

The Drowsy Chaperone

Screwly Slang from the Roaring Twenties

Slang did not become an important element of American speech until the 1920's. The zany words and phrases of the era created silly images, were said with humorous sarcasm, and drove the older generations mad! Many of the terms coined during the Jazz Age are still used today. Check out just some of the 1920's screwly slang below.

A

all wet: wrong, mistaken

applesauce: sweet talk, gibberish, i.e. "Aw, applesauce!"

Attaboy!: Good going! (also, Attagirl!)

B

baby: darling, sweetie

balled up: puzzled, bewildered

beat it: get away, leave

bee's knees: great, terrific, wonderful

beef: complaint or grievance

big cheese: very important person

bird: term for a man or woman

blow: to leave

bootleg: illegal liquor

bull: 1) any law enforcement official; 2) drivel, hot air

C

cat's meow: excellent, terrific

cheaters: eye glasses

ciggy: cigarette

clam: a dollar

copacetic: great, unflappable, just dandy

crush: an infatuation

D

daddy: a young woman's beau, especially if he's rich

dame: woman

dapper: a flapper's dad; handsome

dick: private investigator

dogs: feet

doll: a good-looking woman

dolled up: dressed to the nines

dope: drugs

doublecross: to stab in the back, to betray

dough: money
dry: shut-up
ducky: great, wonderful

E

earful: enough, sufficient
edge: intoxication, a buzz
egg: a person who lives large

F

fag: cigarette
fella: man
fish: 1) college freshman; 2) first-timer in prison
fly boy: a romanticized term for a pilot
frame: to give false evidence, to set up
fried: drunk

G

gams: a woman's legs
gay: happy, joyful (no homosexual connotation)
get-up: an outfit
get in a lather: to get upset, worked up
gold-digger: a woman who's after a man for his money
goofy: in love

H

hair of the dog: a shot of alcohol
handcuff: a wedding ring
heebie-jeebies: the creeps, the shakes (from a popular song)
high hat: snob
hooch: bootleg liquor
hood: ruffian, a thug
hotsy-totsy: pleasing
Hot dawg!: Great! Wonderful!

I

icy mitt: rejection, dismissal
insured: engaged
ish kabibble: an angry reply, i.e. "Like I care!"
It: sex appeal

J

jalopy: an old car
java: coffee
joint: club, bar
john: toilet
juice joint: a speakeasy

K

keen: pleasing, appealing
killjoy: spoilsport
kisser: mouth
knocked up: to become pregnant

L

lay off: cut it out, leave me alone

level with me: be straightforward, be truthful
line: insincere flattery
live wire: an energetic person

M

moonshine: homemade whiskey
moll: a mobster's girlfriend
mop: handkerchief

N

neck: to kiss passionately
nifty: superb, tremendous
nookie: sex

O

old boy: term of address or greeting, i.e. "How are things, old boy?"
on the lam: to hide from the police
on the up and up: honest, trustworthy
ossified: drunk person

P

pet: to make out
pill: an unpleasant person
piker: a coward
pinched: to be arrested
pushover: easy prey, sucker
putting on the Ritz: chic, in high style

R

rag-a-muffin: an unkempt person
razz: to tease
Real McCoy: the real deal, authentic
ritzzy: elegant
rubes: money
rummy: a drunk

S

sap: a dim-witted person
screwy: crazy
shiv: knife
skirt: a pretty woman
speakeasy: a bar which sells bootlegged liquor
spill: to tell all
stuck on: have a crush on
swanky: posh, classy
swell: super, fantastic

T

tasty: likable, enjoyable
tight: eye-catching, appealing
tomato: a female
torpedo: a hired gun

U

upchuck: to throw up
upstage: to show someone up

V

vamp: seducer, flirt

W

wet blanket: spoilsport

What's eating you?: What's the matter?

whoopie: to have fun

Y

You slay me!: You're so funny! That was hilarious!