

The Character of Daisy at the beginning of the novel

Discuss the following questions about Daisy to help you decide what sort of character you think Fitzgerald created and why he chose to portray her as he does in the opening chapter.

1. Daisy is Nick's second cousin once removed – why does Fitzgerald make them distantly related? Nick mentions that he knew Tom Buchanan at college so why does he ensure there is a connection with Daisy too? In order to answer this question think about the role of families (or lack of it) in the novel and the way characters behave about their own families. Does Nick's relationship with Daisy give some 'history'?
2. The first time Nick discusses Daisy and Tom he writes, 'Why they came East I don't know. They had spent a year in France for no particular reason, and then drifted here and there unrestfully wherever people played polo and were rich together. This was a permanent move, said Daisy over the telephone, but I didn't believe it ...' What does this tell us about Nick's understanding of Daisy's life and her character?
3. Later, Nick describes his first meeting with Daisy at East Egg thus, 'The only completely stationary object in the room was an enormous couch on which two young women were buoyed up as though upon an anchored balloon. They were both in white, and their dresses were rippling and fluttering as if they had just been blown back in after a short flight around the house.' What sort of impression does this give the reader of Daisy? Why does Fitzgerald dress her in white and why does he write about her (through Nick) as being 'blown back in'? Do you think he is hinting at real innocence and vulnerability or is he implying this only to destroy the image later? Does it add to our impressions of her as someone who constantly drifts without purpose or as someone who is controlled by others?
4. Later in the same conversation Daisy replies to a suggestion by Jordan Baker that they plan something for the longest day of the year, "What'll we plan?" She turned to me helplessly: "What do people plan?" What conclusions can we draw from these comments? Find other quotations in the novel which reflect the idea that Daisy's lifestyle is that of a wealthy drifter. What do you think Fitzgerald is trying to imply about people like Daisy? Is it a trait that he only sees in women or do you think it is more to do with her wealth and status?
5. Daisy tells Nick that when her daughter was born she said, 'I'm glad it's a girl. And I hope she'll be a fool – that's the best thing a girl can be in this world, a beautiful little fool.' Why do you think Daisy said this and why does she report it to Nick? What sort of impression do you get of Daisy as a mother from this chapter?
6. Afterwards Nick reports, 'The instant her voice broke off, ceasing to compel my attention, my belief, I felt the basic insincerity of what she had said. It made me uneasy, as though the whole evening had been a trick of some sort to exact a contributory emotion from me.' What do you think Nick means by this? Does it change your opinion of Daisy?
7. Just as Nick is leaving the Buchanans' house Daisy asks about Nick's apparent engagement. When Nick denies the story Daisy replies, "But we heard it," insisted Daisy, surprising me by opening up again in a flower-like way. "We heard it from three people, so it must be true." What does her response tell us about the role of the truth in the novel? Do any of the characters in this first chapter give the impression that they are completely truthful? Why might it be seen as ironic that this conversation is to do with relationships and marriage and it turns out that the relationship is not real?