

Name _____ Period _____

Standards Focus: Exploring Expository Writing

Author Biography: F. Scott Fitzgerald

Considered to be one of the greatest American storytellers, F. Scott Fitzgerald unquestionably led a chaotic, yet intriguing life. Despite his alcoholism and bouts of depression and insecurity, and his wife's infidelity and mental instability, Fitzgerald became a highly acclaimed and successful writer. His most popular novel, *The Great Gatsby*, is considered to be a classic American novel, and a dark and disconcerting portrait of America in the 1920's.



Francis Scott Key Fitzgerald was born in St. Paul, Minnesota, on September 24, 1896. He is a descendant of the famous patriot, Frances Scott Key, most well-known for writing the "Star Spangled Banner." His father, Edward Fitzgerald, was a salesman for Procter & Gamble in New York, and his mother, Mary (Mollie) McQuillan, was heiress to the fortune from her father's grocery business. Fitzgerald attended the St. Paul Academy, the Newman School, and Princeton, but dropped out of Princeton to join the Army in 1917. In June of 1918, Fitzgerald was assigned to Camp Sheridan, near Montgomery, Alabama. It was at this time that he met Zelda Sayre, the eighteen year-old Southern socialite who would later become his wife.

In July 1919, Fitzgerald returned to St. Paul to polish his novel *This Side of Paradise*. It was a literary and monetary success, and allowed Fitzgerald the financial security to finally marry Zelda in 1920. In October 1921, they had their only child, a daughter they named Frances Scott, and nicknamed "Scottie." The Fitzgeralds moved frequently over the next few years, from Long Island to Rome to Paris. Fitzgerald wrote *The Beautiful and the Damned* and *Tales of the Jazz Age* in 1922, and it was in Paris where Fitzgerald finished writing *The Great Gatsby*. The novel was published in 1925, and while it was both hailed and rejected by critics, sales were a considerable disappointment compared to the success of his first novel. Fitzgerald continued to augment his lavish lifestyle by writing short stories for newspapers and magazines such as *The Saturday Evening Post*.

In the Spring of 1930, Fitzgerald's life began a downward spiral. His drinking became an increasing problem, Zelda suffered from the first of several mental and physical breakdowns, and their marriage splintered. Fitzgerald was forced again to sell short stories to help pay for Zelda's psychiatric treatment and hospitalization. While working on his fourth novel, *Tender is the Night* in 1932, Zelda suffered a relapse, and was again hospitalized. Fitzgerald was finally able to finish *Tender is the Night* in 1934.

Fitzgerald's admitted low point was in 1936-1937, when his alcoholism was out of control, his debts were soaring, he was unable to write, and he lived in and out of hotels in North Carolina. Scottie was sent away to boarding school, since he was unable to provide a stable home for her. Zelda continued her decline, was permanently hospitalized, and eventually died in 1948 in a hospital fire.

Fitzgerald moved to California in 1937 and worked for major Hollywood studios writing movie scripts. While working on his final novel, *The Last Tycoon*, Fitzgerald suffered a heart attack and died December 21, 1940 at the age of 44. *The Last Tycoon* was published posthumously in 1941.

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Standards Focus: Historical Context—The Jazz Age

The Jazz Age, a term coined by F. Scott Fitzgerald himself, was a time of great prosperity, advancement, change, and uncertainty. This era is symbolized by the first automobiles, radios, prohibition, “flappers,” gangsters, “talkies” (movies with sound), “The Charleston,” and jazz. It was the period between the end of World War I and the devastating Stock Market Crash in 1929, which led to the Great Depression. To some, it was a party that lasted a decade.

After World War I, Americans experienced a time of dramatic change. No longer did Americans believe they were invulnerable to war or other political instability and this insecurity kept the American public on edge. The economy of the United States transitioned from wartime to peacetime, which brought an array of new consumer goods and inventions. The automobile was mass produced by Henry Ford, bringing not only new jobs to many areas, but also a new form of transportation, allowing more freedom and ease of travel.

The 1920s were also known for trends and fashion. With the ratification of the Nineteenth Amendment to the Constitution allowing women to vote, women began to feel a new sense of freedom and acceptance, giving rise to the “flapper.” Flappers were known for their trendy “boyish” short bob hairstyles, tight mini dresses decorated with fringe, and bright red lipstick. Society elevated the “it” girl—one who enjoyed a strong alcoholic beverage, smoked, and danced until the early hours of the morning—a sharp and shocking contrast to the softer, perfectly groomed, more “feminine” ladies of the turn of the century.

New fashion and trends were also popularized in the media, through radio and movies. Radio, a new invention at the time, brought families together nightly in their homes. By 1922, over 500 radio stations broadcast music (especially classical and the newest form of music—jazz), news, drama, comedy shows, church events, farm news, stock market reports, variety shows, and sports events. Movies (called silent films) were also extremely popular and made celebrities and millionaires out of Mary Pickford and Douglas Fairbanks, Sr. In 1927, *The Jazz Singer*, the first movie with sound (a “talkie”) was released. Stars such as Greta Garbo, Clara Bow, and Rudolph Valentino became household names and made going out to the movies a popular pastime.

The 1920s in America is also known for the rise of the American gangster, such as Al Capone, Charles “Lucky” Luciano, John Dillinger, and Bugsy Siegel. Since the enactment of the Eighteenth Amendment to the Constitution, also called the “Noble Experiment,” made the manufacture, sale, and consumption of alcohol illegal in the United States, gangsters became tremendously rich by controlling the black market for the illegal substance. Speakeasies, or underground bars and gambling halls, began popping up everywhere, giving gangsters and other crooked characters power, wealth, and unprecedented fame.

While the 1920s is known for being a turbulent and exciting time, in 1929, the party crashed with the Stock Market, ushering in one of the worst periods in United States history—the Great Depression. The party that lasted a decade was now over, and Americans would be faced with joblessness, poverty, and despair—a sharp contrast to the excess of one of the most optimistic and exciting times in history.

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Comprehension Check: Exploring Expository Writing

Directions: Using the article about F. Scott Fitzgerald on the previous page, answer the questions below using complete sentences.

1. When and where was F. Scott Fitzgerald born? _____

2. After what famous person was he named? What was this person known for? _____

3. What kind of school experience did Fitzgerald have? _____

4. Explain why the author of this article considered Fitzgerald's life to be "chaotic." _____

5. List the names and dates of publication of Fitzgerald's major works. _____

6. Describe Zelda Fitzgerald. _____

7. About what kinds of characters and situations can you conclude Fitzgerald wrote? Explain your response. _____

8. What would you imagine happened to Fitzgerald's daughter Scottie? Explain. _____

9. From the information given in the article, what conclusion could be drawn about American society during Fitzgerald's time? _____
 - a. Americans were motivated and philosophical.
 - b. Americans were interested in art and science.
 - c. Americans were very religious and devoted.
 - d. Americans were restless and reckless.
10. Using the information in the article, create a timeline of 5-7 important dates and events in Fitzgerald's life on a separate piece of paper.

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Comprehension Check: The Jazz Age

Directions: Using the article about *The Jazz Age* on the previous page, answer the questions below using complete sentences.

1. Who is credited with calling the 1920s "The Jazz Age"? _____

2. What event preceded the Jazz Age? _____

3. What invention gave people more freedom to travel? _____

4. Why did women suddenly feel more freedom during this era? _____

5. Describe the "it" girl. How does this image compare/contrast with female celebrities today? _____

6. What was the first movie with sound? In what year was it released? _____

7. What were the characteristics of the "Noble Experiment"? _____

8. What was a speakeasy? _____

9. What event brought the "party" of the 1920s to an end? _____

10. The purpose of this article on the Jazz Age is: _____
 - a. to inform
 - b. to persuade
 - c. to convince
 - d. to entertain