

Sample Prose Passage Response

PROMPT: Write an essay in which you show how the author uses characterization to achieve his purpose. Support with specific references to the passage you selected.

Note: The selected passage for this response is the close reading passage from ch. 1.

WHAT

HOW

WHY

In this passage from his novel *The Great Gatsby*, F. Scott Fitzgerald introduces the reader to Tom and Daisy Buchanan—the wealthy socialites who epitomize the golden era of the Jazz Age. Through his description of Tom and Daisy both as individuals and as a couple, Fitzgerald explores the relationship between wealth and contentment; though the two live in material excess, they seem to lack any real fulfillment in their current lives. Fitzgerald’s characterization in this passage suggests that a life of wealth and ease is ultimately empty.

CLAIM

On the surface, Tom appears powerful and in control; however, he is at his core a careless individual in a constant state of unrest. *His "physical accomplishments" as a former football player and his "enormously wealthy" lineage suggest he is a force to be reckoned with in all aspects of life. This illusion of power is contradicted when Nick, the novel's narrator, describes Tom as "one of those men who reach such an acute limited excellence at twenty-one that everything afterwards savors of anticlimax."* For Tom, his former football glory comes to symbolize the youth he cannot recover. Controlled by his urge to find the "dramatic turbulence" that his current life lacks, Tom becomes restless, resorting to a series of endless moves around the globe to various places where "people played polo and were rich together." Nick's vague description of Tom and Daisy's moves—he simply says they "drifted here and there unrestfully"—proves that the couple acts without purpose. The reference to polo, another sport of interest to Tom, establishes an important metaphor in the text: to Tom, life is merely a game to be won. When Nick says that Tom would always be seeking the challenges of "an irrecoverable football game," he reiterates this metaphor and highlights Tom's unhappiness. Tom's true lack of power and his desperate attempt to create challenges for himself account for his feeling of emptiness, his subsequent search for drama, and his reckless behavior.

COMMENTARY

FILLING (note: this will have textual evidence that includes quotations/paraphrasing, transitions, and simple commentary if necessary)

Quote Sandwich

Nick's brief description of Daisy proves she is delusional and weak. *She believes their move to New York to be "permanent," but their pattern of moving and drifting from place to place clearly suggests otherwise. Nick admits that he cannot believe Daisy when she says they will stay put; in essence he is already establishing Daisy as one whose words cannot be trusted, not necessarily because of willful lying, but because she is either incapable of unwilling to see the truth around her. Nick also suggests Daisy is at the mercy of her husband, to whom she has willingly relinquished control of her own life. He explains, "I had no insight into Daisy's heart, but I felt that Tom would drift on forever."* Despite the fact that Daisy may not have any intention of leaving their new home, Tom's restlessness will likely carry her away at some point. Ultimately Daisy's inability to convey the truth and her lack of control over her own life make her an untrustworthy character and an object of pity in the novel.

Together Tom and Daisy's transient nature reflects their discontent, and their carelessness demonstrates a lack of purpose. *Nick's repetition of the word "drift" establishes this pattern for these two characters. Their hollow existence makes it difficult for either of them to form any relationship of substance; hence, Nick describes them as "old friends whom [he] scarcely knew at all."* Although they have material wealth that exceeds most in their generation, they are clearly unsatisfied and are continually searching for more.