

Josephine Baker Activity

Excerpt from *Josephine The Dazzling Life of Josephine Baker*

Before you read the story discuss the following questions:

1. Do you like to dance? Have you taken lessons or performed dances for audiences?
2. Why might people like to dance to jazz music?
3. What was life like for African Americans in the 1930's?
4. What have we learned about Paris?
5. Why might an African American dancer choose to live in Paris?

On a white board, chalkboard, or smartboard, set up three categories. While you read the story with students, pause every page or so and ask them to brainstorm things they have heard in the story about jazz, History/America and Paris or Josephine Baker, writing their ideas in the appropriate column.

Jazz/Dance	History/America and Paris	Josephine Baker
Dance to jazz, like the Charleston	Ziegfeld Follies— Josephine first African American	wanted to conquer America
Only white dancers in the Follies—people said mean things	Segregation: Josephine had to use A servant entrance to the hotel War starts in Europe in 1939	Josephine becomes a stunt pilot Josephine joins the Red Cross Spies for France Got pneumonia and was in the hospital
Jazz and dance performances For African American and White soldiers	made the black soldiers sit in front with the white soldiers (integration)	awarded the Legion d'Honneur for helping France, the U.S. and their allies win the war

After you read the story, ask students to discuss their lists, including finding out more about anything on their lists that they don't know about or understand.

Possible discussion questions:

1. What do you admire about Josephine Baker?
2. Why do think America treated her badly?
3. How have things changed in America since Josephine's experiences there?