

The Flapper and Women's Rights

Pre-Activity: Comparing the Flapper to the Gibson Girl

STANDARDS

II. Time, Continuity, and Change

- b. Identify an use key concepts such as chronology, causality, change, conflict, and complexity to explain, analyze, and show connections among patterns of historical change and continuity.
- e. Develop critical sensitivities such as empathy and skepticism regarding attitudes, values, and behaviors of people in different historical contexts.

IV. Individual Development and Identity

- d. Relate such factors as physical endowment and capabilities, learning, motivation, personality, perception, and behavior to individual development.
- e. Identify and describe ways regional, ethnic, and national cultures influence individuals' daily lives.
- f. Identify and describe the influence of perception, attitudes, values, and beliefs on personal identity.
- g. Identify and interpret examples of stereotyping, conformity, and altruism.

V. Individuals, Groups, and Institutions

- a. Demonstrate an understanding of concepts such as role, status, and social class in describing the interactions of individuals and social groups.
- b. Analyze group and institutional influence on people, events, and elements of culture.

Procedure

In this activity, students will read selections about the flappers and the Gibson girls (as they appear in pages EA-9 through EA-11 or EB-9 through EB-11 of the student handbook) and make a comparison between the Gibson girl of the turn of the century and the flapper girl of the 1920s. Unlike the descriptions in the charted selections that follow on pages D-16 through D-19, however, the student handbook pages will not distinguish which passages are associated with flappers and which are to be associated with the Gibson girl.

By making the comparison and assigning each passage to its proper person (see the categories in the comparison chart in the student handbook, page EA-12 or EB-12), students will come to understand how women and their behavior changed drastically in a short time. After the students have completed their charts, have them discuss their efforts and check the results with the information in the chart on pages D-16 through D-19.

This exercise will also prepare students for the simulation game, *The Real Deal*, modeled after a television show. Make sure that you select four girls in the classroom to whom you DO NOT give this activity. **Note:** Before assigning this activity, read *The Real Deal* activity on pages D-20 and D-21 for more details.

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Pre-Activity: Comparing the Flapper to the Gibson Girl *(cont.)*

Category	Flapper (1920s)	Gibson Girl (1890s–1900s)
College	Much of the action and fun and games took place on the college campuses or were carried on by the college students. Young men and women were sent off to college, to some of the best colleges and universities in America, and they simply went wild.	There were very few opportunities to get an education. The widespread attitude was that a woman should be at home, raising children, catering to every whim of her husband, and taking care of the house. Women often got married in their late teens.
Bathing Suits	They went the limit in putting on bathing attire that was quite abbreviated and revealing, and many young women were arrested for what police charged was “indecent exposure.”	Bathing costumes totally covered the woman from her wrists and neck all the way down to the ankles. The women wore bloomers, a sort of light pair of slacks, for the water.
Dancing and Music	They did wild and crazy things that were incomprehensible to their parents and elders. The young women took part in dance marathons; one lasted 119 days. The dance marathon was brutal, leaving the contestants exhausted and nearly unconscious on their feet, with swollen legs and blistered toes. They loved jazz because it was wild and exciting, and the youth loved the movement, the rhythm, the action, the beat, and the sound. There was a thrill to the wildness of the dance floor.	Prior to the First World War, the waltz was king. In the best of social circles, the ladies waited for the gentlemen to approach and lead them to the dance floor. The popular beauties of the day held a dance card that all of the men scrambled to sign and claim a dance. Every dance would find a beautiful female spinning in ecstasy, as a gentleman held her delicately by the waist and with an outstretched hand, commanding everyone's attention.

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Pre-Activity: Comparing the Flapper to the Gibson Girl *(cont.)*

Category	Flapper (1920s)	Gibson Girl (1890s–1900s)
Parties or Social Callings	<p>The Jazz Age, the decade right through the twenties, was a "time for youth," filled with young people looking for thrills, excitement, and parties. The college crowd played Mah-jongg, and they didn't want to be bothered by "ideals" and "causes." "Social justice" simply meant that everyone had equal access to the spiked punch bowl at the fraternity party.</p>	<p>Women always wore white silk gloves when in society or at a party, and they left calling cards when they paid visits to other homes and families. Women loved to play bridge. Lawn croquet was a favorite weekend activity. Family dinners on Sunday were traditional. The rich and famous gravitated toward yachting and polo and always remained aloof from the masses.</p>
Liquor	<p>What was a dance or a party without the flask? Every young man carried a hip flask filled with liquor. Women had flasks, too, usually tucked into the garters of their stockings, and a simple hoist of the skirt had the flask in hand for a quick snort. Wild and crazy "party crashing," especially on a Saturday night or over the weekend, became all the rage. Young people would drive from one city to another, crash a party, and drink all the liquor in the house without even knowing the name of the host or hostess. Drinking in public became acceptable, and during Prohibition more and more women ordered cocktails and joined male companions in the speakeasies. The idea that a saloon or bar was the private preserve of the male came quickly to an end. These women drank, and they could sock it away with the best of the male drinkers.</p>	<p>The Anti-Saloon League and the Women's Christian Temperance Union was a "lady's" answer to the evils of drink. These organizations, together with the Baptists and Methodists, waged a war against alcohol. In society, ladies and gentlemen drank sociably and in moderation, sipping the finest wines, with liqueurs and cordials and a smooth after-dinner port to ease digestion. Throwing down shot after shot of "rot-gut" whiskey was only for the lower class. Many women joined the temperance movement and were more active in efforts to rid the nation of "demon rum" and alcohol than they were in trying to secure the vote. Ms. Carry Nation hacked her way through a saloon on a Sunday morning, wielding an axe that splintered the bar and every barrel of booze. The saloon was a man's world where women dared not enter, unless you had an axe in hand.</p>

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Category	Flapper (1920s)	Gibson Girl (1890s–1900s)
Undergarments or Underwear	These women were urged by their mothers to wear corsets, too, but as soon as the pretty young things got to the dance or the fraternity party, they all made a beeline for the ladies room, and off came the corsets and any other restraining undergarment.	Women wore corsets made of whalebone that gave them a figure shaped like an hourglass. The ladies wore layers of crinolines and skirts underneath their gowns, and the material blossomed out and bespoke elegance, poise, charm, and good manners.
Hair	Women bobbed their hair and kept it short. Along with the bobbed hair, they wore skull-hugging hats called <i>cloches</i> .	This young lady was the idealization of the female at this time. The hair flowed in abundance and was swept upward into a seductive coiffure. A woman preferred her hair gathered in the back and carefully sculpted into a bun.
Transportation	Women drove their own roadsters and automobiles and showed they were quite capable behind the wheel. They liked the wildness and excitement of the speed. Jumping into the roadster and careening down the highway with their boyfriends was thrilling and exciting.	Ladies were driven wherever they wanted to go by coachmen and liveried servants, in carriages, phaetons, and landaus. A gentleman might take a lady for a ride in a buggy, but the pace was moderate and sensible, and speed was never a consideration. Later, the ladies were driven in chauffeured luxury automobiles. Women usually rode horses sidesaddle, what was called the "French style." They never sat astride a horse like the men; to ride in that fashion was considered unladylike.
Skirts and Dresses	The length of the dress or the skirt climbed to shocking heights. Short skirts and high hemlines were the rule. This went along with the low waistlines that set a trend. The dresses and garments were loose, with a low beltline that slithered downward off the hips. The style dictated that the knees, and even a portion of the thigh, would be provocatively and alluringly revealed. It became a fad to roll down the stockings to the knee. When dancing the Charleston, the looseness of the dress material moved and swayed and would fly as high as it could go. The young women were not ashamed of showing off their shapely legs encased in silk stockings.	Women's clothing had a touch of elegance, with dresses and gowns made of silks and brocades, accentuating the bodice and tightly sculpting the female figure. The dress covered the body completely, reaching down to the ankle, and with collars that came to the neck and sleeves that embraced the wrist.

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Category	Flapper (1920s)	Gibson Girl (1890s–1900s)
Accessories	<p>This young woman wore long strings of beads that were the rage. She carried large handbags for car keys and wallets, lipstick, mascara, rouge, face powder, and the whole assortment of makeup, plus bills, loose change, cigarettes, cigarette lighter, cigarette holder, an extra pair of stockings, and whatever other garments might be needed in an emergency. Women loved the beach and sun and hid no more.</p>	<p>Diamonds, a short strand of pearls, and exquisite jewelry—these were all permissible adornment on social occasions. Ladies carried small drawstring bags that invariably held a linen handkerchief, a small case with a bit of powder for the face, and a small purse for loose change. Ladies carried parasols to shield them from the rays of the sun, and they were demure and coquettish, twirling the parasol and flirting with the young men who would dearly sell their souls for just the glimpse of a finely shaped ankle.</p>
Conduct and Behavior	<p>These women were described as brash. They were brassy, saucy, and flirtatious. Women became very outspoken and advanced their own opinions quite loudly in public and in mixed company. They liked to kiss and pet. The automobile offered a place for heavy petting and kissing. Inhibitions melted away, and these women were far from being repressed females. These women smoked in public. Suddenly, it was no longer “unladylike” to light up a cigarette and smoke anywhere and everywhere a young woman chose to do so!</p>	<p>To show good breeding and elegance was important. It was equally important to be standoffish, quiet, and polite rather than vulgar or profane. Women were not encouraged to be forward; shyness was a valued characteristic. Women were not given the opportunity to have opinions and were seldom approached in mixed company to voice any thought or idea. It was customary after dinner for the ladies to leave the dining room for the parlor where they could gossip among themselves or chatter to their heart's delight. The men held forth in the dining room where “male” issues were the topic of conversation over good liquor and cigars.</p>