

# F. Scott Fitzgerald

1896–1940



**WHY HE MADE HISTORY** F. Scott Fitzgerald was an American novelist and short-story writer. He is widely considered to be one of the greatest literary voices of the Roaring Twenties.



*As you read the biography below, think about how F. Scott Fitzgerald's life may have influenced his stories and characters.*

F. Scott Fitzgerald was born in Minnesota to middle-class parents. He attended private schools, and enrolled in Princeton University in 1913. Fitzgerald never completed his degree but spent some of his time at the university writing musical comedies for the theater. After leaving school Fitzgerald joined the army and was stationed in Alabama. It was there that Fitzgerald met the love of his life, Zelda Sayre. Zelda, the daughter of a judge, and Fitzgerald married in 1920.

It was also in 1920 that F. Scott Fitzgerald published his first novel, *This Side of Paradise*. The book describes life at Princeton among the **disillusioned** postwar generation. The novel was an instant success, and Fitzgerald and Zelda used the novel's earnings to live a life of luxury. They traveled to New York, Paris and the French Riviera. While in Europe they became part of a famous group of American **expatriates**.

*The Beautiful and the Damned*, Fitzgerald's second novel, also focused on the free-spirited generation of the Roaring Twenties. The same theme was repeated in his short-story collections, *Flappers and Philosophers* and *Tales of the Jazz Age*.



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## VOCABULARY

**disillusioned** disappointed, disenchanted

**expatriates** people who leave their native country to live elsewhere

**socialites** important members of a community's social life

**cynical** pessimistic, distrustful

F. Scott Fitzgerald's masterpiece, *The Great Gatsby*, was published in 1925. The novel addressed the moral emptiness Fitzgerald observed among the wealthy American **socialites** of the time period. The novel is a **cynical** portrait of the "American Dream" when it measures success and love in terms of money.

By the time of *The Great Gatsby's* publication, F. Scott Fitzgerald's life had become unstable. He was burdened with financial struggles, and his wife Zelda was suffering from mental illness. Fitzgerald himself experienced a physical and mental collapse. He wrote about these issues in his essay *The Crack-Up*. "In a real dark night of the soul it is always three o'clock in the morning," he wrote in this essay in 1936.

F. Scott Fitzgerald spent the last years of his life as a scriptwriter in Hollywood. He died in 1940 at the age of 44, leaving behind an unfinished novel called *The Last Tycoon*.

### WHAT DID YOU LEARN?

**1. Recall** What were some of the subjects for F. Scott Fitzgerald's stories?

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**2. Draw Conclusions** How do you think F. Scott Fitzgerald's lifestyle contributed to his eventual collapse?

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### ACTIVITY

**3.** F. Scott Fitzgerald had his own definition of the American Dream. What is yours? On a separate sheet of paper, write a brief essay describing your American Dream.