

animal names—‘Civet’, ‘Blackbuck’, ‘Beaver’, ‘Ferret’, ‘Klipspringer’; and names of sea creatures—‘Whitebait’, ‘Hammerhead’, ‘Beluga’.

Some of these names make the partygoers seem like caricatures rather than rounded and realistic characters. This should draw our attention to the impact a name can have. Remember that *The Great Gatsby* tells the story of a man who has changed his name, for a reason. James Gatz becomes Jay Gatsby so that he may appear to be a more glamorous individual.

The Great Gatsby shares its name with its central character. It is important to pay close attention to the names of characters. Remember that the history of America has involved the arrival of immigrants from different parts of the world. You can see from his name that Tom Buchanan has Scottish ancestry, for example, and that Meyer Wolfshiem’s family origins are Germany. Gatsby is more difficult to pin down in terms of origin. It also has a more sophisticated sound than the monosyllabic Gatz.

Daisy’s flowery first name suggests that she is delicate, and physically Daisy appears so. But as we learn more about her character that air of delicacy seems increasingly misleading.

Organised Crime:

During the 1920s, organised crime had a violent and high-profile impact on life in American cities, such as New York and Chicago. There are numerous suggestions in this novel that Jay Gatsby has strong links with figures from the criminal underworld. His involvement with Meyer Wolfshiem seems to confirm those connections. Wolfshiem is a professional gambler, ‘the man who fixed the World’s Series back in 1919’ (p. 71). Nick thinks of this as a betrayal by one man of the belief in fair play of 50 million baseball fans, an unethical act as well as a major crime performed by Wolfshiem ‘with the single-mindedness of a burglar blowing a safe’ (p. 71).

Youth:

Note that in 1917, when Gatsby first met her, Daisy was eighteen. Jordan was only sixteen at that time. So in 1922, when the action of the novel takes place, they are both still young. Jordan is just twenty-one, yet she is cynical and is said to be dishonest and a cheat. Despite these character flaws, Nick is clearly attached to her.

Nick likes present himself as a detached and rather cold person, who at thirty is so too old for youthful excitement and strong feelings. Yet here he physically holds and kisses Jordan Baker. Gatsby, clinging to his memories of an adolescent love affair with Daisy, remains alone, living in hope. On the other hand, Nick's involvement with Jordan may seem opportunistic and unromantic.

America has cultivated an image as a youthful nation, full of energy and hope. Remember though that the New World settled by European immigrants had for centuries before their arrival been inhabited by Native Americans. The Europeans took the land, often by force. The fact, and the enslavement of Americans until the mid-nineteenth century, reveals a violent reality underlying America's youthful self-image.