



## The Roaring 1920s featuring Josephine Baker, George Gershwin, and Harry Pace

### OVERVIEW

#### ESSENTIAL QUESTION

How did the economic and political policies of the 1920s affect American businesspeople, cultural figures, politicians, and activists?

#### OVERVIEW

*In this lesson, students examine how the political and economic policies of the 1920s affected American businesspeople, politicians and activists, and cultural figures such as musicians, dancers, and actors. By listening to a political speech, students investigate President Warren G. Harding's "Return to Normalcy" presidential campaign, and consider what constitutes a "normal" versus an "abnormal" era for a country.*

*They then pursue a role-playing activity to discover how important figures lived through the 1920s, to further determine whether the 1920s constituted a "normal" era.*



Krazy Kat. , 1921. Photograph. <https://www.loc.gov/item/2016831001/>.

In November 1920, U.S. Senator Warren G. Harding of Ohio won the presidential election by a large margin. Harding's presidential campaign was framed around a "return to normalcy," in which he promised a country guided by "not heroics, but healing; not nostrums, but normalcy; not revolution, but restoration; not agitation, but adjustment." Harding's call for normalcy clearly resonated with the majority of the American people, who were reeling after World War I and the 1918-1920 flu pandemic.

Whether Harding delivered the "normalcy" he promised as President is up for debate. Harding's economic policy was guided by industry interests. After a substantial loan from the Mellon Bank, he named Pittsburgh business magnate Andrew Mellon the Secretary of the Treasury. With Mellon and other industry leaders as a guide, taxes were cut, tariffs were raised, and businesses were deregulated with the state goal of strengthening the economy. In the process, the Harding Administration became considered one of the most historically corrupt administrations of the 20th century. This corruption was perhaps best exemplified by the Teapot Dome Scandal, in which U.S. Secretary of the Interior Albert Fall was caught leasing federal land to oil companies.

In many ways, corruption and underhanded dealings were part of the culture of the 1920s, perhaps best exemplified by the country's response to prohibition. In 1919, the 18th Amendment was passed, which outlawed the consumption of alcohol throughout the United States. Shortly

later, the amendment's primary means of enforcement - the National Prohibition Act or Volstead Act - was passed. The result was perhaps not what those in favor of prohibition wished for: alcohol consumption continued under the radar, and helped build the fortunes for people on both sides of the law.

Vice-President Calvin Coolidge assumed the presidency in April 1923, following Harding's untimely death, and continued industry-first policies. President Coolidge was arguably best known as being "actively inactive" when it came to Federal government management and oversight. Additionally, in anticipation of the Red Scare that defined much of the 1950s, a fear of "Bolshevism" in the 1920s led to government crackdowns on political activists. This fear reached its peak with the trial and subsequent execution of Nicola Sacco and Bartolomeo Vanzetti in 1927, two Italian immigrants and anarchists put to death for a crime evidence suggested they didn't commit.

At the same time, for many the 1920s were an era of growth in commerce and culture. New technologies and manufacturing techniques led to a boom in consumer products. Most famously, Henry Ford's Model T car and the assembly line method that built it transformed the automobile from a luxury only available to the rich to a standard for almost every American. At one point, it might have been argued that Harding's policies enfranchised Americans of all types.

Thanks to the activism of suffragists like Carrie Chapman Catt and Mary Burnett Talbert, the decade began with the newly established right for women to vote, due to the ratification of the 19th Amendment to the U.S. Constitution. The 1920s didn't just see the rise of people like Henry Ford, but also Harry Pace, the founder of the first Black-owned major record company, Black Swan Records, and Black Oklahoma real estate magnate Ottawa W. Gurley. The Native American Osage Tribe, also in Oklahoma, became wealthy due to oil rights. Additionally, the increasing popularity of the phonograph and motion pictures brought stardom to not just people like Babe Ruth and Irving Berlin, but also entertainers such as Anna May Wong, Josephine Baker, and Dolores del Río.

Ultimately, whether the Harding Administration successfully made the 1920s into an era of "normalcy" might only be answered by the question, "normal for who?" While the era did see a rise in a diverse group of business owners and entertainers, it also saw a rise in the Klu Klux Klan and racist violence. Indeed, Ottawa Gurley's fortune collapsed and a white mob burned the "Black Wall Street" that he helped create; Harry Pace's Black Swan Records was forced out of the industry by larger recording companies; the wealth accumulated by the Osage Tribe was disrupted by racist legislation and a string of brutal murders. And while Anna May Wong, Josephine Baker, and Dolores del Río all achieved unparalleled stardom as women of color, each decided to leave the United States and pursue their careers elsewhere, as they grew tired of being constantly typecast by Hollywood.

## OBJECTIVES

Upon completion of this lesson, students will:

### 1. KNOW (KNOWLEDGE):

- That Warren G. Harding was elected president in the 1920s largely by promising Americans a “return to normalcy”
- That the Harding and subsequent Coolidge administrations were defined by “pro-business” economic policies including lowered taxes, de-regulation, and higher tariffs
- The biographies of the following figures in 1920s society: Josephine Baker, Carrie Chapman Catt, Calvin Coolidge, Dolores del Río, Albert Bacon Fall, Henry Ford, George Gershwin, Ottawa W. Gurley, Mollie Kyle, Andrew Mellon, Harry Pace, Babe Ruth, Nicola Sacco, Mary Burnett Talbert, and Anna May Wong

### 2. MASTERY OBJECTIVE:

- Students will be able to assess the impacts of economic and political policies in the 1920s on U.S. society by investigating the biographies of important figures at the time in a role playing activity.

## ACTIVITIES

### PREPARATION

1. Create a T-chart on the board, with one column reading, “Normal Times,” and another column reading “Abnormal Times.”
2. (Optional) Arrange the room to resemble a salon or restaurant from the 1920s. This could be done by arranging the chairs and tables in the room, simple decorations, or playing a playlist of 1920s music in the background.

### MOTIVATIONAL ACTIVITY

1. Inform students that they will begin the lesson by examining what it means for a country to be existing in “normal times” and “abnormal times.” Ask students:
  - How might you define the terms “normal” and “abnormal” in your own words?
  - What might a country look like if it were experiencing “normal times”? What would a country’s economy, politics, foreign affairs, and civil society look like during normal times?
  - What might a country look like if it were experiencing “abnormal times”? What would a country’s economy, politics, foreign affairs, and civil society look like during abnormal times?

2. Write student suggestions on the T-chart, and leave their responses up for the rest of the lesson.

## PROCEDURE

1. Inform students that in class they will be exploring the 1920s. To begin their exploration, they will be examining a speech given by U.S. Senator Warren G. Harding, whose later presidency helped define the era.
2. Distribute **Handout - Warren G. Harding's "Readjustment" Speech** (Teacher's Guide). Inform students that during and after listening to the speech, they will summarize in their own words what Harding was trying to say in the right hand column of the handout. Play the above recording "Readjustment" from the Library of Congress. Allow time for students to complete their summaries after examining Harding's speech.
  - citizenship seeks what it may do for the government and country, rather than what the country may do for individuals"?
    - What might Harding mean when he states that "all human ills are not curable by legislation"?
    - What sort of policies might have Harding enacted to align to the message of the speech?
    - Do you find the speech convincing? Who might Harding be appealing to in this speech, and what evidence can you find in the speech that supports your argument?
3. Divide students into groups, and have each student share how they summarized each portion of the speech. Then, allow each group time to craft a collective summary of each paragraph. Then ask each group how they summarized each of the five paragraphs in the speech.
4. Inform students that Harding delivered this speech before he became president. Ask students:
  - What is the "Cataclysmic War" Harding refers to in paragraph 1? (*World War I*)
  - Why might Harding be calling for "healing" and "normalcy" in this speech?
  - What might Harding mean when he states he wants to build a "popular government under which
5. Inform students that part of Harding's project for "return to normalcy" was to boost the economy, which he felt could be done by creating policies that benefit American businesses. Distribute to students or student groups **Handout - Legislation under Harding** (Teacher's Guide). Ask students to complete the handout and share their answers with the class.
6. Inform students that for the remainder of class they will be investigating the effects of Harding's "Return to Normalcy" agenda by doing a Café Conversation Activity. Display **Image 1, Café Conversation Activity** and **Handout - Invitee List** to each student. Additionally, distribute around the room pages from **Document Set - Headlines from the 1920s** and encourage students to look at the news articles as a way to spur conversation while role-playing the party. Finally, distribute **Handout - Invitee Profiles** and assign or let students choose which



figure they would like to role play (*teachers can either distribute the entire document digitally, or distribute individual pages to students.*)

7. After the completion of the cafe conversation, ask students to share the story of one interesting person they met. Continuing sharing until all or the majority of figures on **Handout-Invitee Profiles** have been covered. Encourage students to take notes on the handout for figures they didn't have the chance to speak to during the Café Conversation.

## SUMMARY ACTIVITY

1. Return to the T-chart students created at the beginning of the class. Ask students:
  - Based on what you learned during the Café Conversation activity, would you say the 1920s were a “return to normalcy” as Harding declared? Use evidence to support your answer.
  - Based on your conversations, what type of person prospered in the 1920s, and who met with challenges?

## STANDARDS

### COLLEGE, CAREER, AND CIVIC LIFE (C3) SOCIAL STUDIES STANDARDS

#### *History*

D2.His.3.9-12. Use questions generated about individuals and groups to assess how the significance of their actions changes over time and is shaped by the historical context.

D2.His.16.9-12. Integrate evidence from multiple relevant historical sources and interpretations into a reasoned argument about the past.

### CALIFORNIA HISTORY—SOCIAL SCIENCE CONTENT STANDARDS

*11.5 Students analyze the major political, social, economic, technological, and cultural developments of the 1920s.*

1. Discuss the policies of Presidents Warren Harding, Calvin Coolidge, and Herbert Hoover.
3. Examine the passage of the Eighteenth Amendment to the Constitution and the Volstead Act (Prohibition).
4. Analyze the passage of the Nineteenth Amendment and the changing role of women in society.
5. Trace the growth and effects of radio and movies and their role in the worldwide diffusion of popular culture.
6. Trace the growth and effects of radio and movies and their role in the worldwide diffusion of popular culture.

### DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA SOCIAL STUDIES STANDARDS

US2.38 Evaluate the portrayal of the “Roaring ‘20s,” including an assessment of the changing societal roles and rights of women and Black Americans, along with the cultural backlash to these changes.

### MASSACHUSETTS HISTORY AND SOCIAL SCIENCE FRAMEWORK STANDARDS

*Topic 2. Modernity in the United States: ideologies and economies [USII.T2]*

Analyze primary sources (e.g., documents, audio or film recordings, works of art and artifacts), to develop an argument about how the conflict between traditionalism and modernity manifested itself in the major societal trends and events in first two decades of the 20th century.





## CONNECTICUT ELEMENTARY AND SECONDARY SOCIAL STUDIES STANDARDS

### *US-4. The 1920s, Great Depression, and New Deal*

US.His.4.c. Analyze how racism and nativism shaped perspectives about individuals and groups and influenced government policy.

US.His.4.d. Analyze complex and interacting factors that influenced a debate over national identity in the United States in the 1920s.

US.Civ.2.a. Analyze the role of citizens in advocating for and ratifying the 19th Amendment to the United States Constitution.

US.His.6.a. Analyze how authors, artists, and musicians documented perspectives and experiences of individuals and groups throughout the interwar period.

## NEW JERSEY STUDENT LEARNING STANDARDS - SOCIAL STUDIES

### *Era 8. The Emergence of Modern America: Roaring Twenties (1890–1930)*

6.1.12.CivicsHR.8.a: Analyze primary and secondary sources to explain how social intolerance, xenophobia, and fear of anarchism led to restrictive immigration and refugee laws, and the violation of the human rights of individuals and groups.

6.1.12.EconET.8.a: Relate social, cultural, and technological changes in the interwar period to the rise of a consumer economy and the changing role and status of women.

## SOCIAL STUDIES – NATIONAL COUNCIL FOR THE SOCIAL STUDIES (NCSS)

Theme 1: Culture

Theme 3: People, Place, and Environments

Theme 4: Individual Development and Identity

Theme 5: Individuals, Groups, and Institutions

Theme 6: Power, Authority and Governance

Theme 7: Production, Distribution, and Consumption

Theme 8: Science, Technology, and Society



## COMMON CORE STATE STANDARDS

### *College and Career Readiness Reading Information Text Standards for Grades 11-12*

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RI.9-10.1 Cite strong and thorough textual evidence to support analysis of what the text says explicitly as well as inferences drawn from the text.

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RI.9-10.2 Determine a central idea of a text and analyze its development over the course of the text, including how it emerges and is shaped and refined by specific details; provide an objective summary of the text.

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RI.9-10.3 Analyze how the author unfolds an analysis or series of ideas or events, including the order in which the points are made, how they are introduced and developed, and the connections that are drawn between them.

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RI.9-10.4 Determine the meaning of words and phrases as they are used in a text, including figurative, connotative, and technical meanings; analyze the cumulative impact of specific word choices on meaning and tone (e.g., how the language of a court opinion differs from that of a newspaper).

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RI.9-10.6 Determine an author's point of view or purpose in a text and analyze how an author uses rhetoric to advance that point of view or purpose.

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RI.9-10.9 Analyze seminal U.S. documents of historical and literary significance (e.g., Washington's Farewell Address, the Gettysburg Address, Roosevelt's Four Freedoms speech, King's "Letter from Birmingham Jail"), including how they address related themes and concepts.

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RI.11-12.1 Cite strong and thorough textual evidence to support analysis of what the text says explicitly as well as inferences drawn from the text, including determining where the text leaves matters uncertain.

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RI.11-12.2 Determine two or more central ideas of a text and analyze their development over the course of the text, including how they interact and build on one another to provide a complex analysis; provide an objective summary of the text

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RI.11-12.6 Determine an author's point of view or purpose in a text in which the rhetoric is particularly effective, analyzing how style and content contribute to the power, persuasiveness or beauty of the text.

### *College and Career Readiness Anchor Standards for Writing for Grades 9-12*

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.W.9-10.1 Write arguments to support claims in an analysis of substantive topics or texts, using valid reasoning and relevant and sufficient evidence.





CCSS.ELA-Literacy.W.9-10.2 Write informative/explanatory texts to examine and convey complex ideas, concepts, and information clearly and accurately through the effective selection, organization, and analysis of content.

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.W.9-10.4 Produce clear and coherent writing in which the development, organization, and style are appropriate to task, purpose, and audience. (Grade-specific expectations for writing types are defined in standards 1-3 above.)

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.W.9-10.7 Conduct short as well as more sustained research projects to answer a question (including a self-generated question) or solve a problem; narrow or broaden the inquiry when appropriate; synthesize multiple sources on the subject, demonstrating understanding of the subject under investigation.

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.W.9-10.9 Draw evidence from literary or informational texts to support analysis, reflection, and research.

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.W.11-12.1 Write arguments to support claims in an analysis of substantive topics or texts, using valid reasoning and relevant and sufficient evidence.

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.W.11-12.2 Write informative/explanatory texts to examine and convey complex ideas, concepts, and information clearly and accurately through the effective selection, organization, and analysis of content.

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.W.11-12.4 Produce clear and coherent writing in which the development, organization, and style are appropriate to task, purpose, and audience. (Grade-specific expectations for writing types are defined in standards 1-3 above.)

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.W.11-12.7 Conduct short as well as more sustained research projects to answer a question (including a self-generated question) or solve a problem; narrow or broaden the inquiry when appropriate; synthesize multiple sources on the subject, demonstrating understanding of the subject under investigation.

### *College and Career Readiness Anchor Standards for Speaking and Listening for Grades 9-12*

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.SL.9-10.1 Initiate and participate effectively in a range of collaborative discussions (one-on-one, in groups, and teacher-led) with diverse partners on grades 9-10 topics, texts, and issues, building on others' ideas and expressing their own clearly and persuasively.

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.SL.9-10.2 Integrate multiple sources of information presented in diverse media or formats (e.g., visually, quantitatively, orally) evaluating the credibility and accuracy of each source.

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.SL.9-10.4 Present information, findings, and supporting evidence clearly, concisely, and logically such that listeners can follow the line of reasoning and the organization, development, substance, and style are appropriate to purpose, audience, and task.



CCSS.ELA-Literacy.SL.11-12.1 Initiate and participate effectively in a range of collaborative discussions (one-on-one, in groups, and teacher-led) with diverse partners on grades 11-12 topics, texts, and issues, building on others' ideas and expressing their own clearly and persuasively.

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.SL.11-12.2 Integrate multiple sources of information presented in diverse formats and media (e.g., visually, quantitatively, orally) in order to make informed decisions and solve problems, evaluating the credibility and accuracy of each source and noting any discrepancies among the data.

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.SL.11-12.4 Present information, findings, and supporting evidence, conveying a clear and distinct perspective, such that listeners can follow the line of reasoning, alternative or opposing perspectives are addressed, and the organization, development, substance, and style are appropriate to purpose, audience, and a range of formal and informal tasks.

## LEARNING FOR JUSTICE SOCIAL JUSTICE STANDARDS

DI.9-12.10 I understand that diversity includes the impact of unequal power relations on the development of group identities and cultures.

JU.9-12.12 I can recognize, describe and distinguish unfairness and injustice at different levels of society.

JU.9-12.13 I can explain the short and long-term impact of biased words and behaviors and unjust practices, laws and institutions that limit the rights and freedoms of people based on their identity groups.



## RESOURCES

### HANDOUTS

- Handout - Warren G. Harding's "Readjustment" Speech
- Handout - Warren G. Harding's "Readjustment" Speech (Teacher's Guide)
- Handout - Legislation under Harding
- Document Set - News Headlines from the 1920s
- Handout - Invitee List
- Document Set - Invitee Profiles