

## Flappers

“New social practices and ideas accompanied the rising consumer culture, and the United States experienced a radical transformation of social traditions. Many women who had entered the workplace in large numbers during the First World War, and had gained the vote with the passage of the Nineteenth Amendment (1920), began to feel more confident. In turn, flappers began to challenge the conservative morality that women were expected to uphold. They engaged in petting, smoked in public, attended speakeasies, drank illicitly, and were easily identifiable by their unconventional conduct and dress. Flappers cultivated a boyish look, cut their hair short into styles like the bob and shingle, abandoned corsets, flattened their breasts by wrapping fabric tightly around their upper bodies, and sported knee-length skirts over their straight, skinny hips. Images of flappers abounded on popular magazine covers and in other areas of popular culture, and F. Scott Fitzgerald immortalized them in his popular postwar fiction.”

Citation: *Great Gatsby* Lesson, Humanities Out There

Zelda Fitzgerald, born Zelda Sayre, came to symbolize the new woman/flapper in 1920s United States. Her husband called her “the first American Flapper” and she was known for resisting social expectations. Even in High School in the 1910s she drank, smoked, wore revealing outfits, and spent most of her time with men. This was part of her charm, at least for Fitzgerald and the many other men who courted her. The two married and became notorious for their wild partying, having attained celebrity status after his first novel was published.

### **Source 5: Lisa Hix, “Great Gatsby Still Gets Flappers Wrong,” *Collectors Weekly*, May 3, 2013.**

Found at: <https://www.collectorsweekly.com/articles/the-great-gatsby-still-gets-flappers-wrong/>

But Zelda [Fitzgerald], as fearless and trail-blazing as she was, can’t even embody the flapper movement fully. For one, it was not all white women, as NYU’s Modern America reports: “For the time being, the bob and the entire Flapper wardrobe, united blacks and whites under a common hip-culture.” Secondly, the flapper’s rebellion against Victorian sexual traditions didn’t start among the high-society debutantes, but in “working-class neighborhoods and radical circles in the early 1900s before it spread to middle-class youth and college campuses.”

... The flapper movement wasn’t simply a fashion trend...it was a full-blown, grassroots feminist revolution. After an 80-year campaign by suffragists, women were finally granted the right to vote...When the U.S. entered World War I in April 1917, many women entered the workforce, and when the soldiers returned in November 1918, their female counterparts were reluctant to give up their jobs.

As a result, young, unmarried women experienced far greater financial independence than they’d ever had before...Suddenly, it was possible for women to go out and enjoy freedom and rebellion in a way they never had before when they were beholden to their fathers or husbands.

1. How could you identify a flapper?	
2. What types of ideas and social expectations did flappers challenge?	
3. What changes are the authors arguing flappers represented?	

## Flapper Fashion

Women's Dresses, 1910s



Women's Dresses, 1920s



Beach Censor, 1925



Howard University Students in the 1920s



<b>1.</b> What shifts in fashion between the 1910s and 1920s do the first two images show?	
<b>2.</b> Do the images from the 1920s fit with the text’s description of flappers?	

“Flapper: A British term for the New Woman of the 1920s, who challenged conventional forms of behavior and dress. The name was first used metaphorically to describe women as butterflies trying out their new wings.”

*Source:* Humanities Out There Great Gatsby Lesson, page 10

Given the above definition of a flapper, do you think it’s a fitting name for the New Woman of the 1920s? List evidence for the position you take.

(Example: The first two images show how much more of the legs flapper dresses showed, which supports the definition because it was a newer, less conventional style.)

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