

## The Roaring Twenties

### Lesson 5

# Education and Popular Culture

## Key Terms and People

**Charles A. Lindbergh** First person to fly nonstop solo across the Atlantic

**George Gershwin** Composer who merged popular concert music with American jazz

**Irving Berlin** Composer who wrote 1,500 songs, including “White Christmas”

**Georgia O’Keeffe** Artist who created colored canvases of New Mexico

**modernism** Artistic movement that rejected traditional art as outdated

**Sinclair Lewis** Author who was the first American to win a Nobel Prize in Literature

**F. Scott Fitzgerald** Author who revealed the negative side of the 1920s

**Edna St. Vincent Millay** Poet whose poems celebrated youth and freedom

**Ernest Hemingway** Author who introduced a tough, simple style of writing

## Before You Read

In the last lesson you learned about women in the 1920s. In this lesson you will read about education and popular culture during the 1920s.

## As You Read

Use a chart to take notes on the mass media and popular culture that defined the 1920s.

## SCHOOLS AND THE MASS MEDIA SHAPE CULTURE

### How did popular culture change in America?

America had become more prosperous. Business and industry required a more educated workforce. These factors caused an increase in the number of students going to high school. In 1914 only 1 million American students went to high school after elementary school. In 1926 the number was nearly 4 million.

Schools changed as they grew. Before the 1920s high schools were mostly for

students who planned on attending college. In the twenties high schools had a variety of students. Schools offered vocational, or work-related, training for industrial jobs.

High schools also saw an increase in the number of children of immigrants. Many of them did not speak English. Even so, schools were successful in teaching large numbers of Americans to read.

As a result of increased literacy, more people read newspapers than before. Newspaper circulation rose. Big city papers and newspaper chains swallowed up small-town newspapers.

Lesson 5, *continued*

National magazines were also popular. Some of them delivered the news. By the end of the 1920s, ten magazines had a circulation of more than 2 million each.

The most powerful of the mass media was radio. Radio networks created something new in America: the shared national experience of hearing things as they happened. Listeners could hear speeches by the president or listen to the World Series.

1. What was an effect of increased literacy in the United States?

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## AMERICA CHASES NEW HEROES AND OLD DREAMS

### Who was Charles Lindbergh?

In the 1920s Americans had more money and more free time than ever before. Fads, including crossword puzzles and games, swept the nation. People also flooded athletic stadiums to see sports stars.

**Charles A. Lindbergh** thrilled the nation by becoming the first person to fly nonstop solo across the Atlantic Ocean. Lindbergh took off from New York City in his plane, *The Spirit of St. Louis*. After 33 hours Lindbergh landed outside of Paris, France. On his return to the United States, Lindbergh became the idol of America. In an age of sensationalism and excess, Lindbergh stood for the honesty and bravery the nation seemed to have lost.

2. Why did Lindbergh become an American idol?

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## POPULAR CULTURE REFLECTS NEW ATTITUDES

### Why did the music, art, and literature of the 1920s appeal to many Americans?

Even before the introduction of sound, movies became a national pastime. *The Jazz Singer*, the first movie with sound, was released in 1927. Walt Disney's *Steamboat Willie*, the first animated film with sound, was made the next year. By 1930 the "talkies" had caused movie attendance to double.

In the 1920s American artists broke away from European traditions. Eugene O'Neill wrote plays about the confusion of modern American life. Composer **George Gershwin** merged jazz with traditional elements creating music with a new American sound. **Irving Berlin**, another important composer, wrote 1,500 songs, many of which were heard in Broadway shows or in movies.

American painters recorded an America of dreams and contrasting realities. Edward Hopper painted the loneliness of American life. **Georgia O'Keeffe** showed the grandeur of New Mexico. Their works represented **modernism**, an artistic movement that rejected traditional art as outdated and no longer meaningful.

Many gifted American writers criticized American society. **Sinclair Lewis** was the first American to win a Nobel Prize in Literature. His novel *Babbitt* made fun of middle-class America.

Novelist **F. Scott Fitzgerald** coined the term "Jazz Age" to describe the twenties. His books, such as *This Side of Paradise* and *The Great Gatsby*, showed the negative side of the age. But the poems of **Edna St. Vincent Millay** celebrated youth and freedom from traditional restrictions.

Lesson 5, *continued*

Some Americans disliked American culture so much they went to live abroad. Many gathered in Paris. The writer Gertrude Stein called them the Lost Generation. They included Fitzgerald and **Ernest Hemingway**. Hemingway introduced a tough, simple

style of writing that changed American literature.

3. How did American artists reflect new American ideas?

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Fill in the chart describing the mass media and popular culture that defined the 1920s.

MASS MEDIA/POPULAR CULTURE	
1. Magazines	
2. Radio	
3. Charles Lindbergh	
4. Movies	
5. Composers	
6. Artists	
7. Writers	