

The Jazz Age

By Sarah Gudgeon

I. Read

Do you know what a 'flapper' is? No, it's not something you use for scuba diving, that's a 'flipper'. A 'flapper' was a girl who followed the fashion, dance and music culture of 1920s America. Just like we have 'emos' and 'goths' today. Before the 1920s, most Americans lived in rural areas without cars and radios and so their lives were quite isolated. Women were particularly isolated because they stayed home all day with the babies and the farm animals. Suddenly, in 1920, they got the vote and with cities everywhere expanding, they also got jobs and boyfriends, instead of husbands and babies.

Dance-halls opened in major cities like New York and Chicago and with cheap Ford cars now available, young people could move around for fun and work. There was a cultural explosion; freedom, fashion, dance and music meant that young people could openly express themselves. Chain stores sold trendy clothes and hair salons gave flappers a stylish bob. Jazz bands played their music all night long and people danced the Charleston and the Black Bottom. Not everybody was happy about the liberated 'roaring twenties' but the new generation continued to party and left the modern consumer society as their legacy.

Glossary

Dance-halls: le prime discoteche dove le persone andavano per sentire musica e ballare.

Chain store: un negozio che fa parte di una catena

A bob: un'acconciatura che andava molto di moda e che avevano tutte le 'flappers'

The Charleston and the Black Bottom: i nomi di due tipi di balletti jazz.

The roaring twenties: il nome dato agli anni venti che erano caratterizzati da divertimento e libertà.

2. True or False?

- a. Everyone in America lives in the countryside. T / F
- b. Before the 1920s women didn't usually work. T / F
- c. Ford produced motor cars that cost a lot of money. T / F
- d. Men and women had 'bobs'. T / F
- e. American culture changed in the 1920s. T / F
- f. We now live in a consumer society. T / F

3. Read the statement below. Do you agree or disagree? Discuss with a partner.

Life in 1920s America was great fun.

4. Summarise the good and bad that came from the Jazz Age.

Good:

Bad:

Teacher's Notes

2. True or False?

a. F b. T c. F d. F e. T f. T

3. Talk to a partner about the statement.

Post-task: If you have the possibility, let your students listen to some jazz music and show them a video clip of young people doing the Charleston and driving their first car, etc., to give them a taste of life in the Jazz Age.

4. Summarise the good and bad that came from the Jazz Age.

Before asking the students to do this task, elicit some possible answers from the group or make suggestions.

Sample answer:

Good: *Social and political freedom. Women's rights. Jazz music accepted in the mainstream.*

Bad: *Loss of local farming communities. Loss of family values. The increased rise of consumerism.*