

Slang of the 1920's

The twenties were the first decade to emphasize youth culture over the older generations, and the flapper sub-culture had a tremendous influence on mainstream America; many new words and phrases were coined by these liberated women. Many of these are still used today!

Ab-so-lute-ly - affirmative

All Wet - describes an erroneous idea or individual, as in, "he's all wet."

And How - I strongly agree!

Applesauce- an expletive same as horsefeathers, As in "Ah applesauce!"

Attaboy - well done!; also Attagirl!

Baby - sweetheart. Also denotes something of high value or respect.

Balled Up - confused, messed up

Baloney - nonsense!

Bank's Closed - no kissing or making out - i.e. - "Sorry, Mac, the bank's closed."

Bearcat - a hot-blooded or fiery girl

Beat it - scam or get lost

Beat one's gums - idle chatter

Bee's Knees - An extraordinary person, thing, idea; the ultimate

Beef - a complaint or to complain

Beeswax - business, i.e. None of your beeswax."

Bell bottom - a sailor

Berries - That which is attractive or pleasing; similar to bee's knees, As in "It's the berries."

Bible Belt - Area in the South and Midwest where Fundamentalism flourishes

Big Cheese - The most important or influential person; boss. Same as big shot

Big six - a strong man; from auto advertising, for the new and powerful; six cylinder engines

Bimbo - a tough guy

Bird - general term for a man or woman, sometimes meaning "odd," i.e. "What a funny old bird."

Blind Date - going out with someone you do not know

Bluenose - An excessively puritanical person, a prude, Creator of "the Blue Nozzle Curse."

Bootleg - illegal liquor

Breezer - an convertible car

Bronx Cheer - A loud spluttering noise, used to indicate disapproval. Same as raspberry

Bull - (1) a policeman or law-enforcement officer including FBI (2) nonsense (3) to chat idly, to exaggerate

Bull Session - Male talkfest, gossip, stories of sexual exploits

Bum's rush - ejection by force from an establishment

Bump Off - To murder, To kill

Butt me - I'll take a cigarette

Caper - a criminal act or robbery

Carry a Torch - To have a crush on someone

Cash - a kiss

Cash or check? - Do you kiss now or later?

Cat's Meow - Something splendid or stylish; similar to bee's knees; The best or greatest, wonderful.

Cat's Pajamas - Same as cat's meow

Chassis - the female body

Cheaters - Eyeglasses

Check - kiss me later

Ciggy - cigarette

Clam - a dollar

Copacetic - Wonderful, fine, all right

Crush - An infatuation

Daddy - a young woman's boyfriend or lover, especially if he's rich

Dame - a female

Dapper - a Flapper's dad

Darb - An excellent person or thing (as in "the Darb" - a person with money who can be relied on to pay the check)

Dead soldier - an empty beer bottle

Deb - an debutant

Dick - a private investigator

Dogs - feet

Doll - an attractive woman

Dolled up - dressed up

Don't know from nothing - don't have any information

Don't take any wooden nickels - Don't do anything stupid

Double-cross - to cheat, stab in the back

Dough - money

Drugstore Cowboy - a guy that hangs around on a street corner trying to pick up girls

Dry up - shut up, get lost

Ducky - very good

Dumb Dora - a stupid female

Earful - enough

Edge - intoxication, a buzz. i.e. "I've got an edge."

Egg - a person who lives the big life

Fall Guy - Victim of a frame

Fire extinguisher - a chaperone

Fish -(1) a college freshman (2) a first timer in prison

Flat Tire - A dull witted, insipid, disappointing date. Same as pill, pickle, drag, rag, oilcan

Flivver - a Model T; after 1928, could mean any old broken down car

Flapper - A stylish, brash, hedonistic young woman with short skirts & shorter hair

Fly boy - a glamorous term for an aviator

Frame - To give false evidence , to set up someone

Gams - A woman's legs

Get a wiggle on - get a move on, get going

Giggle Water - An intoxicating beverage; alcohol

Gin Mill - An establishment where hard liquor is sold; bar

Glad rags - "going out on the town" clothes

Gold Digger - A woman who associates with or marries a man for his wealth

Goofy - in love

Hair of the Dog - a shot of alcohol

Handcuff - an engagement ring

Hard Boiled - a tough, strong guy

Hayburner - (1) a gas guzzling car (2) a horse one loses money on

Heebie-Jeebies - The jitters

High-Hat - To snub

Hit on all sixes - to perform 100 per cent; as "hitting on all six cylinders"

Hooch - Bootleg liquor

Hood - hoodlum

Hoofer - Dancer

Horsefeathers - an expletive ; same usage as applesauce

Hotsy - Totsy - Pleasing

It - Sex appeal

Iron - a motorcycle

Jack - money

Jake - OK, as in , "Everything is Jake."

Jalopy - Old car

Jane - any female

Java - coffee

Jitney - a car employed as a private bus. Fare was usually five cents; also called a "nickel"

Joe - coffee

John - a toilet

Joint - an establishment

Juice Joint - a speakeasy

Joint - A club, usually selling alcohol

Keen - Attractive or appealing

Kisser - Mouth

Left holding the bag - (1) to be cheated out of one's fair share (2) to be blamed for something

Level with me - be honest

Line - Insincere flattery

Live wire - a lively person

Middle Aisle - To marry

Mrs. Grundy - A priggish or extremely tight-laced person

Moll - A gangster's girl

Neck - Kissing with passion

Nifty - great, excellent

"Now you're on the trolley!" - Now you've got it, now you're right!

Nobody Home - Describes some one who is dumb

On the lam - fleeing from police

On the level - legitimate, honest

On the up and up - on the level

Orchid - an expensive item

Ossified - a drunk person

Owl - a person who's out late

Palooka (1) a below-average or average boxer (2) a social outsider

Pet - Same as neck, but more so

Piker - (1) a cheapskate (2) a coward

Pill - (1) a teacher (2) an unlikable person

Pinch - To arrest

Pipe down - stop talking

Pushover - A person easily convinced or seduced

Putting on the Ritz - after the Ritz hotel in Paris; doing something in high style

Rag-a-muffin - a dirty or disheveled individual

Razz- to make fun of

Real McCoy - The genuine article

Ritzy - Elegant (from the hotel)

Rubes - money or dollars

Sap - a fool

Says you - a reaction of disbelief

Scram - Ask someone to leave immediately

Sheba - A woman with sex appeal (from the movie Queen of Sheba) or (e.g. Clara Bow)

Sheik - A man with sex appeal (from the Valentino movies)

Shiv - a knife

Sinker - a doughnut

Speakeasy - An illicit bar selling bootleg liquor

Spifflicated - Drunk. The same as canned, corked, tanked, primed, scrooched, jazzed, zozzled, plastered, owled, embalmed, lit, potted, ossified or fried to the hat

Spiffy - An elegant appearance

Spoon - to neck, or at least talk of love

Struggle Buggy - the backseat of a car. A parent's worst nightmare

Stuck On - Having a crush on

Swanky - Ritzy

Swell - Wonderful. Also: a rich man

Take for a Ride - To drive off with someone in order to bump them off

Tin Pan Alley - the music industry in New York, located between 48th and 52nd street

Tomato - a female

Torpedo - A hired gun

Upchuck - To vomit when one has drunk too much

Wet Blanket - a solemn person, a killjoy

What's eating you? - What's wrong

Whoopee - To have a good time

You slay me - that's funny

Sources:

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