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Below you will find an alphabetical listing of slang words used in the "Jazz Age" (generally taken to mean the years of the Roaring Twenties and the Great Depression). The Jazz Age was the first modern era to emphasize youth culture over the tastes of the older generations; the flapper sub-culture had a tremendous influence on main stream America--many new words and phrases were coined by these liberated women. These are the most common words and phrases of the time, many of which you may be surprised to note are still very much in use today!

Some entries were the exclusive domain of students (or rather, those of student age; only a very small percentage of the population attended college) or flappers and have been indicated as such with *italicized* monikers. Also, the words that emerged in a particular year are noted appropriately.

Note: the majority of the entries were gleaned from a great slang dictionary called *Flappers 2 Rappers*, written by Tom Dalzell (Merriam-Webster, 1996). This is *the* resource for those interested in slang from any decade of the 20th century. The reader will find more Jazz Age slang, along with literally *hundreds* of other words and selected etymologies. Details can be found at the Merriam-Webster site [here](#).

Many entries have also been added from *The Writer's Guide to Everyday Life from Prohibition through World War II*, by Marc McCutcheon. This book is an indispensable guide to all those minutiae of life during one of the most story rich periods in history. A must have for those interested in the Twenties! Check it out (along with all the other books in the Writer's Guide series) [here](#).

“-“

-ski, -avous: these are two suffixes (derived from Russian and French, respectively) used in flapper parlance to “dress up” normal words. The suffix could be added to *any* word. There was only one hard and fast rule: if you responded to a question containing a suffix, you had to use the same part of speech somehow. Example: “*Would you like a drink-avous?*” “*No thanks, I’m on the wagon-avous.*” “*The sun-ski is so bright!*” “*Put on a hat-ski.*”

## A

ab-so-lute-ly: affirmative

Abe's Cabe: five-dollar bill

ace: one-dollar bill

all wet: incorrect

And how!: I strongly agree!

ankle: to walk, i.e.. “*Let's ankle!*”

apple sauce: flattery, nonsense, i.e.. “*Aw, applesauce!*”

Attaboy!: well done!; also, Attagirl!

## B

baby: sweetheart; also denotes something of high value or respect

baby grand: heavily built man

baby vamp: an attractive or popular female; *student*

balled up: confused, messed up

baloney: nonsense

Bank's closed.: no kissing or making out ie. “*Sorry, mac, bank's closed.*”

barrell house: illegal distillery

bearcat: a hot-blooded or fiery girl

beat it: scam, get lost

beat one's gums: idle chatter

bee's knee's: terrific; a fad expression. Dozens of “animal anatomy” variations existed: elephant's

eyebrows, gnat's whistle, eel's hips, etc.

beef: a complaint or to complain

beeswax: business; *student*

bell bottom: a sailor

belt: a drink of liquor  
bent: drunk  
berries: (1) perfect (2) money  
big cheese: important person  
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: drunk  
blotto (1930 at the latest): drunk, especially to an extreme  
blow: (1) a crazy party (2) to leave  
bohunk: a derogatory name for an Eastern European immigrant; out of use by 1930, except in certain anti-immigrant circles, like the KKK  
bootleg: illegal liquor  
breezer (1925): a convertible car  
brown: whiskey  
brown plaid: Scotch whiskey  
bubs: breasts  
bug-eyed Betty (1927): an unattractive girl; *student*  
bull: (1) a policeman or law-enforcement official, including FBI. (2) nonsense, bullshit (3) to chat idly, to exaggerate  
bump off: to kill  
bum's rush, the: ejection by force from an establishment  
bunny (1925): a term of endearment applied to the lost, confused, etc; often coupled with "poor little"  
bus: any old or worn out car  
busthead: homemade liquor  
bushwa: a euphemism for "bullshit"  
Butt me.: I'll take a cigarette

## C

cake-eater: a lady's man  
caper: a criminal act or robbery  
cat's meow: great, also "cat's pajamas" and "cat's whiskers"  
cash: a kiss  
Cash or check?: Do we kiss now or later?

cast a kitten/have kittens: to have a fit. Used in both humorous and serious situations. *i.e.* "Stop tickling me or I'll cast a kitten!"  
celestial: derogatory slang for Chinese or East Asians  
chassis (1930): the female body  
cheaters: eye glasses  
check: kiss me later  
chewing gum: double-speak, or ambiguous talk  
Chicago typewriter: Thompson submachine gun  
choice bit of calico: attractive female; *student*  
chopper: a Thompson Sub-Machine Gun, due to the damage its heavy .45 caliber rounds did to the human body  
chunk of lead: an unattractive female; *student*  
ciggy: cigarette  
clam: a dollar  
coffin varnish: bootleg liquor, often poisonous  
copacetic: excellent, all in order  
crasher: a person who attends a party uninvited  
crush: infatuation  
cuddler: one who likes to make out

## D

daddy: a young woman's boyfriend or lover, especially if he's rich  
daddy-o: a term of address; strictly an African-American term  
dame: a female; did not gain widespread use until the 1930's  
dapper: a Flapper's dad  
darb: a great person or thing, *i.e.* "That movie was darb."  
dead soldier: an empty beer bottle  
deb: a debutant  
dewdropper: a young man who sleeps all day and doesn't have a job  
dick: a private investigator; coined around 1900, the term finds major recognition in the 20s  
dinge: a derogatory term for an African-American; out of use by 1930  
dogs: feet  
doll: an attractive woman  
dolloed up: dressed up  
don't know from nothing: doesn't have any information

don't take any wooden nickels: don't do anything stupid  
dope: drugs, esp. cocaine or opium.  
doublecross: to cheat, stab in the back  
dough: money  
drugstore cowboy: a well-dressed man who loiters in public areas trying to pick up women  
drum: speakeasy  
dry up: shut up, get lost  
ducky: very good  
dumb Dora: an absolute idiot, a dumbbell, especially a woman; *flapper*  
dump: roadhouse

## E

earful: enough  
edge: intoxication, a buzz. *i.e. "I've got an edge."*  
egg: a person who lives the big life  
Ethel: an effeminate male.

## F

face stretcher: an old woman trying to look young  
fag: a cigarette; also, starting around 1920, a homosexual.  
fella: fellow. as common in its day as "man," "dude," or "guy" is today, *i.e. "That John sure is a swell fella."*  
fire extinguisher: a chaperone  
fish: (1) a college freshman (2) a first timer in prison  
flat tire: a bore  
flivver: a Model T; after 1928, could mean any broken down car  
floorflusher: an insatiable dancer  
flour lover: a girl with too much face powder  
fly boy: a glamorous term for an aviator  
For crying out loud!: same usage as today  
four-flusher: a person who feigns wealth while mooching off others  
fried: drunk  
futz: a euphemism for "fuck;" *i.e. "Don't futz around."*

## G

gams (1930): legs

gasper: cigarette

gatecrasher: see "crasher"

gay: happy or lively; no connection to homosexuality; see "fag"

Get Hot! Get Hot!: encouragement for a hot dancer doing his or her thing

get-up (1930): an outfit

get a wiggle on: get a move on, get going

get in a lather: get worked up, angry

giggle water: booze

gigolo: dancing partner

gimp: cripple; one who walks with a limp; *gangster Dion O'Bannion was called Gimpy due to his noticeable limp*

gin mill: a seller of hard liquor; a cheap speakeasy

glad rags: "going out on the town" clothes

go chase yourself: get lost, scram.

gold-digger (1925): a woman who pursues men for their money

goods, the: (1) the right material, or a person who has it (2) the facts, the truth, *i.e. "Make sure the cops don't get the goods on you."*

goof: (1) a stupid or bumbling person, (2) a boyfriend; *flapper*.

goofy: in love

grummy: depressed

grungy: envious

## H

hair of the dog (1925): a shot of alcohol

half seas over: drunk; also "half under"

handcuff: engagement ring

hard-boiled: a tough person, *i.e. "He sure is hard-boiled!"*

harp: an Irishman

hayburner: (1) a gas guzzling car (2) a horse one loses money on

heavy sugar (1929): a lot of money

heebie-jeebies (1926): "the shakes," named after a hit song

heeler: a poor dancer

high hat: a snob  
hip to the jive: cool, trendy  
hit on all sixes: to perform 100 per cent; as "hitting on all six cylinders;" perhaps a more common variation in these days of four cylinder engines was "hit on all fours;" also see "big six".  
hoary-eyed: drunk  
hooch: booze  
hood (late 20s): hoodlum  
hooley: bullshit, nonsense; very popular from 1925 to 1930, used somewhat thereafter  
hop: (1) opiate or marijuana (2) a teen party or dance  
hope chest: pack of cigarettes  
hopped up: under the influence of drugs  
horse linament: bootleg liquor  
Hot dawg!: Great!; also: "Hot socks!"  
hot sketch: a card or cut-up

## I

"I have to go see a man about a dog.": "I've got to leave now," often meaning to go buy whiskey  
icy mitt: rejection  
Indian hop: marijuana  
insured: engaged  
iron (1925): a motorcycle, among motorcycle enthusiasts  
iron one's shoelaces: to go to the restroom  
ish kabibble (1925): a retort meaning "I should care," from the name of a musician in the Kay Kayser Orchestra

## J

jack: money  
Jake: great, *i.e.* "Everything's Jake."  
Jalopy: a dumpy old car  
Jane: any female  
java: coffee  
jeepers creepers: "Jesus Christ!"  
jerk soda: to dispense soda from a tap; thus, "soda jerk"  
jigaboo: a derogatory term for an African-American

jitney: a car employed as a private bus; fare was usually five cents, ergo the alternate nickname of "nickel"

joe: coffee

Joe Brooks: a perfectly dressed person; *student*

john: a toilet

joint: establishment

jorum of skee: a drink of hard liquor

juice joint: a speakeasy

junk: opium

## K

kale: money

keen: appealing

kike: a derogatory term for a Jewish person

killjoy: a solemn person

knock up: to make pregnant

know one's onions: to know one's business or what one is talking about

## L

lay off: cut the crap

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

let George do it: a work evading phrase

level with me: be honest

limey: a British soldier or citizen; from World War I

line: a false story, as in "to feed one a line"

live wire: a lively person

lollapalooza (1930): a humdinger

lollygagger: (1) a young man who enjoys making out (2) an idle person

## M

M: morphine

manacle: wedding ring



mazuma: money  
Mick: a derogatory term for Irishmen  
milquetoast (1924): a very timid person; from the comic book character Casper Milquetoast, a hen-pecked male  
mind your potatoes: mind your own business  
mooch: to leave  
moonshine: homemade whiskey  
mop: a handkerchief  
Mrs. Grundy: a prude or kill-joy  
mulligan: Irish cop  
munitions: face powder

## N

neck: to kiss passionately; what would today be called "French kissing"  
necker: a girl who wraps her arms around her boyfriend's neck  
nifty: great, excellent  
noodle juice: tea  
nookie: sex  
"Not so good!": "I personally disapprove."  
"Now you're on the trolley!": "Now you've got it!".

## O

ofay: a commonly used Black expression for Whites  
off one's nuts: crazy  
"Oh yeah!": "I doubt it!"  
old boy: a male term of address, used in conversation with other males as a way to denote acceptance in a social environment; also: "old man" or "old fruit"  
Oliver Twist: a skilled dancer  
on a toot: a drinking binge  
on the lam: fleeing from police  
on the level: legitimate, honest  
on the up and up: on the level  
orchid: an expensive item  
ossified: drunk

owl: a person who's out late

## P

palooka: (1) a below-average or average boxer (2) a social outsider; from the comic strip character Joe Palooka, who came from humble ethnic roots

panic: to produce a big reaction from one's audience

panther piss/sweat (1925): homemade whiskey

pen yen: opium

percolate: (1) to boil over (2) as of 1925, to run smoothly; "perk"

pet: like necking (see above), only moreso; making out

petting pantry: movie theater

petting party: one or more couples making out in a room or auto

phonus balonus: nonsense

piffle: baloney

piker: (1) a cheapskate (2) a coward

pill: (1) a teacher (2) an unlikable person (3) cigarette

pinch: to arrest

pinched: to be arrested

pinko: liberal

pipe down: stop talking

prom-trotter: a student who attends all school social functions

pos-i-lute-ly: affirmative, also "pos-i-tive-ly"

pull a Daniel Boone: to vomit

punch the bag: small talk

putting on the ritz: after the Ritz Hotel in Paris (and its namesake Caesar Ritz); doing something in high style; also, "ritzy"

## Q

quiff: a slut or cheap prostitute

## R

rag-a-muffin: a dirty or disheveled individual

rain pitchforks: a downpour  
razz: to make fun of  
Real McCoy: a genuine item  
regular: normal, typical, average  
Reuben: an unsophisticated country bumpkin; also, "rube"  
Rhartz!: "How disappointing!" *flapper*  
rotgut: bootleg liquor  
rub: a student dance party  
rubes: money or dollars  
rummy: a drunken bum

## S

sap: a fool, an idiot; very common term in the 20s  
sawbuck: ten-dollar bill  
says you: a reaction of disbelief  
scratch: money  
screaming meemies: the shakes  
screw: get lost, get out, etc.; occasionally, in pre 1930 talkies (such as *The Broadway Melody*)  
screw is used to tell a character to leave: one film features the line "Go on, go on--screw!"  
screwy: crazy; "You're screwy!"  
sheba: one's girlfriend  
sheik: one's boyfriend  
shine box: a bar or club for black patrons  
shiv: a knife  
simolean: a dollar  
sinker: a doughnut  
sitting pretty: in a prime position  
skee: Scotch whiskey  
skirt: an attractive female  
smarty: a cute flapper  
smoke-eater: a smoker  
smudger: a close dancer  
snort: a drink of liquor  
sockdollager: an action having a great impact  
so's your old man: a reply of irritation

spade: yet another derogatory term for an African-American  
speakeasy: a bar selling illegal liquor  
spill: to talk  
splifficated: drunk  
spoon: to neck, or at least talk of love  
static: (1) empty talk (2) conflicting opinion  
stilts: legs  
strike-me-dead: bootleg liquor  
struggle: modern dance  
stuck on: in love; *student*.  
sugar daddy: older boyfriend who showers girlfriend with gifts in exchange for sex  
swanky: (1) good (2) elegant  
swell: (1) good (2) a high class person

## T

take someone for a ride: to take someone to a deserted location and murder them  
tasty: appealing  
tea: marijuana  
teenager: not a common term until 1930; before then, the term was "young adults."  
tell it to Sweeney: tell it to someone who'll believe it  
three-letter man: homosexual  
tight: attractive  
Tin Pan Alley: the center of the music industry in New York City, located between 48th and 52nd Streets  
tomato: a "ripe" female  
torpedo: a hired thug or hitman  
trip for biscuits: wild goose chase

## U

unreal: special  
upchuck: to vomit  
upstage: snobby

## V

vamp: (1) a seducer of men, an aggressive flirt (2) to seduce  
voot: money

## W

water-proof: a face that doesn't require make-up  
wet blanket: see Killjoy  
white lightning: bootleg liquor  
wife: dorm roommate; *student*.  
"What's eating you?": "What's wrong?"  
whoopee: wild fun  
Woof! Woof!: ridicule

## X

## Y

"You slay me!": "That's funny!"

## Z

zozzled: drunk

### **Sources:**

Dalzel, Tom. *Flappers 2 Rappers: American Youth Slang*. (Springfield: Merriam-Webster, 1996). Entries used on this page are duplicated with permission.

McCutcheon, Marc. *The Writer's Guide to Everyday Life from Prohibition through Word War II*. (Cincinnati: Writer's Digest Books, 1995). Permission pending.

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