Unit: Literary Essay

Grade: English 10

Summative Assessment Task:

How is a theme developed across a text using various literary techniques? After reading a whole class novel or independent novel of your choice, write an argumentative literary essay that addresses the question and support your position with evidence from the texts. Be sure to acknowledge alternate themes developed in the novel.

This prompt is from the MAISA English 10 Literary Essay unit. Students had the option to use the paragraph styles taught in the unit: Thesis paragraph, extended example, connected example, literary device, and conclusion.

The Great Gatsby: A Euphoric Fortune

In his great American novel, *The Great Gatsby*, F. Scott Fitzgerald writes about the Roaring 20’s, in all its wealth, glamour, and inevitable ruin. Nick Carraway, a young man on the rise, moves to New York in the summer of 1922. He rents a small cabin-like house on the very tip of West Egg. Right across the Long Island Sound is West Egg, where his second cousin and her husband, Daisy and Tom Buchanan, live. Nick’s neighbor is a mysterious and enigmatic man by the name of Jay Gatsby, about whom everyone has some speculative theory. Over the summer, Nick grows to be acquainted with Gatsby. Slowly, the two become friends. Nick learns from Gatsby of an old romance that took place five years ago between a young, broke Gatsby and the charming, rich Daisy. They fell in love with each other, but Gatsby left for the war, and Daisy, unable to wait, married rich. Since then, Gatsby has amassed a prodigious fortune of his own. Now, his goal is to prove to Daisy that he and his wealth are worth her love and happiness. Gatsby throws immense, luxurious parties, showing off his wealth, all in the hopes that Daisy might notice and be allured to him. Finally, with Nick’s help, he obtains her and her love.
but this leads only to his tragic demise. **Fitzgerald, through these characters, communicates to the world that wealth alone will never bring happiness.**

When Daisy had her little girl, she realized that by marrying Tom for money instead of Gatsby for love, she plunged herself into a life of wealth and false content. Daisy chose the grand estate, empowered husband, and beautiful daughter. Yet, even with all this, she has been unable to find any real happiness. Nick comes to visit Daisy one day and sees this malcontent in her. In a private moment, Daisy tells Nick what she said after her daughter was born, “I woke up out of the ether and asked the nurse right away if it was a boy or girl. She said it was a girl, and so I turned my head away and wept… ‘I’m glad it’s a girl. And I hope she’ll grow up to be a fool—that’s the best thing a girl can be in this world, a beautiful little fool,’” (17). This shows the reader exactly how Daisy must feel for herself. She thinks the only way to have any sort of happiness is to be a fool, to trick herself into thinking that she is happy. Daisy has more wealth than she could possibly need, but she is not happy. She needs more out of life. She wants Gatsby, but she knows that what she wants cannot be achieved. So, she has to be “a little fool,” ignore her other wants, and believe that she is happy in her life with all her wealth. Daisy’s choice of marrying Tom left her richer, but this wealth could not bring her happiness.

Gatsby’s journey with his wealth, from the time he was a poor soldier to when he died in his swimming pool, showed him that he could not be happy with his wealth alone. Gatsby grew up in an impoverished family, but he believed he was destined for much greater. When he was a soldier, he met Daisy and many other people of a higher class. They all liked Gatsby and treated him as an equal, while Daisy even fell in love with him. Gatsby was poor, of the lowest class, but his uniform veiled him and enabled him to be
with the wealthy and be treated as one. Because of his uniform, no one could tell who Gatsby really was or how much money he had to his name. However, Gatsby knew that, “…he was at present a penniless young man without a past and at any moment the invisible cloak of his uniform might slip from his shoulders,” (149). Eventually, he would have to take off the uniform, and would go back to his poor life. It is at this moment that Gatsby decided to make a fortune of his own. He believed that in order to be happy, which for him was synonymous with being among the upper class, he needed to acquire a grand fortune. So, over the course of three years, Gatsby works hard, and with some illegal methods, he earns a colossal fortune. He buys an estate on West Egg, a huge, magnificent mansion with, “…period bedrooms swathed in rose and lavender silks and vivid with new flowers, [with] dressing-rooms and poolrooms, and bathrooms with sunken baths,” (91). Gatsby’s house is rich and grand, and everything in it screams so. However, Gatsby never uses his wealth. He never swims in his swimming pool, never reads any of the hundreds of books in his library, and never even attends his own lavish parties. He is content with just having this wealth and with his dream of Daisy, for whom all this is meant. Gatsby remained separate from his wealth, happy without actually using it. However, at the very end of his story, Gatsby decides to go for a swim. He tells Nick, “You know, old sport, I’ve never used that pool all summer?” (153). With this sudden whim, Gatsby dons his swimsuit and climbs into the pool on the last day of summer. In this symbolic action, as Gatsby immerses himself in the pool’s water, he immerses himself in his wealth. However, almost immediately upon entering the pool, Gatsby is shot dead. Surrounded by the wealth of his pool and house, Gatsby lies dead. Wealth left Gatsby with his demise, bringing him not happiness, but ruin.
Fitzgerald uses a necklace of pearls as a symbol of wealth devoid of happiness. After Gatsby left for the war, Daisy married Tom Buchanan. Tom, on the day before the wedding, “…gave her a string of pearls valued at three hundred and fifty thousand dollars,” (76). This is an extremely lavish gift, a reminder that Tom essentially is buying Daisy’s love. On this same day, Daisy receives a letter, presumably from Gatsby asking her to wait for him. Daisy read the letter and then threw the pearls in the trash. She, for a brief moment, chose the love and happiness in Gatsby’s letter over the wealth in Tom’s pearls. In this moment, Daisy seems happy. She is alone in her bedroom, drinking wine, the bottle in one hand and the letter in the other. It is as if she is celebrating her choice of love and happiness. However, soon enough, Daisy is brought to her senses and begins to cry. She realizes that she has to marry Tom, because it is what is expected of her and what is best for her. Upon this realization, Daisy put her dress back on and, “she didn’t say another word… when [she] walked out of the room, the pearls were around her neck and the incident was over,” (76). Daisy had completely accepted her fate. She could not wait for Gatsby. She needed to pick the logical option, the security of the pearls over the letter. However, she was unhappy. She did not speak the whole time and stood as rigid as a statue. She forced herself into believing she could learn to love Tom. She made the choice of the pearls, but it left her with a miserable life.

_The Great Gatsby_ proves that great wealth has never resulted in great happiness. From Daisy’s pearls to Gatsby’s mansion, we see that wealth leaves only a miserable life and an ultimate death. Wealth is needed. Without it, a life is difficult and unpleasant. However, so much is missing from a life filled with only wealth. Fitzgerald ends the book with Nick looking back at all the mansions and grand houses seen from the beach of West
Egg. Nick sees the land under those houses as it once was, as a beautiful, untouched, unspoiled island. He sees the world before wealth corrupted it, and how beautiful and peaceful it once was. It is true; a wealth-filled, glamorous life often lacks this beauty, lacks true happiness, and lacks blissful euphoria.

**Teacher’s Final Summative Comment:**

This tenth grade writer shows command of the moves required to write a literary essay. She has a clear understanding of how to vary her paragraph structure to suit a purpose, and her evidence and thinking supports her them that “wealth alone will never buy happiness.” The paper could be improved by going through one more feedback and revision loop; however, the paper was written at the beginning of the first semester, and the writer was already able to organize and compose a paper that meets (and sometimes exceeds) expectations for tenth grade writers.

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<th>RUBRIC</th>
<th>High</th>
<th>Medium</th>
<th>Low</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Fluency</td>
<td>The essay includes multiple, well-developed paragraphs. The sentences are easy to follow and help to make the essay understandable.</td>
<td>The essay includes multiple paragraphs, but they are not well-developed or the language is choppy.</td>
<td>The essay does not include multiple paragraphs or the choppiness of the language distracts from the meaning.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Development</td>
<td>The essay includes a clear claim. It includes specific, well-chosen evidence from the text that supports that claim. The interpretation makes sense and clearly supports the claim.</td>
<td>The essay includes a relatively clear claim. Some pieces of evidence support the claim. The interpretation may not make sense or does not clearly support the claim.</td>
<td>The essay lacks a clear claim. It lacks evidence or does not support the claim at all. The interpretation does not make sense and does not support the claim.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Organization</td>
<td>The essay includes the types of body paragraphs that best support the claim. The transitions between examples and paragraphs make for smooth reading.</td>
<td>The essay includes at least one of the best types of body paragraphs to provide basic support for the claim. The transitions might make the essay easier to read.</td>
<td>The essay does not include the best types of body paragraphs to provide enough support for the claim. The transitions between examples and between paragraphs are choppy and distract from</td>
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Comment [26]: This is evidence of the writer putting to use the technique used in the unit to write a good conclusion: Reread the last few paragraphs of novel. (See the MAISA literary essay unit for more details about this type of paragraph)

Comment [27]: The writer tries to end with personal commentary and bookend the paper by tying her thoughts to the thesis paragraph and her title.
| Editing/Correctness | The essay is essentially error-free. There is a sense of careful editing. Appropriate format for literary essay is used. | The essay includes occasional errors. Some sense of editing is obvious. Some errors in formatting a literary essay are present. | The essay includes multiple errors. Little or no sense of editing is present. Rules for formatting a literary essay are not followed. |