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Lesson Ten

FOCUS: What Makes a Book Great?

Great stories articulate and explore the mysteries of our daily lives in the larger context of the human struggle. The writer's voice, style, and use of language inform the plot, characters, and themes. By creating opportunities to learn, imagine, and reflect, a great novel is a work of art that affects many generations of readers, changes lives, challenges assumptions, and breaks new ground.

Discussion Activities

Ask students to make a list of the characteristics of a great book. Put these on the board. What elevates a novel to greatness? Then ask them to discuss, within groups, other books that include some of the same characteristics. Do any of these books remind them of *The Great Gatsby*? Is this a great novel?

A great writer can be the voice of a generation. What kind of voice does Fitzgerald provide through Nick and *Gatsby*? What does this voice tell us about the concerns and dreams of their generation?

According to avant-garde writer Gertrude Stein, this was the novel of the Lost Generation. How might it represent the hopes and dreams of Americans during the 1920s?

If you were the voice of your generation, what would be your most important message? Why might you choose to convey this in a novel rather than a speech or an essay? What story would you tell to get your point across?

Writing Exercise

Have students work on their essays in class. Be available to assist with outlines, drafts, and arguments. Have them partner with another student to edit outlines and rough drafts. For this editing, provide students with a list of things they should look for in a well-written essay.

Homework

Students should finish writing their essays to hand in during the next class period. Celebrate by participating in a Big Read community event or show a film version of *The Great Gatsby*.