



WANDERING WARDROBE



CLOTHING AS EXPRESSION/PERFORMANCE: DESIGNING WITH COLOR

Lesson engages in object-based analysis of a Mourning Cape, highlighting how the design choices reflect the contextual and historical background of the garment. The activity asks students to consider how color communicates an idea in art and design.

Associated garment: 1890s Capelet

Associated web page: onstead.unt.edu/capelet

Subject Areas: Theatre, Visual Arts

Grades: Adaptable for any grade

Topics/Themes: Art observation, Art history, Fashion History, Color, Monochromatic Design

Set-up: Place the garment in its display box on a table in the classroom that students can gather around and see easily; remind students not to touch

Materials: Capelet, projector and screen

Note: This lesson is designed to fill 1-4 class periods.

GOALS

Students will be able to:

- Recognize and describe design elements in clothing
- Design using color to communicate concept
- Explain conceptual choices related to their design

TERMINOLOGY

- **Monochromatic:** refers to one color, in art and design refers to work executed in a single color. Often these works include a variety of values of this color to create interest. ([Tate Website](#))
- **Conceptual Art:** Work that places emphasis on the idea, or concept, behind the work. The materials, shape, color, and other artistic choices communicate the concept. ([Tate website](#), [TheArtStory](#))
- **Mourning Dress:** Garments worn during periods of mourning the loss of a family member, leader in society, or monarchy. Began as part of royal court protocol in the Middle Ages and became popular with the middle classes in the 1800s, declining in popularity around

World War I. Social protocols dictated the time period, color, embellishment, and details of these garments. (Taylor, 1983)

DAY 1: OBSERVATION USING ARTFUL THINKING (SEE, THINK, WONDER)

Give each student a chance to look up at the garment up close, facilitate discussion and inquiry, and share historical and contextual information:

- **See:** While observing the object, or projecting images of the capelet and its details, ask students to share observations of what they see. Ask students to identify the colors they see, and the different materials they notice. Other questions include: Can you see where the fabric is cut and sewn together? How do you think it was made? Do you see any tears, fraying, or staining? What activities do you think caused this?
- **Wonder:** Have students discuss or write down (in pairs or as a group) what questions they have about the garment.
- **Think:** Have students discuss (in pairs or as a group) one of the questions they had, or ask one of the following: What does the color represent in this capelet? Why would someone decorate a garment this way? What kind of person might wear this coat, what are they trying to say about themselves by wearing this cape? What is the shape of this garment? What would it look like if it were put on a person? Ask them to think about the person wearing the piece, the time it would have been worn, who would have made it, or the activities people would have performed while wearing it.

After allowing students to discuss and share their thoughts, give some contextual information:

- **Mourning Dress**
This capelet was made around the 1890's. This garment was likely originally created to be worn during the prescribed mourning period for women; deaths requiring a mourning period included husbands, aristocracy, and close family members. These garments followed a societal code of etiquette dictating use of all black materials, modest silhouette (the shape of the garment), and minimal embellishment. This code of dress was strictly adhered to by all and could put financial strain on less-affluent families. (Taylor, 1983; [MAAS Museum Article](#))

Additional Examples: [2.2.1 Supporting document: Mourning dress example](#)

- **Social Context/Influences**
The practice of dressing in specific clothing for a Mourning period began in Europe during the Middle Ages as part of court protocols. Wealthy merchant families adopted these practices by 1700. By the 1800s it had become important to all of Western society. Both wealthy and poor families spent money on these clothes to maintain respectability. Smart clothing manufacturers took advantage of this, producing options for a variety of price points. Additionally, marketing encouraged the importance of proper accessories including "in memoriam" jewelry. Wealthy widows followed the fashions from Paris and spent money purchasing new garments each season or re-working old ones. The specific prescribed period of mourning shifted through the years, but generally widows were

required to spend much more time in mourning than men. Generally, women spent about 2- 2.5 years in mourning for a husband or close family member, going through several prescribed phases, each with slightly less restrictive options for garment material and color choice. Men spent from 3-6 months in mourning, with a black band across the arm being the singular change in dress to indicate mourning. (Taylor, 1983, [National Museum of Funeral History](#))

- **Materials and Embellishment Significance**

The detailed beadwork and delicate fringe overlay indicate this garment was expensive to make and most likely owned by a more affluent person. Additionally, careful analysis reveals the neckline has been rolled and stitched down to make it shorter. (Note the beading remaining on the inside of the garment at back of neck.) This could have been to modify the garment for general wear after the mourning period was complete, as a hand-me-down to fit another family member, or an alteration when a less-affluent person purchased it as a second-hand garment.

- **Color as Part of Cultural Communication** [Cultural Color Meanings Chart](#)

Black is still commonly worn to funerals in Western society, but color can communicate many different things. Around the world, different cultures interpret colors in a variety of ways. Some examples include:

RED	GREEN	BLUE	WHITE	BLACK
Australian Aboriginals: Land, Earth	China: Exorcism; green hats imply a man's wife is cheating on him	Cherokees: Defeat, trouble, the North	China: Death	Apache: West, where the sun sets
Celtic: Death, afterlife	Ireland: Patriotism, Catholicism	China: Immortality	India: Unhappiness	Cherokee: Problems, death, the West
China: Good luck, celebration, summoning	Islam: Perfect faith	Iran: Heaven, spirituality, mourning	Japan: White carnation symbolizes death	Thailand: Bad luck, unhappiness, evil
India: Purity	Japan: Life	Eastern: Wealth, self- cultivation	Eastern: Funerals, children, marriage, peace	Western: Funerals, death, bad guys, rebellion
South Africa: Mourning	Western: Spring, new birth, go, money	Western: Depression, sadness, conservative, corporate	Western: Brides, angels, doctors, peace (white dove)	
Western: Excitement, danger, love, stop				

Further color meanings/cultural color association resources:

[2.2.2 Supporting document: Color in Fashion \(article\)](#)

[Red craze Fashion](#)

[Color in Interior Design](#)

[Huffpost Color Article](#)

[Design Color Chart](#)

[Color Matters Website](#)

DAY 2: COLOR AS CONCEPT DESIGN ACTIVITY

- Teacher refresh how color can be used to communicate an idea or emotion:
 - Conceptual use of a Color: Discuss how color can be used to communication life events, emotions, or social standing. Ask if they can think of any colors commonly associated with celebrations, sports, places, brands, etc. What effect would there be if the colors changed?
 - Using a Color as Design Element: Discuss how color can be used as a design element in monochromatic artwork and garments; show examples.
 - [Josef Albers](#) – article on artnet.com
 - [Cornelia Kubler Kavanagh](#) – article on artnet.com
 - [Unravel by Ben Taverniti](#) – Vogue.com report on 2019 Unravel Resort Collection
 - [Berksha PANTONE Collaboration Video](#) – fashion/art collaboration video
 - [Harry Nuriev Interview& Images](#) – Interior Designer
- Introduce Activity: Designing an interior space with Monochromatic color. The space could be for a play, performance, store, restaurant, or home, among others. Depending on resources, students can draw their design using the [2.2.3 Supporting document Perspective Space](#), **and/or** they could build a 3D model in a shoebox “space” using other craft supplies to paint and build the items to fill the space.
 - Use the handout to have students list ideas/concepts/moods they would like to express via the space. Next to these, have the students write what color they would associate with each word on the list. Additionally, write down other elements that would communicate the concept such as shape, line, color value, etc.
 - Let students work out some preliminary sketches of each idea.
 - Before the end of the day, have students choose their favorite idea to expand upon in the next class. Remind them that the project is to remain monochromatic.

DAY 3-4: DESIGN ACTIVITY

Have the students execute their best idea from the previous class:

- Give students time to draw or make their idea, bringing it to life.
- Remind students to consider how monochromatic color can be manipulates with tone and value to add dimension, interest, and expression.
- Ask students to write 2-3 sentences sharing why they chose the color and design elements to express their chosen emotion or concept.
- To conclude the project, have students present their work and share the sentences they have written with the class.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Hartley, Florence. *The Ladies Book of Etiquette and Manual of Politeness*. Boston: Lee and Shepard

Publishers, 1872.

Taylor, Lou. *Mourning Dress: A Costume and Social History*. London: Allen and Unwin, 1983.

SUPPLIES

- Drawing/Illustration supplies (pencils, markers, paint, paintbrushes, paper)
- Paint, markers, sequins, glitter in several color tones
- Construction Paper
- Shoeboxes