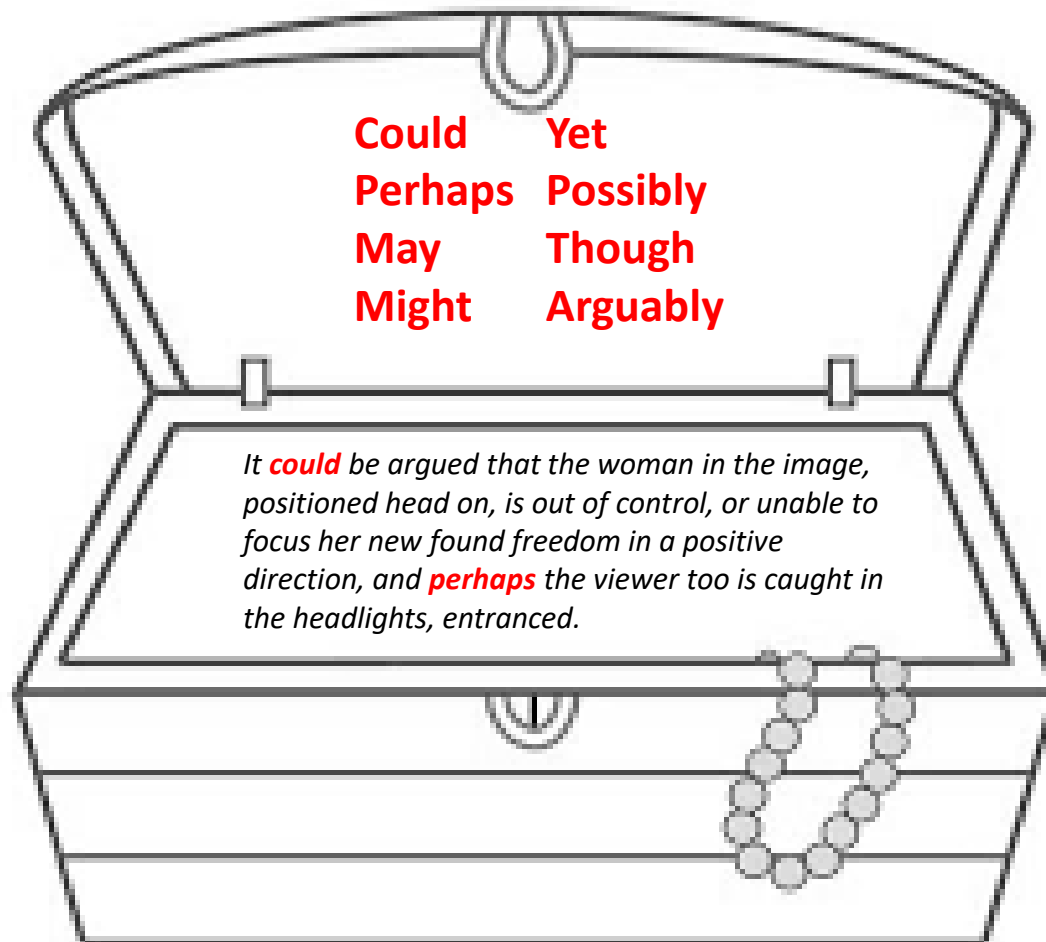
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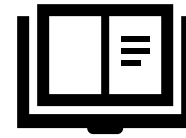
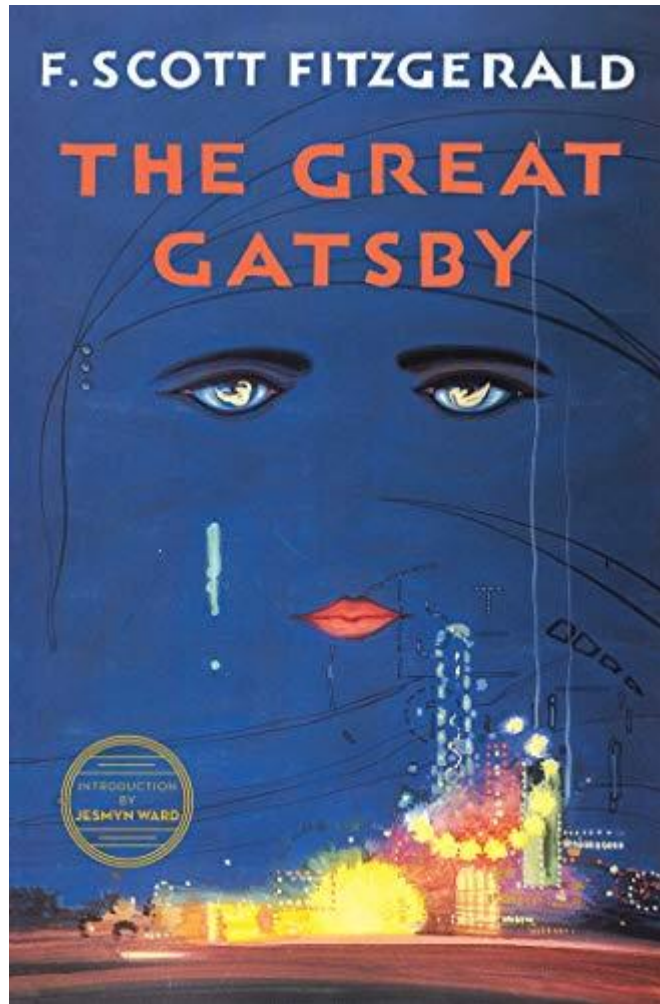
Task:



Write a statement about **one** of the images using the prompts.

You must use some **cautious** vocabulary





The Great Gatsby is a novel by F. Scott Fitzgerald, set in 1920s America. It is narrated by Nick Carraway, a man in his late 20s, who has moved to Long Island to commute to his job in New York City trading bonds. He moves next door to Jay Gatsby, a man who has earned a reputation for an extravagant lifestyle but is a somewhat enigmatic figure. At this point in the novel, Nick hasn't even met Gatsby, despite hearing a lot about him.

There was music from my neighbor's house through the summer nights. In his blue gardens men and girls came and went like moths among the whisperings and the champagne and the stars. At high tide in the afternoon I watched his guests diving from the tower of his raft, or taking the sun on the hot sand of his beach while his two motor-boats slit the waters of the Sound, drawing aquaplanes over cataracts of foam. On week-ends his Rolls-Royce became an omnibus, bearing parties to and from the city between nine in the morning and long past midnight, while his station wagon scampered like a brisk yellow bug to meet all trains. And on Mondays eight servants, including an extra gardener, toiled all day with mops and scrubbing-brushes and hammers and garden-shears, repairing the ravages of the night before.

Every Friday five crates of oranges and lemons arrived from a fruiterer in New York — every Monday these same oranges and lemons left his back door in a pyramid of pulpless halves. There was a machine in the kitchen which could extract the juice of two hundred oranges in half an hour if a little button was pressed two hundred times by a butler's thumb.

At least once a fortnight a corps of caterers came down with several hundred feet of canvas and enough colored lights to make a Christmas tree of Gatsby's enormous garden. On buffet tables, garnished with glistening hors-d'oeuvre, spiced baked hams crowded against salads of harlequin designs and pastry pigs and turkeys bewitched to a dark gold. In the main hall a bar with a real brass rail was set up, and stocked with gins and liquors and with cordials so long forgotten that most of his female guests were too young to know one from another.

By seven o'clock the orchestra has arrived, no thin five-piece affair, but a whole pitful of oboes and trombones and saxophones and viols and cornets and piccolos, and low and high drums. The last swimmers have come in from the beach now and are dressing up-stairs; the cars from New York are parked five deep in the drive, and already the halls and salons and verandas are gaudy with primary colors, and hair shorn in strange new ways, and shawls beyond the dreams of Castile. The bar is in full swing, and floating rounds of cocktails permeate the garden outside, until the air is alive with chatter and laughter, and casual innuendo and introductions forgotten on the spot, and enthusiastic meetings between women who never knew each other's names.

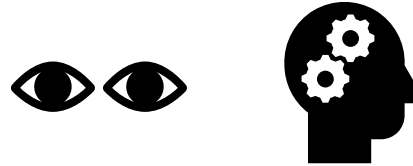
The lights grow brighter as the earth lurches away from the sun, and now the orchestra is playing yellow cocktail music, and the opera of voices pitches a key higher. Laughter is easier minute by minute, spilled with prodigality, tipped out at a cheerful word. The groups change more swiftly, swell with new arrivals, dissolve and form in the same breath; already there are wanderers, confident girls who weave here and there among the stouter and more stable, become for a sharp, joyous moment the centre of a group, and then, excited with triumph, glide on through the sea-change of faces and voices and color under the constantly changing light.

Suddenly one of the gypsies, in trembling opal, seizes a cocktail out of the air, dumps it down for courage and, moving her hands like Frisco, dances out alone on the canvas platform. A momentary hush; the orchestra leader varies his rhythm obligingly for her, and there is a burst of chatter as the erroneous news goes around that she is Gilda Gray's understudy from the Follies. The party has begun.



I believe that on the first night I went to Gatsby's house I was one of the few guests who had actually been invited. People were not invited — they went there. They got into automobiles which bore them out to Long Island, and somehow they ended up at Gatsby's door. Once there they were introduced by somebody who knew Gatsby, and after that they conducted themselves according to the rules of behavior associated with amusement parks. Sometimes they came and went without having met Gatsby at all, came for the party with a simplicity of heart that was its own ticket of admission.

I had been actually invited. A chauffeur in a uniform of robin's-egg blue crossed my lawn early that Saturday morning with a surprisingly formal note from his employer: the honor would be entirely Gatsby's, it said, if I would attend his "little party" that night. He had seen me several times, and had intended to call on me long before, but a peculiar combination of circumstances had prevented it — signed Jay Gatsby, in a majestic hand



Read the statements on the next slide which are made about the extract you have just read. Which ones stand out? Which do you agree strongly with? With which do you disagree?

Gatsby is a magician; the cocktails, potions; the music, incantations; the food, otherworldly and full of menace. The guests are at the mercy of his magical power.

Women at the party are vulnerable and thus open to manipulation and abuse.

The impermanence of happiness within this social setting is symptomatic of the consumerism necessary to perpetuate a capitalist society.

In the extract, the location represents the whole subconscious mind of the party's host and the light, colour and busy images are a representation of the host's loose grip on reality.

Nothing is beyond the power that money wields; even the natural world can be managed with the right amount of money.

Women are presented as vacuous, unintelligent and devoid of memory: they are fodder for the men at the "party".

The bombardment of the senses deliberately mask an underlying sadness within the extract.

Food waste is not only a symptom of a class driven society, it is a symbol of wealth and success.

The division of labour in this extract must be examined as an economic phenomenon but also a social and emotional one.

Music and art belong to the working class but are appropriated by the wealthy.

The rich do not experience time in the same way as the working classes who have been governed by a precise and accurate perception of time since the Industrial Revolution. For the rich, time remains hazy and localised as it was in pre-industrialised age.

A common feature of literary epics and fairy tales alike, the inclusion of a great banquet in the exposition is menacing, foreshadows later turmoil and highlights the naivety of those who take part in the feast.

Making connections with people is the true measure of a man.

The party is described using the language of childish fantasy, and demonstrates the desperate attempts of those present to return to a child-like state devoid of responsibility.

Depravity is the inevitable consequence of success.

The scene of the party is a metaphor for the descent of man to his primeval state, devoid of morals and driven by his most basic instincts.

Achieving your dream is the ultimate failure of imagination.

In a world of vacuous people, the only defence is to isolate yourself

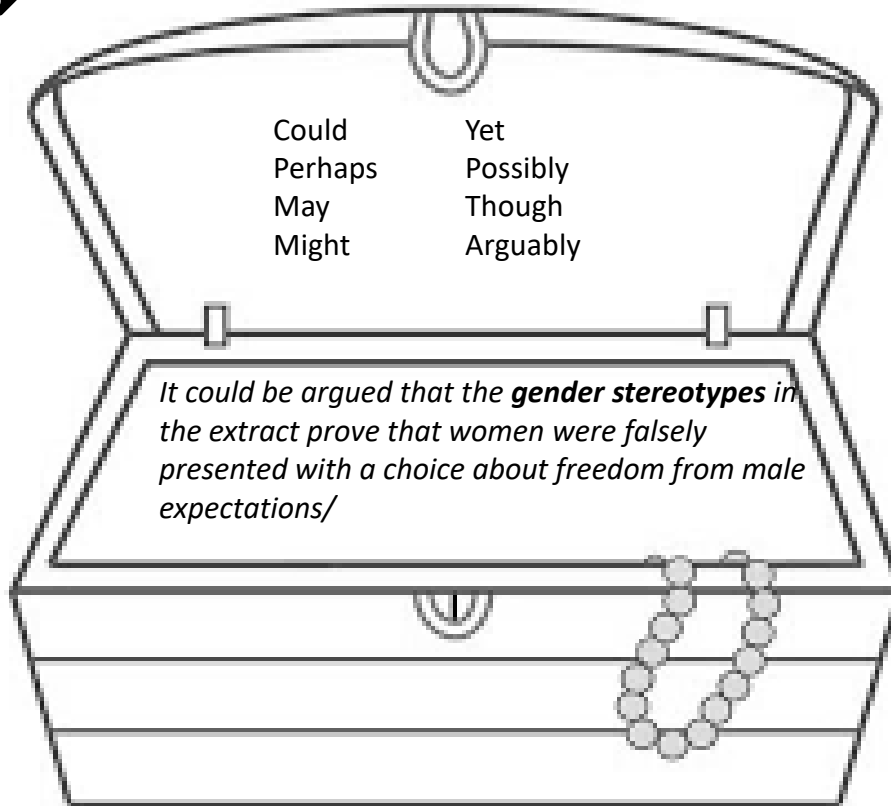
Female characters are little more than a consumable product.

Reputation is the only thing of value to a man.

You cannot understand the life you are living; you must be on the outside to truly perceive.



## Written task:



1. Re-read the statements made about the extract
2. Group them together- you could colour code the boxes, or cut them out! You can have as many groups as you like.
3. Give **each** group of statements a title for the category you have put them in, for example “Consumerism” or “Gender”. These titles are up to you but should ideally be a word or two to describe the group.
4. Choose the group you feel strongest or most confident about and write down your own statement about the extract. **You must use the name of that group in your statement.** You must also use at least one of the words in the treasure chest

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[Finally, watch this clip.](#)



Does it change your perception of the previous statements? Does a modern interpretation do anything to challenge the comments made already?

# Our summer task:

## What do we expect?

You to choose a poem that you are interested in, a poem that reflects a part of your personality or personal beliefs, a poem that makes you laugh or a poem that makes you cry. We don't mind which poem you choose – there is only **one** rule: the poem **must not** feature on the current GCSE specifications.

**You are to make a 3-5 minute (maximum) presentation of 3 PowerPoint slides ready to present to the class during the first lessons back after the summer break.**

## What do we want to see in the presentation?

We want to see you address the following areas in your presentation:

- Why have you selected the poem- carefully consider your: ideas, thoughts, feelings, opinions?
- Has this poem taught you something? Does it have a message that resonates with you?
- Which parts of the poem interest you most and why?
- Does the poet employ any particular techniques which you think are engaging?
- Do you know anything about the collection that the poem is from?
- Is there an interesting story surrounding the publication of the poem?
- What do you know about the poet that can help inform a reading of the poem?
- Would anyone read this in a completely different way to you? How might they?
- Where does this poem belong in the literary canon?
- Is the poem typical of a particular style or movement?

Be creative – you do not have to fill three slides with these questions and your answers!

Make your slides engaging and do not simply read from the board – this does not engage your audience.



## **Why do we want to see this?**

We want your choice to reveal something about you – this will help us get to know you. We are all going to be new to each other at the start of Year 12 – so this will help to break the ice.

We also want to see what you are capable of when we leave you to your own devices – show us your very best work.

This piece of work will create a first impression on your peers and teachers – with this in mind, aim for it to be the very best!

There is no right or wrong poet to work on – this is a personal choice.

Your teacher will also present their own favourite poem to you during these sessions – you might be surprised!