

Flappers

1920s

A flapper was a young woman in the 1920s who looked and behaved differently than women of earlier generations. However, before the flapper, there was the Gibson Girl. The Gibson Girl was based on the drawings of Charles Dana Gibson. The Gibson Girl wore her hair loosely on top of her head. Her shirt had a high collar, and she wore a long skirt. She looked like a regular girl of the time. The Gibson Girl wanted to do activities men did. Some of these activities were golfing and bicycle riding.

Many women began to change during World War I. This was when many men were overseas fighting. When the men returned, women did want to return to the way they had lived earlier. They liked their new place in the world. In World War I, many American men were killed. In wartime, with so much destruction, rules about people's behavior and dress did not seem to be as important. The flappers decided they wanted more freedom.

The word *flapper* first was used in England after World War I. It meant a young woman who was immature. The word traveled to the United States where it meant a woman in her late teens. These flappers were different. They wore dresses that were shorter than dresses before the 1920s. The flappers wanted to move easily in their clothes. Jazz became a popular type of music, and women wanted to have looser clothing when they danced. Their new dresses stopped at the knees. The hiplines on their dresses also were lowered. This made it easy to do dances such as the Black Bottom, Charleston, and the Shimmy. These dances were more active than previous ballroom dances. The flappers shocked older people with their actions.

The flappers smoked cigarettes. They drank alcohol. They carried flasks of alcohol on their hips. They took alcohol with them when they went out. Before this time, only men did such things in



public. In 1919 alcoholic beverages became illegal in America. Alcohol could not be sold or made. Alcohol remained banned until 1933.

The flappers also wore their hair short, almost as short as men did. They wore makeup such as face powder and lipstick when they went out. Flappers drove automobiles and wanted to prove that women could enjoy the same activities as men.

As time went by, American society began to accept flappers. More women cut their hair and did not wear corsets. Eventually flapper styles influenced how all women dressed. This was until the Stock Market Crash of 1929 and the Great Depression began. The bad economic times changed women's behavior. Everyone needed to pull together to help the country. Flappers, however, helped move the United States closer to women having the same rights as men.

Name: _____

Date: _____

Flappers

Characteristics: In the spaces below describe four characteristics of flappers.

