



WANDERING WARDROBE



3.2 LESSON: FASHION AND ENVIRONMENT

Using the garment as a starting point, the lesson engages students in contextual research of the time period to develop a character sketch and set design/environment for the character. (Can be assigned as an individual or group project)

Associated garment: 1920's dress

Associated web page: onstead.unt.edu/1920s-dress

Subject Areas: Theatre, Visual Arts

Grades: High school

Topics/Themes: Fashion History, 1920's history, Environment/Setting

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: 1920's dress, projector and screen, research tools, paper, pencils, shoeboxes & craft media, illustration media

GOALS

Students will be able to:

- Identify fashion styles from different time periods and compare/contrast visual design elements
- Understand how art, fashion, and popular culture influence each other
- Use their creative skills to create a character sketch & set design

TERMINOLOGY

- Popular Culture – The accepted practices, beliefs, and things - such as media objects, entertainment and leisure, fashion and trends, and linguistic conventions - that embody the most broadly shared meanings of a social system. [OxfordBibliographies](#)

DAY 1: OBSERVATION (SEE, THINK, WONDER) & CONTEXT

Students discuss observations of 1920's garment from the WW collection. Give each student a chance to look up at the garment up close:

- **See:** Ask students to share observations of what they see, such as colors, material, and embellishments. Have them write down questions they might have about the garment.
- **Think:** Have students discuss (in pairs or as a group) a question from the students or one of the following: Can you see where the fabric is cut and sewn together? Do you see any tears, fraying, or staining? How do you think the fabric would feel? Would the fabric look stiff or flowy on a person?
- **Wonder:** Have students share their discussions and share additional questions they have about the coat. Additional prompts include: What kind of person do you think wore this? What kinds of activities do you think the person would do in this dress? What time of year would it be worn? What would it look like on a person?
- Teacher will briefly discuss historical context and influences during the 1920s:
 - **World War I** – While many men were away fighting, women became more independent as they had to take jobs and earn incomes; after the war, many women continued to embrace this new independence. Also, the seriousness of war was followed by a prosperous decade led to a spirit of independence, pleasure, and freedom. These all influenced the shape of women's clothing in a short amount of time. Women even began wearing trousers and foregoing gloves.
 - **Jazz** – the rise in popularity of Jazz music and its dances such as the Charleston influenced fashionable attire in Western society. The African-American roots of the genre was made more 'commercial' for wider popularity and dancing during World War I. The energetic rhythms and exuberant dances provided a contrast to the war-torn past. Clothing suitable for dancing embraced this movement, including ignorant Western notions of an 'exotic African culture' inspiring the use of fringe and materials that would make noise while dancing.
 - **Prohibition** – A religious revival phase, a rise in women's temperance movements, and support from manufacturers wanting more productive workers all contributed to support of the ban of alcoholic drinks and bars and clubs that sold them. In 1919 the 18th Amendment prohibiting the sale of alcohol was passed by Congress and was quickly ratified by the states and put into effect a year later. Initial positive results were soon overcome by the rise of illegal production, distribution, underground clubs, and gang violence from gangsters such as Al Capone. These problems along with need for jobs and commerce to recover from the Great Depression led to the eventual repeal via the 21st Amendment in 1933.

- **The “Flapper”** – An adapted slang term used to describe young women who challenged traditional behaviors, appearance, and lifestyles. They wore shorter dresses and skirts, sleeveless garments, flashy dresses for dancing, and less restrictive undergarments. Hair was cut short, make-up or “rouge” visibly applied, and stockings were rolled below the knees or foregone altogether. The Flapper embodied the modern woman, and while most women did not adopt the most extreme version of this look, many women wore bobbed hairstyles and shorter skirts.
- **Social & Artistic Movements** – Following WWI, dissatisfaction with conventional thinking led to an interest in psychology, feminism, and alternative lifestyles in intellectual and artistic circles. Looser, bohemian, and even more athletic styles of dress emerged, an additional influence on the more unstructured clothing and style of the time.

Resources:

[Kent State Museum](#)

[Museum of London: "How to dress - 1920s" Part 1,](#)

[Museum of London: “How to dress – 1920s” Part 2](#)

[3.2.1 GreenwichVillageChapter Support File](#)

[Prohibition – History.com](#)

[Wall Street Journal: WWI Legacies](#)

[3.2.2 Jazz Support File](#)

[3.2.3 Flappers Support File](#)

- Leave time for final questions and observations. (let students know that lesson will continue tomorrow)

DAY 2: FASHION AND ENVIRONMENT: CHARACTER SKETCH/SET DESIGN

- There were changes in fashion as well as the environments people worked and lived. Refresh the contextual information discussed previously and ask students to think about what life would be like in the 1920s.
 - [The Roaring 20s – Photo Album from PBS.com](#)
 - [3.2.4 Environment Support File](#)
- Introduce Project:
 - Students will work in as individuals or groups to 1) develop a character and 2) design a setting for their character. If working as a group, assign each a setting/environment; have each student develop a character for this set.
 - Encourage students to conduct further research on the type of lifestyle their character would have lived: fashion/clothing, job, environment, social life, etc.

DAY 3-5: EXECUTE CHARACTER SKETCH/SET DESIGN

- Give students time to work in class on their projects (or assign as homework for a later due date)
Students can create a 2-D design of their set using the [3.2.5 SetDesign Support File](#), or they can construct a model inside a shoebox using craft supplies
- Have each student/group present their work to the class, including reading their character sketch aloud. Encourage questions and discussion about each project.

MATERIALS

Research tools (library, computers)

Notebooks and pencils/computer with word processing

Shoeboxes and craft supplies