



Slang of the 1920s

A

1. **ab-so-lute-ly:** affirmative, yes
2. **absent treatment:** dancing with a timid partner
3. **air tight:** very attractive
4. **Airedale:** an unattractive man
5. **alarm clock:** a chaperone
6. **all wet:** incorrect
7. **And how!:** I strongly agree!
8. **ankle:** to walk, i.e.. "Let's ankle!"
9. **applesauce:** flattery, nonsense, i.e.. "Aw, applesauce!"
10. **Attaboy!:** well done!; also, Attagirl!

B

11. **baby:** sweetheart. Also denotes something of high value or respect.
12. **baby grand:** heavily built man
13. **baby vamp:** an attractive or popular female, student.
14. **balled up:** confused, messed up.
15. **baloney:** Nonsense!
16. **banana oil!:** I doubt that!
17. **Bank's closed:** no kissing or making out i.e. "Sorry, mac, bank's closed."
18. **bearcat:** a fiery girl
19. **beat it:** scam, get lost.
20. **beat one's gums:** idle chatter
21. **bee's knee's:** terrific; a fad expression. Dozens of "animal anatomy" variations existed such as: elephant's eyebrows, gnat's whistle, eel's hips, etc.
22. **beef:** a complaint or to complain.
23. **beeswax:** business, i.e. "None of your beeswax."
24. **bell bottom:** a sailor
25. **bent:** drunk
26. **berries:** (1) perfect (2) money
27. **Bible Belt:** Area in the South and Midwest where Fundamentalism flourishes
28. **big cheese:** important person
29. **big six:** a strong man; from auto advertising, for the new and powerful six cylinder engines.
30. **big timer:** A charming and romantic man

31. **billboard:** a flashy man or woman
32. **bimbo:** a tough guy
33. **bird:** general term for a man or woman, sometimes meaning "odd," i.e. "What a funny old bird."
34. **Blind Date:** going out with someone you do not know
35. **blooey:** the condition when one has gone to pieces
36. **Bluenose:** An excessively puritanical person, a prude, Creator of "the Blue Nozzle Curse."
37. **blotto:** drunk, especially to an extreme
38. **blow:** (1) a crazy party (2) to leave
39. **blue serge:** a sweetheart
40. **bootleg:** illegal liquor
41. **breezer:** a convertible car
42. **Bronx Cheer:** A loud spluttering noise, used to indicate disapproval. Same as raspberry
43. **bug-eyed Betty:** an unattractive girl, student.
44. **bull:** (1) a policeman or law-enforcement official, including FBI. (2) nonsense (3) to chat idly, to exaggerate
45. **bump off:** to murder, to kill
46. **bum's rush, the:** ejection by force from an establishment
47. **bunk:** nonsense
48. **bunny:** a term of endearment applied to the lost, confused, etc. Often coupled with "poor little."
49. **bus:** any old or worn out car.
50. **Butt me:** I'll take a cigarette.

C

51. **cake-eater:** a lady's man
52. **canceled stamp:** A shy girl at a dance or party
53. **caper:** a criminal act or robbery.
54. **Carry a Torch:** To have a crush on someone
55. **cash:** a kiss
56. **Cash or check?:** Do we kiss now or later?
57. **cast a kitten:** to have a fit. Used in both humorous and serious situations. i.e. "Stop tickling me or I'll cast a kitten!" Also, "have kittens."
58. **cat's meow:** great, also "cat's pajamas" and "cat's whiskers"
59. **Cat's Pajamas:** Same as cat's meow
60. **Charlie:** a man with a mustache
61. **chassis:** the female body
62. **cheaters:** eye glasses
63. **check:** Kiss me later.
64. **chewing gum:** double-speak, or ambiguous talk.
65. **chin music:** gossip
66. **choice bit of calico:** attractive female, student.
67. **chopper:** a Thompson Sub-Machine Gun, due to the damage its heavy .45 caliber rounds did to the human body.



- 68. **chunk of lead:** an unattractive female, student.
- 69. **ciggy:** cigarette
- 70. **clam:** a dollar
- 71. **coffin varnish:** bootleg liquor, often poisonous.
- 72. **copacetic:** excellent
- 73. **crasher:** a person who attends a party uninvited
- 74. **crush:** infatuation
- 75. **cuddler:** one who likes to make out

D

- 76. **Daddy:** a young woman's boyfriend, especially if he's rich
- 77. **daddy-o:** a term of address
- 78. **dame:** a female. Did not gain widespread use until the 1930's.
- 79. **dapper:** a Flapper's dad
- 80. **darb:** a great person or thing. "That movie was darb."
- 81. **dead soldier:** an empty beer bottle.
- 82. **deb:** a debutant.
- 83. **declaration of independence:** a divorce
- 84. **dewdropper:** a young man who sleeps all day and doesn't have a job
- 85. **dick:** a private investigator. Coined around 1900, the term finds major recognition in the 20's.
- 86. **dimbox:** a taxi
- 87. **dimbox jaunt:** a taxi ride
- 88. **dogs:** feet
- 89. **doll:** an attractive woman.
- 90. **dolled up:** dressed up
- 91. **don't know from nothing:** doesn't have any information
- 92. **don't take any wooden nickels:** don't do anything stupid.
- 93. **dope:** drugs, esp. cocaine or opium.
- 94. **doublecross:** to cheat, stab in the back.
- 95. **dough:** money
- 96. **drugstore cowboy:** A well-dressed man who loiters in public areas trying to pick up women.
- 97. **dry up:** shut up, get lost
- 98. **ducky:** very good
- 99. **dud up:** to dress up
- 100. **dumb Dora:** an absolute idiot, a dumbbell, especially a woman; flapper.

E

- 101. **earful:** enough
- 102. **edge:** intoxication, a buzz. i.e. "I've got an edge."
- 103. **Edisoned:** questioned
- 104. **egg:** a person who lives the big life

105. **embalmer:** a bootlegger

F

106. **face stretcher:** an old woman trying to look young



107. **fag:** a cigarette.

108. **Father Time:** any man over 30

109. **fella:** fellow. As common in its day as "man," "dude," or "guy" is today. "That John sure is a swell fella."

110. **fire extinguisher:** a chaperone

111. **fish:** (1) a college freshman (2) a first timer in prison

112. **flapper:** the modern woman of the 1920s.

113. **flat tire:** a bore

114. **flivver:** a Ford Model T; after 1928, also could mean any broken down car.

115. **floorflusher:** an insatiable dancer

116. **flour lover:** a girl with too much face powder

117. **fly boy:** a glamorous term for an aviator

118. **For crying out loud!:** same usage as today

119. **four-flusher:** a person who feigns wealth while mooching off others.

120. **Frame:** To give false evidence, to set up someone

121. **fried:** drunk

G

122. **gams:** legs

123. **gatecrasher:** see "crasher"

124. **gay:** happy or lively

125. **get-up:** an outfit.

126. **get a wiggle on:** get a move on, get going

127. **get in a lather:** get worked up, angry

128. **giggle water:** booze

129. **gigolo:** dancing partner

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

131. **gin mill:** a seller of hard liquor; a cheap speakeasy

132. **glad rags:** "going out on the town" clothes

133. **go chase yourself:** get lost, scam.



134. **gold-digger:** a woman who pursues men for their money.
 135. **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."
 136. **goof:** (1) a stupid or bumbling person, (2) a boyfriend, flapper.
 137. **goofy:** in love
 138. **greenland:** a park
 139. **grubber:** one who borrows cigarettes
 140. **grummy:** depressed
 141. **grungy:** envious

H

142. **hair of the dog:** a shot of alcohol.
 143. **half seas over:** drunk, also "half under."
 144. **handcuff:** engagement ring
 145. **hard-boiled:** tough, as in, a tough guy, ie: "he sure is hard-boiled!"
 146. **harp:** an Irishman
 147. **hayburner:** (1) a gas guzzling car (2) a horse one loses money on
 148. **heavy sugar:** a lot of money
 149. **heebie-jeebies:** "the shakes," named after a hit song.
 150. **heeler:** a poor dancer
 151. **hen coup:** a beauty parlor
 152. **high hat:** a snob, haughty, unapproachable
 153. **hike:** a walk.
 154. **hip to the jive:** cool, trendy
 155. **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".
 See "big six".
 156. **hokum:** nonsense
 157. **hooch:** booze
 158. **hood:** hoodlum
 159. **hooey:** nonsense.
 160. **hoof:** to walk
 161. **Hoofer:** Dancer or chorus girl
 162. **hope chest:** pack of cigarettes
 163. **hopped up:** under the influence of drugs
 164. **hopper:** a dancer
 165. **horn in:** to get into a dance without an invitation
 166. **Hot dawg!:** Great!; also: "Hot socks!" Rarely spelled as shown outside of flapper
 circles until popularized by 1940s comic strips.
 167. **hot sketch:** a card or cut-up
 168. **Hotsy – Totsy:** Pleasing

I



169. **"I have to go see a man about a dog.":** "I've got to leave now," often meaning to go buy whiskey.
170. **icy mitt:** rejection
171. **insured:** engaged
172. **iron:** a motorcycle, among motorcycle enthusiasts
173. **iron one's shoelaces:** to go to the restroom
174. **ish kabibble:** a retort meaning "I should care."
175. **It:** Sex appeal. Actress Clara Bow was the 'it' girl.

J

176. **jack:** money
177. **Jake:** great, ie. "Everything's Jake."
178. **Jalopy:** a dumpy old car
179. **Jane:** any female
180. **java:** coffee
181. **jeepers creepers:** exclamation
182. **jerk soda:** to dispense soda from a tap; thus, "soda jerk"
183. **jitney:** a car employed as a private bus. Fare was usually five-cents; also called a "nickel."
184. **joe:** coffee
185. **Joe Brooks:** a perfectly dressed person; student.
186. **john:** a toilet
187. **joint:** establishment or club, usually selling alcohol
188. **juice joint:** a speakeasy

K

189. **kale:** money
190. **keen:** appealing
191. **killjoy:** a solemn person
192. **kisser:** mouth
193. **kneeduster:** skirt
194. **know one's onions:** to know one's business or what one is talking about

L

195. **lalapazaza:** a good sport
196. **lay off:** cut the nonsense
197. **left holding the bag:** (1) to be cheated out of one's fair share (2) to be blamed for something

198. **let George do it:** a work evading phrase
 199. **level with me:** be honest
 200. **limey:** a British soldier or citizen, from World War I
 201. **line:** a false story, as in "to feed one a line."
 202. **lip stick:** a cigarette
 203. **live wire:** a lively person
 204. **lollygagger:** an idle person

M

205. **mad money:** carfare home to be used by a flapper if she has a fight with her date.



218. **munitions:** face powder

206. **manacle:** wedding ring
 207. **mazuma:** money
 208. **meringue:** personality
 209. **Mick:** a derogatory term for Irishmen
 210. **Middle Aisle:** To marry
 211. **milquetoast:** a very timid person; from the comic book character Casper Milquetoast, a hen-pecked male.
 212. **mind your potatoes:** mind your own business.
 213. **Moll:** A gangster's girl
 214. **mooch:** to leave
 215. **moonshine:** homemade whiskey
 216. **mop:** a handkerchief
 217. **Mrs. Grundy:** A priggish or extremely tight-laced person

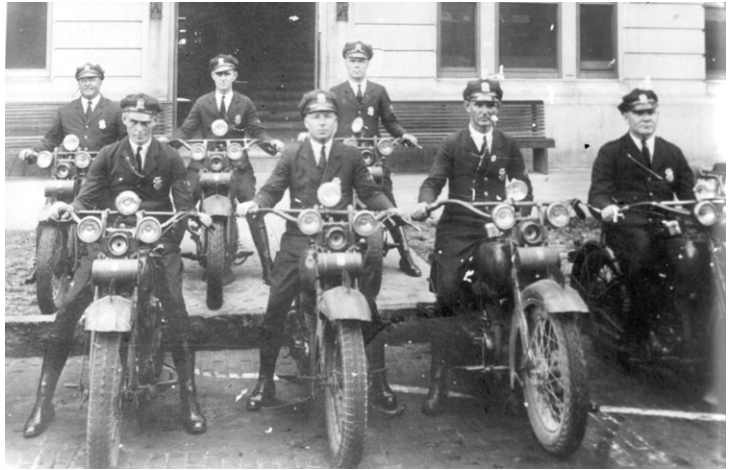
N

219. **neck:** to kiss passionately
 220. **necker:** a girl who wraps her arms around her boyfriend's neck.
 221. **Nerts!:** I am amazed!
 222. **nifty:** great, excellent
 223. **Nobody Home:** Describes some one who is dumb
 224. **noodle juice:** tea
 225. **Not so good!:** I personally disapprove.
 226. **"Now you're on the trolley!":** Now you've got it, now you're right.

O

227. **Oh yeah!:** I doubt it!
 228. **oil burner:** a person who chews gum

229. **old boy:** a male term of address, used in conversation with other males. Denoted acceptance in a social environment. Also "old man" "old fruit." "How's everything old boy?"
230. **Oliver Twist:** a skilled dancer
231. **on a toot:** a drinking binge
232. **on the lam:** fleeing from police
233. **on the level:** legitimate, honest
234. **on the up and up:** on the level
235. **orchid:** an expensive item
236. **ossified:** drunk
237. **owl:** a person who's out late



P

238. **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
239. **panic:** to produce a big reaction from one's audience
240. **panther sweat:** whiskey
241. **peppy:** vigorous, energetic
242. **percolate:** (1) to boil over (2) As of 1925, to run smoothly; "perk"
243. **pet:** necking
244. **petting pantry:** movie theater
245. **petting party:** one or more couples making out in a room or auto
246. **piffle:** baloney
247. **piker:** (1) a cheapskate (2) a coward
248. **pill:** (1) a teacher (2) an unlikable person
249. **pinch:** to arrest. Pinched: to be arrested.
250. **pinko:** liberal
251. **pipe down:** stop talking
252. **prom-trotter:** a student who attends all school social functions
253. **pos-i-lute-ly:** affirmative, also "pos-i-tive-ly"
254. **prune pit:** anything that is old-fashioned
255. **punch the bag:** small talk
256. **Pushover:** A person easily convinced
257. **putting on the ritz:** after the Ritz Hotel in Paris (and its namesake Caesar Ritz); doing something in high style. Also "ritzzy."

Q

258. **quilt:** a drink that warms one up

R

259. **rag-a-muffin:** a dirty or disheveled individual
260. **rain pitchforks:** a downpour
261. **razz:** to make fun of
262. **Real McCoy:** a genuine item
263. **regular:** normal, typical, average; "Regular fella."
264. **Reuben:** an unsophisticated country bumpkin. Also "rube"
265. **Rhaz!:** How disappointing!
266. **Ritzy:** Elegant (from the hotel)
267. **Rock of Ages:** a woman over the age of 30.
268. **rub:** a student dance party
269. **rubes:** money or dollars
270. **rummy:** a drunken bum

S

271. **sap:** a fool, an idiot. Very common term in the 20s.
272. **says you:** a reaction of disbelief
273. **Scram:** Ask someone to leave immediately
274. **scratch:** money
275. **screaming meemies:** the shakes
276. **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.
277. **screwy:** crazy; "You're screwy!"
278. **sheba:** one's girlfriend
279. **sheik:** one's boyfriend
280. **shiv:** a knife
281. **simolean:** a dollar
282. **sinker:** a doughnut
283. **sitting pretty:** in a prime position
284. **skirt:** an attractive female
285. **smarty:** a cute flapper
286. **smoke-eater:** a smoker
287. **smudger:** a close dancer
288. **snake charmer:** a woman involved in bootlegging
289. **sockdollager:** an action having a great impact



290. **so's your old man:** a reply of irritation
 291. **speakeasy:** a bar selling illegal liquor
 292. **Spiffy:** An elegant appearance
 293. **spill:** to talk
 294. **splifficated:** drunk
 295. **spoon:** to neck, or at least talk of love
 296. **squirrel:** to hide
 297. **static:** (1) empty talk (2) conflicting opinion
 298. **stilts:** legs
 299. **streeted:** thrown out of a party
 300. **struggle:** modern dance
 301. **Struggle Buggy:** the backseat of a car.
 302. **stuck on:** having a crush on; in love.
 303. **stutter bus:** a truck
 304. **sugar daddy:** older boyfriend who showers girlfriend with gifts
 305. **swanky:** (1) good (2) elegant
 306. **swell:** (1) good (2) a high class person

T

307. **take someone for a ride:** to take someone to a deserted location and murder them.
 308. **tasty:** appealing
 309. **teenager:** not a common term until 1930; before then, the term was "young adults."
 310. **ten cent box:** a taxi cab
 311. **tell it to Sweeney:** tell it to someone who'll believe it.
 312. **tight:** attractive
 313. **Tin Pan Alley:** the music industry in New York, located between 48th and 52nd Streets
 314. **tomato:** a female
 315. **torpedo:** a hired thug or hitman



U

316. **unreal:** special
 317. **upchuck:** to vomit
 318. **upstage:** snobby

V

319. **vamp:** a seducer of men, an aggressive flirt
320. **voot:** money

W

321. **water-proof:** a face that doesn't require make-up
322. **weasel:** a young man who steals a girl from her boyfriend
323. **wet blanket:** see Killjoy
324. **wife:** dorm roommate, student.
325. **What's eating you?:** What's wrong?
326. **whoopee:** wild fun
327. **windsucker:** a braggart
328. **Woof! Woof!:** ridicule
329. **wurp:** a killjoy

X

Y

330. **You slay me!:** That's funny!

Z

331. **zozzled:** drunk



Sources:

<http://home.earthlink.net/~dlarkins/slang-pg.htm>;

<http://local.aaca.org/bntc/slang/slang.htm>;

Flappers 2 Rappers, American Youth Slang, by Tom Dalzell.