

Jazz Age Worksheet

Directions: Read the passages below, & then answer the questions that follow using complete sentences.

The Jazz Age

During the period of artistic vitality known as the Harlem Renaissance, African American writer Zora Neale Hurston (1903–1960) entertained fellow party goers with stories of Eatonville, the small Florida town where she grew up. Although Hurston left Eatonville as a teenager, all of her stories reflect her experiences there. One such story is “Double-Shuffle,” excerpted below.

In contrast, F. Scott Fitzgerald (1896–1940), who was raised in a middle-class neighborhood, wrote about the rich and the would-be rich, who dreamed of wealth and its accompanying lifestyle. Fitzgerald believed that the dream of wealth, though attractive at first, often led to disillusionment. The excerpt that follows is from “May Day,” a story about rich college students.

Read both excerpts, and answer the questions that follow.

Double-Shuffle

Back in the good old days before the World War, things were very simple in Eatonville. People didn't fox-trot. When the town wanted to put on its Sunday clothes and wash behind the ears, it put on a “breakdown.” The daring younger set would two-step and waltz, but the good church members and the elders stuck to the grand march. By rural canons [standards] dancing is wicked, but one is not held to have danced until the feet have been crossed. Feet don't get crossed when one grand marches. . . .

. . . The march . . . has a kick in Eatonville. Everybody happy, shining eyes, gleaming teeth. Feet dragged ‘shhlap, shhlap! to beat out the time. No orchestra needed. Round and round! Back again, parse-me-la! shlap! shlap! Strut! Strut! Seaboard! Shlap! Shlap! Tiddy bumm! Mr. Clarke in the lead with Mrs. Moseley.

It's too much for some of the young folks. Double shuffling commences. Buck and wing. Lizzimore about to break his guitar. Accordion doing contortions. People fall back against the walls, and let the soloist have it, shouting as they clap the old, old double shuffle songs. . . .

When the buck dance was over, the boys would give the floor to the girls and they would parse-me-la with a sly eye out of the corner to see if anybody was looking who might “have them up in church” on conference night. Then there would be more dancing. . . .

But the boys and girls got scattered about during the war, and now they dance the fox-trot by a brand new piano. They do waltz and two-step still, but no one now considers it good form to lock his chin over his partner's shoulder and stick out behind. One night just for fun and to humor the old folks, they danced, that is, they grand marched, but everyone picked up their feet. *Bah!!*

From *The Eatonville Anthology* by Zora Neale Hurston.

May Day

She came out of the dressing-room at Delmonico's and stood for a second in the doorway looking over the shoulders of a black dress in front of her at the groups of Yale men who flitted like dignified black moths around the head of the stairs. From the room she had left drifted out the heavy fragrance left by the passage to and fro of many scented young beauties—rich perfumes and the fragile memory-laden dust of fragrant powders. This odor drifting out acquired the tang of cigarette smoke in the hall, and then settled sensuously down the stairs and permeated the ballroom where the Gamma Psi dance was to be held. It was an odor she knew well, exciting, stimulating, restlessly sweet—the odor of a fashionable dance.

She thought of her own appearance. Her bare arms and shoulders were powdered to a creamy white. She knew they looked very soft and would gleam like milk against the black backs that were to silhouette them tonight. The hairdressing had been a success; her reddish mass of hair was piled and crushed and creased to an arrogant marvel of mobile curves. Her lips were finely made of deep carmine; the irises of her eyes were delicate, breakable blue, like china eyes. She was a complete, infinitely delicate, quite perfect thing of beauty, flowing in an even line from a complex coiffure to two small slim feet.

She thought of what she would say to-night at this revel [party], faintly presaged [foretold]

already by the sounds of high and low laughter and slippared footsteps, and movements of couples up and down the stairs. She would talk the language she had talked for many years—her line—made up of the current expressions, bits of journalese and college slang strung together into an intrinsic [essential] whole, careless, faintly provocative, delicately sentimental. She smiled faintly as she heard a girl sitting on the stairs near her say: “You don’t know the half of it, dearie!”

From *Tales of the Jazz Age* by F. Scott Fitzgerald. Copyright 1922 by Charles Scribner’s Sons; copyright renewed 1950 by Frances Scott Fitzgerald Lanahan.

1. What kind of event does each excerpt describe?

2. How did the adults of Eatonville view dancing? Did the young people have the same attitude?

3. How might the people at the Eatonville dance have viewed those at the “May Day” dance?

4. How might the people at the “May Day” dance have viewed those at the Eatonville dance?

5. According to these two excerpts, how did Hurston’s portrayal of music and dance differ from Fitzgerald’s portrayal of music and dance?
