

Student's Worksheet

Outstanding American Writers 1 (Fitzgerald, Steinbeck, Faulkner)

Francis Scott Fitzgerald

Francis Scott Key Fitzgerald (September 24, 1896 – December 21, 1940) was one of the greatest American writers of the 20th century and the member of the “Lost Generation”. He is mainly known for his novels and short stories associated with the “the Jazz Age” (the twenties of the 20th century). His books have been made into many films.

He was born 1869 in St. Paul, Minnesota to an upper-middle-class family. He studied at Princeton University where he started writing and in 1917 he entered the US army. Fitzgerald was commissioned a second lieutenant in the infantry and assigned to Camp Sheridan outside of Montgomery, Alabama.

While at a country club, Fitzgerald met and fell in love with Zelda Sayre (1900–1948), the seventeen-year-old daughter of an Alabama Supreme Court justice and the "golden girl", in Fitzgerald's terms, of Montgomery youth society. The war ended in 1918, before Fitzgerald was ever deployed, and upon his discharge he moved to New York City hoping to launch a career in advertising lucrative enough to convince Zelda to marry him and in 1920 he really married her.

They moved to New York, then travelled in Europe and back to America several times and lived the lifestyle which they couldn't afford. Zelda was very demanding and Fitzgerald was constantly in debts. Their life became more complicated when Scott started to drink a lot (although he was an alcoholic all his life) and Zelda was diagnosed with schizophrenia. Since that time she was hospitalized several times both in Europe and in America.



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As Scott needed much money he began to write essays and for a short time he also worked in Hollywood as a screenwriter, but he was fired because of his drinking. He died of a heart attack in 1940. Zelda died in 1948, in a fire at the Highland Mental Hospital in Asheville, North Carolina.

In his books he shows the world of the rich which he admired. For the rich everything was available. He wrote many stories for magazines to earn money and then his collected stories were published with the titles **Tales of the Jazz Age, All the Sad Young Men** and others.

His most famous novels are : **This Side of Paradise, The Beautiful and Damned, The Great Gatsby, Tender is the Night** and **The Last Tycoon** which is unfinished.

The Great Gatsby

It's Fitzgerald's best work and it's considered to be the second best English-language novel of the 20th century. It criticizes the life of the richest Americans in the US. (The lifestyle that Fitzgerald always wanted to live, but couldn't afford it.) It's a real portrait of the Jazz Age with its careless, selfish rich.

It's a story of a rich smuggler Jay Gatsby who wants to get back the love of his early love Daisy who belongs to the society of the rich and is married to a millionaire Tom Buchanan. Although she still loves Gatsby and knows Tom has a lover, she doesn't want to leave him, because he belongs among the rich and Gatsby in spite of his wealth isn't accepted by this society. In the end Gatsby is shot by the Tom's lover's husband who blames him for the death of his wife although he is innocent.

William Faulkner

William Faulkner (1897 – 1962) is one of most important writers of the American South.

He was born on September 25, 1897 as the first of four sons of Murry Falkner and Maud Butler in New Albany in northern Mississippi. His family belonged to old aristocratic families with the sense of white social status and the strict code of honour which later provided a good material for Faulkner's books. Soon his parents moved to Oxford, where he spent most of his life. As a young boy he was interested in books and wanted to become a writer. On the other hand he was a weak student, never graduated from the high school and left school at the eleventh grade.

During WWI he entered the Canadian Royal Force and was sent to Toronto as a cadet pilot, but he was there in 1918 and the war ended before he finished his basic training. After returning home he entered the University of Mississippi and he started writing. In 1924 he published a cycle of poems **The Marble Faun** and began to work on his first novel **Soldier's Pay** - about the return to Georgia of a fatally wounded pilot.

Faulkner's Mississippi, where he lived, forms (under the fictional name of Yoknapatawpha) the background to a long series of his novels. E.g.: **The Sound and the Fury, As I Lay Dying, Sanctuary, Light in August, Absalom, Absalom** etc.

The trilogy **The Hamlet, The Town** and **The Mansion** covers all the experience of Faulkner's life.

In his books he shows the traditions and history of the South, the life of the old Southern aristocratic families and their confrontation with new people - capitalists and businessmen – and with the Negroes and the Indians. The Negroes are often described more sympathetically than the whites.



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Faulkner's method of writing is very complicated. He takes the reader into the middle of the story and then leaves him to find out how the story started. The characters return retrospectively to some events which happened before and mix the events together. The events are discussed from different points of view of various characters and it's sometimes difficult to understand what the people are talking about. E.g.: *As I Lay Dying* is composed of 59 monologues by a variety of characters.

In contrast to Ernest Hemingway his sentences are very long and very complicated.

In 1950 W. Faulkner was awarded the Nobel Prize for literature. He died of a heart attack in a hospital near Oxford in 1962.

John Steinbeck

He was born in Salinas Valley, California in 1902. His father was a miller and his mother was a teacher. It was her who led her son to love of books and literature. He studied at Stanford University, but left it without a degree and went to New York where he worked as a newspaper reporter. He didn't like it and returned back to California and started writing novels. During WWII he was as a correspondent in Europe. In 1948 he visited the Soviet Union, but avoided the political topics and tried to write about the life of common Soviet people. When the Vietnamese War started he went to Vietnam to report on it. He died of heart attack in New York in 1968.

In his books he tried to uncover the "root of all evil" in human society. In his teens he worked on ranches with migrant workers and he saw the harsh conditions, the low pay and the hard life of these people. It inspired him for writing about the life of poor people in his books. Many of his books were made into films.

The most famous books are e.g.: **Of Mice and Men, The Grapes of Wrath, Tortilla Flat, Cannery Row, East of Eden, The Wayward Bus.**



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He won the Pulitzer Prize for *The Grapes of Wrath* and in 1962 he was awarded the Nobel Prize for literature.

Of Mice and Men

...For a moment the place was lifeless, and then two men emerged from the path and came into the opening by the green pool.

They had walked in single file down the path, and even in the open one stayed behind the other. Both were dressed in denim trousers and in denim coats with brass buttons. Both wore black, shapeless hats and both carried tight blanket rolls over their shoulders. The first man was small and quick, dark of face with restless eyes and sharp, strong features. Every part of him was defined: small, strong hands, slender arms, and a thin and bony nose. Behind him walked his opposite, a huge man, shapeless face, with large, pale eyes, with wide, sloping shoulders; and he walked heavily, dragging his feet a little. His arms did not swing at his sides, but hung loosely.

The first man stopped short in the clearing, and the follower nearly ran over him. He took off his hat and wiped the sweatband with his forefinger. His huge companion dropped his blankets and flung himself down and drank from the surface of the green pool; drank with long gulps, snoring into the water like a horse. The small man stepped nervously beside him.

“Lennie!” he said sharply. “Lennie, for God’s sakes don’t drink so much.” Lennie continued to snore into the pool. The small man leaned over and shook him by the shoulder. “Lennie. You gonna be sick like you was last night.”

Lennie dipped his whole head under, hat and all, and then he sat on the bank and his hat dripped down on his blue coat and ran down his back. “Tha’s good,” he said. “You drink some, George. You take a good big drink.” He smiled happily.

George unslung his bindle and dropped it gently on the bank. “I ain’t sure it’s good water,” he said. “Looks kinda scummy.” George knelt beside the pool and drank from his hand. “Tastes all right,” he admitted. “Don’t really seem to be running, though. You never oughta drink water when it ain’t running, Lennie.: he said hopelessly. “You’d drink out of a gutter if you was thirsty.” He threw

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some water into his face and rubbed it about with his hand, under his chin and around the back of his neck.

Then he replaced his hat, pushed himself back from the river, drew up his knees and embraced them. Lennie, who had been watching him, imitated George exactly. He pushed himself back, drew up his knees, embraced them, looked over to George to see whether he had it just right. He pulled his hat down a little more over his eyes, the way George's hat was.

George stared morosely at the water. The rims of his eyes were red with the sun glare. He said angrily: "We could just as well of rode clear to ranch if that bastard bus driver knew what he was talkin' about. 'Jes'a little stretch down the highway,' he says. 'Jes'a little stretch.' God damn near four miles, that's what it was! Didn't wanna stop at the ranch gate, that's what. Too God damn lazy to pull up. Kicks us out and says, 'Jes'a little stretch down the road.' I bet it was more than four miles. Damn hot day."

Lennie looked timidly over to him. "George?"

"Yeah, what ya want?"

"Where we goin', George?"

The little man jerked down the brim of his hat and scowled over at Lennie. "So you forgot that already, did you? I gotta tell you again, do I? Jesus Christ, you're a crazy bastard!"

"I forgot," Lennie said softly. "I tried not to forget. Honest to God I did, George."

"OK – OK. I'll tell ya again. I ain't got nothing to do. Might jus'as well spen'all my time tellin'you things and then you forget 'em, and I tell you again."

"Tried and tried," said Lennie, "but it didn't do no good. I remember about the rabbits, George."

"The hell with the rabbits. That's all you ever can remember is them, rabbits. OK!."

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George looked sharply at him. "What'd you take outta that pocket?"

"Ain't a thing in my pocket," Lennie said cleverly.

"I know there ain't. You got it in your hand. What you got in your hand - hidin' it?"

