THE NEW WOMAN

After a decades-long struggle, women finally won the right to vote when the 19th Amendment was passed in 1920. Many other changes occurred for women during the 1920’s.

Due to the economic boom of the 1920’s, American women began to work in greater numbers, and in a wider range of jobs, than ever before. However, women still held lower paying jobs than men. Women also began to attend college in greater numbers than ever before.

Even the basic rules that defined proper female behavior were beginning to change. American women continued to have the primary responsibility for caring for the home and children and most women still depended on men for financial support, but an increasing number began to seek a greater sense of equality in their relationships with men.

The flapper is a popular image that reflects many of the changes affecting women in the 1920’s. A flapper was a young woman who defied traditional ideas of proper dress and behavior. Flappers shocked society by chopping off their hair, raising the hemlines of their skirts, wearing makeup, smoking cigarettes, drinking alcohol, and going dancing in nightclubs.

In general, the term ‘flapper’ suggested a certain lifestyle of great independence and freedom. As write Dorothy Parker noted about the modern woman of the 1920’s, “She’s not what Grandma used to be.”

Although flappers became a symbol of the 1920’s, they didn’t represent all women of the 1920’s. Not all women were flappers. In fact, in many parts of the U.S., especially in small towns and in rural areas, women disapproved of flappers’ bold and reckless behavior. Older supporters of women’s rights believed that the flappers were more interested in having fun than in advancing the cause of women.

*IN YOUR “ROARING TWENTIES” PACKET, ANSWER THE FOLLOWING QUESTIONS:

1. How did women’s role in society change during the 1920’s?

2. How did women’s role in society stay the same during the 1920’s?

3. What is a flapper?

4. Overall, do you think “The New Woman” was a positive or negative aspect of the 1920’s? Why?