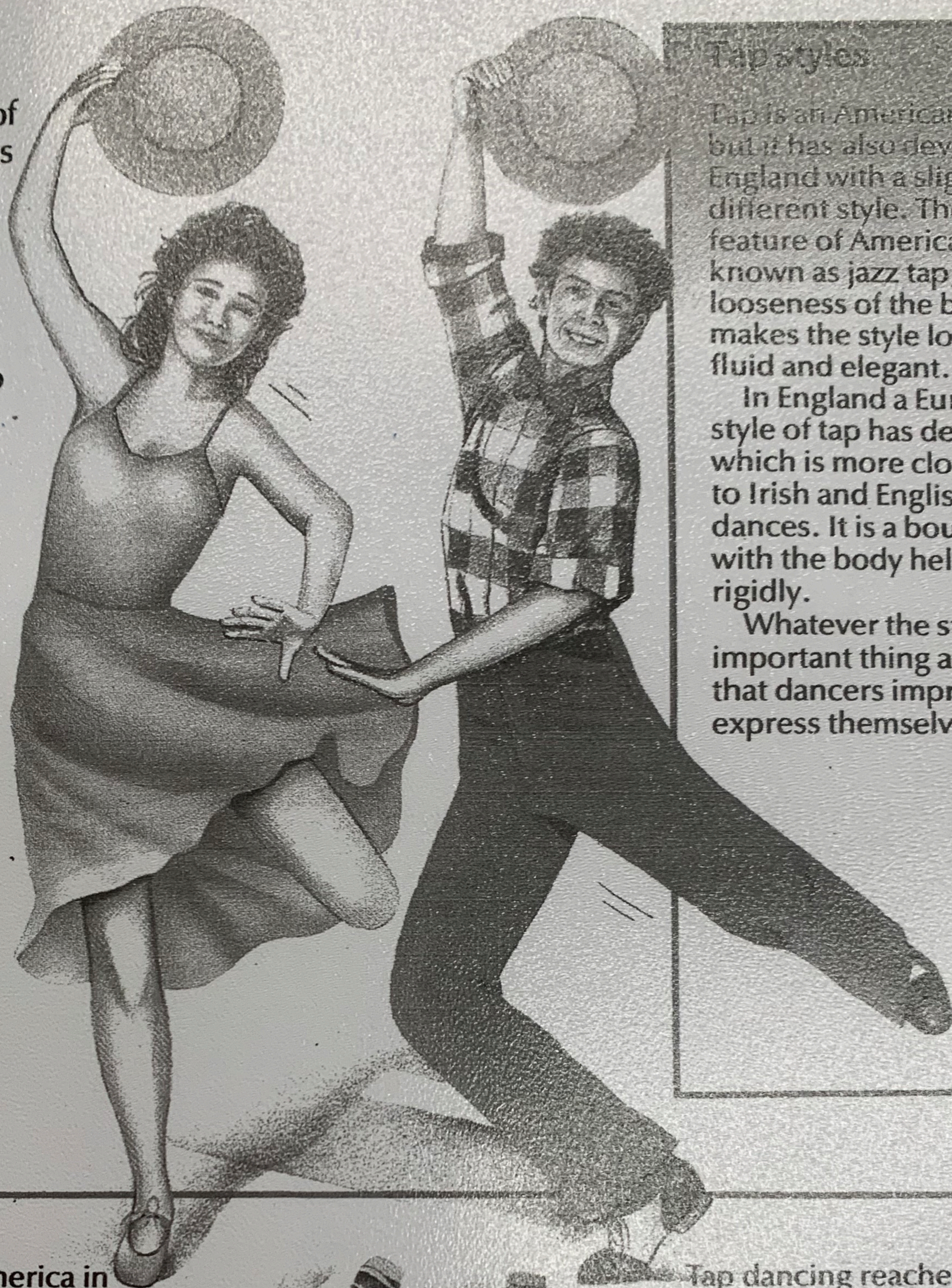


Tap dance

Tap dancing is one of the most stylish kinds of dance and a fun way to exercise. It is a dance where you create your own sound with your feet so you do not need to rely on music. The main qualities you need are a good sense of rhythm and timing, and a love of performing to an audience.

The essential movements of tap come from your feet and ankles. Your arms, head and hands are important, but they move to complement the actions of your feet.



Tap styles

Tap is an American dance, but it has also developed in England with a slightly different style. The main feature of American tap, known as jazz tap, is the looseness of the body which makes the style look very fluid and elegant.

In England a European style of tap has developed which is more closely related to Irish and English clog dances. It is a bouncy style with the body held more rigidly.

Whatever the style, the important thing about tap is that dancers improvise and express themselves.

How tap started

Tap dance started in America in the 19th century. Its roots are in the Irish jig and English clog dances of early settlers, mingled with the African tribal dances brought by slaves. The European jigs involved intricate leg and footwork, while the Africans danced flat-footed, moving their whole body to the pounding rhythms of their drums.



Tap emerged when black slaves on the American plantations combined their rhythms with the jigs and clog dances. White people began to copy the black dancers and tap eventually became a performance dance. People started to wear special tap shoes with metal plates on the soles and to learn a basic technique.



Tap dancing reached the height of its popularity in the 1930s through Hollywood film musicals. These starred tap artists such as Fred Astaire, Bill Robinson, Eleanor Powell and Gene Kelly. Fred Astaire was probably the most famous. He was trained in ballet and his tap style was distinctively graceful and elegant.

