

The Great Gatsby: Analyzing Fitzgerald's Prose

1. Select and copy two significant passages from the novel. Analyze each passage for what it achieves and how it achieves it. Be alert to rich descriptions, strong mood or tone, character development, and communication of theme or philosophy. In analyzing each passage, begin by trying to figure out what Fitzgerald's purpose was in writing this particular passage.
2. Type your work (double space) or write in ink. If you write instead of type, skip a line between each of your passages/responses.
3. Each of your responses should be at least one well developed paragraph. In each response, be sure to examine Fitzgerald's diction (word choice) and to discuss particular words or phrases of significance.

Here is an example from "The Scarlet Ibis" by James Hurst, but there are many ways to accomplish this kind of literary analysis.

"It was in the clove of seasons, summer was dead but autumn had not yet been born, that the ibis lit in the bleeding tree. The flower garden was stained with rotting brown magnolia petals and ironweeds grew rank amid the purple phlox. The five o'clocks by the chimney still marked time, but the oriole nest in the elm was untenanted and rocked like an empty cradle."

In this opening passage from the story, James Hurst establishes the somber tone of his story. His description includes specific words that suggest loss and death and ugliness. The summer is "dead." The tree is "bleeding." A flower garden usually suggests life and color, but this garden is "stained" with brown flower petals that lie rotting on the ground. The phlox are still alive and colorful ("purple"), but "rank," ugly weeds grow out of them. Flowers still grow by the chimney, but even this brief glimpse of life is immediately contrasted by the vacant oriole's nest. There are no living birds in the nest. It is empty and lifeless and sways pointlessly "like an empty cradle." There are fleeting bits of life and color in the passage, but the overall image is one of emptiness and death--void of life and color. The diction of the passage sets the bleak mood--and warns the reader--of the tragic story to follow.

