



Curriculum Units by Fellows of the Yale-New Haven Teachers Institute
1991 Volume II: The Family in Art and Material Culture

History through Fashion

Curriculum Unit 91.02.01
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Fashion reflects a complex variety of commercial enterprises all directly connected with each other. The development, progress, and the richness of a country, are often attested to by the evolution of clothing. People, instinctively knowing that the country is strong, devote more of their money, time, and energy to improving their look, fussing therefore about fashion.

Materials, like silk; modes of weaving fabric, like velvet and brocade; products like lace; accessories, such as wigs, hats, fans, walking stick etc.; and jewelry made of precious and semi-precious stones, pearls etc., display the wealth and the social status of the person wearing the outfit. One can make educated assumptions about a society by studying its clothing trends.

In the history of France during the XVIIth and the XVIIIth centuries, the progress and the social changes of the nation are evident. The ruling class lost touch with reality, increasingly dissociating itself from the other classes. In the end there was revolution. Through an examination of fashion we not only have the opportunity to assess the evolution of a country, but also a chance to understand the reasons behind certain trends and certain events,

It is for these reasons that the idea of teaching history through fashions has come to my mind, and I hope that by doing so I will be able to spark more interest in the study of history.

This unit has been developed for seventh and eighth grade students studying French and having French history as part of their curriculum. This unit does not seek to cover historical events but rather it seeks to show how important fashion was for those people who made history, and to study and remember them better.

I intend to reach my objective with the following steps.

A. Visualization

With the help of slides the students will be shown several paintings from the XVIIth and the XVIIIth centuries and they will analyze the following:

1. The objects depicted, specifying what they are, the material they appear to be made of, and if they still exist in some form today.

2. The people, how many, how young or old, rich or poor, famous or unknown, etc.
3. Fashion, style, color, details on clothing and on the person.

B. Background Check-up

Investigation of the social and economic status of France internally and compared to other countries reached by viewing other paintings and by reading excerpts from writers and famous personalities of the time.

C. Final Discussion

The analysis of paintings combined with readings from several authors of the period should enable the students to discuss the following points:

1. The evolution that took place during the XVIIth and the XVIIIth centuries and the people who must take the credit for it.
2. How family life was affected by these changes.
3. How people, and women in particular, increasingly became part of the decision making process, politically and economically.

In addition to these discussions, it would be of great interest and very beneficial for both the students and the teacher to visit a local art museum. This visit would expose students to an environment filled with artistic objects and show them how history can talk through paintings and other objects.

Children in the XVIIth century

Today, children hold a very special place in society. They are recognized as being an essential part of society and the hope for our future. Therefore many efforts and services are geared to understanding their behavior and improving their education.

This is a fairly new concept. Up to the XIXth century, children were considered no more than an investment, a piece of property to be used as cheap labor, unless of course the child was part of a rich household in which case he had other duties to perform. In either case children were not considered part of the family unit completely until they reached a certain age.

There were several reasons for such an attitude. Infant mortality was extremely high (one out of five infants would die before their first birthday), and it was not considered appropriate for an upper class lady to nurse or to take personal care of her own children. The newborn would therefore be sent out of the household to be nursed, or a “wet nurse” would be called in to take care of the baby from the very first days.

In the XVIIth and the XVIIIth centuries newborn babies were clothed much differently than today’s newborn. After his or her birth, the baby was swaddled. After four months the arms would be freed but the breast and stomach and feet would still be covered to keep out cold air. The baby would remain swaddled for a long period of time, sometimes extending up to one year.

Other beliefs played a role in the use of swaddling:

1. It was believed that the baby's legs and feet would not deform.
2. The infant would not wiggle, and therefore it would be easier to take care of the child.
3. Safety (open fires).

XVIIth CENTURY FASHION

Children's clothing

The usual clothing for an infant would be a sort of nightgown worn over the underclothes (minishirt and the swaddling cloth). The little gown would be made of fine linen and delicately embroidered if the family was rich. A bonnet to match the outfit was also worn.

Embroideries were very complicated and expensive and the fabrics used to clothe the child were the same as for the adults. The purpose was to display the social status. The lower classes would dress their infants in a more basic way: wrappings made of materials such as flax, a very common fibre plant still used today, and cotton. Wrappings would also be made from old clothes or rags, the main objective being survival rather than display.

Boys and girls would be dressed alike until the age of five, after which time the two sexes would be treated and educated differently, following what was considered proper for each gender and social class. Children's fashions would then pretty much follow adult fashion.

Men's fashion

For France, the XVIIth century's importance was marked by the ascent to the throne of Louis XIV who became not only the absolute monarch, but also the leader in fashion in France and abroad. During his reign, (1638-1715), fashion was divided into three different periods and styles:

- A. Regency (1638-1661)
- B. The sun King (1661-1685)
- C. The setting Sun (1685-1715)

A. Regency

This time was marked by austerity under the direction of Cardinal Richelieu (1585-1642), who achieved the political ruin of the Protestants and reformed the country's finances, the army and the legislation. Being a very nationalistic minister he had forbidden all foreign imports. This was beneficial for the economy and also affected fashion. The result of this policy was the disappearance of lace (unless French made). All sorts of trinkets disappeared. Buttons were replaced by ribbons. However, silk ribbons were decorated with gold thread which made them just as expensive as buttons. Since lace and trinkets could not be used, the nobility and upper bourgeoisie showed their social status by adding more ribbons to their clothing.

After the death of Louis XIII in 1634, Queen Anne of Austria, his wife, nominated Cardinal Mazarin (1602-1661) as Prime Minister. In his efforts to curb the excessive use of precious commodities, he made the young king Louis XIV walk the streets in a simple velvet suit. The only result of this experiment was Mazarin's new nickname: "skinflint".

In August 1660 King Louis XIV married his cousin Marie-Therese of Austria for political reasons, and from this moment on the fashions and the code of behavior at Court would follow the king's directions.

Gentlemen's fashions during the Regency were long hair curled and dressed into pigtails, wide lace collar, coat draped over one shoulder and trimmed with gold braid and buttons, fitted doublet (close fitting jacket, with or without sleeves), matching Spanish breeches (very bulky, short trousers ending at the knees), boots worn with butterfly boot leathers (butterfly-shaped broad leather bands crossing the ankles in front), spurs and clogs.

B. The Sun King

During this period Louis XIV, called "le Roi Soleil" in French, played an extremely important role in the society of his time and in the development of fashion, dictating his own taste to the Court. In 1661, after the death of Cardinal Mazarin, Louis XIV announced to the Council that he would be the only one governing France. It was the beginning of "Absolutisme" (the king would rule with absolute and unlimited powers).

The king surrounded himself with a court that he could control and would consider him the focal point for everything. He set a very quick pace for new trends in order to be constantly the center of attention.

The fashion to follow during this period for the gentleman was a small hat covered with feathers and tiny bows, wide lace-edged collar and neck-cloth, short jacket with short sleeves, full shirt gathered at waist and wrist, over-skirt decorated with looped ribbons, and hose with lace frill over the knee. Proper grooming was essential, so particular care and attention were given to personal details.

Moustaches Men did not wear beards, but moustaches were popular. In order to keep their moustaches in shape men had to sleep with a "Bigotière" (a special curler for moustaches) on their upper lip.

Hair When Louis XIV began to grow bald, he started to use wigs, and so did his entourage. Men often mixed false hair with real but it was easier to shave their hair and wear a wig. At first wigs were faithful imitations of natural curled hair. Later they began to increase in size, with hair cascading down the back. The price of wigs changed according to the style and quality. Large wigs of natural human hair, fair or light brown, were the most expensive. Black wigs were the cheapest, with horse and goat hair used for them. The most popular wig was the "Allonge" with long curled hair falling over the shoulders, but this was only one of many. The king himself had many wigs. They were part of his daily wardrobe, and his personal "Coiffeur" would suggest the wig to wear during the day according to the time and the event.

Cravate This is the original name for what became the modern neck tie, even if the original length and shape were different. According to historians, this item was worn by Croatian soldiers and consisted of a large ribbon turned around the neck several times. French officers noticed it and started to wear it. Soon the fashion spread.

Made of linen or muslin with broad edges of lace, the cravate became even more famous when the King himself began to use it. Every morning a "Cravatier" (tie maker) would bring him an assortment of cravates to choose from. According to fashion, the cravate went twice around the neck and was tied behind. A second

neck-cloth was also worn, making the wrap so thick that its circumference was equal to that of the head, and the chin was buried in the neck-cloth, usually black.

Hats They were generally made of soft felt shaped in a cone, but later they were made of leather with a broad brim and feathers.

Gloves In the XVIIth century a pair of gloves was a customary gift at New Year. Materials used for gloves were leather and other types of fabrics such as silk and damask. Silk or velvet was also used for linings. Trimmings were made of embroidery, lace, both silver and gold, fringes, fur, silk and ribbon. Fringes were the most popular. Perfumed gloves were common use, the scents used being civet, cloves, musk, ambergris, jasmine, cinnamon, nutmeg, “benjamin” (benzoin) and floral scents. Gloves were worn, carried, or tucked into the belt.

Vest Like the Cravate, the “Vest” was a new creation in the XVIIth century that is still in use today. At first the vest was long, reaching to the knees and having sleeves. Later it became shorter and sleeveless.

Boots and Shoes During the first half of the XVIIth century the nobles wore boots with spurs attached, even on festive occasions. At the beginning of the century boots were narrow and came up only a little beyond the knee. Afterwards they became higher. The tops were lined with colored material, and reversed to show the material. Shoes did not change too much except in the second part of the century when the heels became much higher than before. Ribbons were used instead of rosettes on shoes, and boots were used only for riding.

Breeches Up to 1650 men were still wearing very wide breeches called “large cannons”. Their width was so excessive that they had to be pleated at the waist and resembled a short skirt. After 1660 the full breeches were considered unsuitable for daily use and became much tighter, shorter, and tied below the knees.

C. The Setting Sun

After the death of his wife Marie-Therese (1683), Louis XIV married Mme de Maintenon secretly and adopted a more sober style of clothing. He wore nothing but dark suits. His full outfit would include a small hat with narrow brim, rosette, and feather trim, shoulder length curled wig, neck-cloth, matching shirt, cuff and garters, a short jacket with short sleeves, matching overskirt, full breeches, and red-heeled shoes decorated with bows and rosettes.

Women’s Fashions

During the XVIIth century ladies’ fashions became more attractive and simple to wear. A frequently worn item was the “Robe à la Commode” (easy dress), with wide sleeves and wrist-bands, fastened at the elbow with ribbons. The outfit was in two parts: an open bodice laced or pinned at the front covering the lower skirt which hung straight with a few flat pleats at the side with wide sleeves and wrist-bands, fastened at the elbow with ribbons. Women began going to the hairdresser and paying great attention to their hairstyles.

One of the writers who gave a very clear picture of the fashion of the time was the Marquise de Sevigné (Marie de Rabutin-Chantal), born in Paris in 1626. She wrote more than 1,000 letters exchanging correspondence with her daughter and with famous people of her time such as Mme de la Fayette and the Cardinal Retz. These letters give us an idea how the aristocracy lived and thought, the famous people she encountered and the important events that took place. Her letters, however vivacious they might be, showed complete disinterest towards the middle class, and the lower classes were never mentioned unless for scandalistic purposes.

Since there were no fashion magazines to publish the latest fashions until the *Mercure Gallant* started publication in 1672, wax dolls in different styles and of different heights were sent to the Provinces. The dolls were named Little Pandora and Big Pandora. Even Mme de Sevigné sent one to her daughter to be sure that she understood exactly the fashion she was describing in one of her letters.

XVIIIth CENTURY FASHION

This century was marked by so many changes in fashion that it is one of the most complicated and difficult to follow.

Beginning with the reign of Louis XV (1710-1774), this century can be divided into two parts: 1) 1715-1750 and 2) 1750-1774.

Men's fashions 1715-1750

Men wore jackets and trousers with a jerkin (jacket worn over the doublet with a slightly longer skirt) worn either loose or tightly buttoned and padded with pleats. The three corner hat was still in style, but the wig disappeared, replaced by rat's tail haircuts. High heeled shoes went out of fashion.

Men's fashions 1750-1774

Men's fashions underwent a complete transformation after mid-century. Trousers reached to the ground and jackets became so narrow that they could not be buttoned. The sleeveless waistcoat was double breasted. Travel was more frequent, and as protection against foul weather encountered on the road, travelers wore high collared, many buttoned, greatcoats. Military dress became more comfortable and more uniform.

Women's fashions 1715-1750

During this period the society went through a phase of English influence called "Anglomanie" when Frenchwomen as well as Frenchmen did not hesitate to copy the English fashions. The most striking innovation during this period was the use of the "farthingale" (a padded roll worn around the hip), with "paniers" (panniers) or metal hoops. This fashion became so popular that even common women wore it to the market place. The width of these skirts was so vast that to pass through a doorway the wearer had either to go sideways or else to flatten to hoop by pressure on the flexible rings. The use of such device caused some embarrassing moments: since the ladies-in-waiting's skirts could hide the queen, an empty seat had to be left on either side of the queen. Later skirts with farthingales gave way to skirts whose folds had to be held in the hand. The bodice which was fitted in the front but loose in the back produced the famous "Pli Watteau". A great deal of material went into these dresses. Therefore light weight clothes were used to make these skirt.

Women's fashions 1750-1774

There was during this period a return to simplicity. Farthingales were out of fashion although protocol required their continued use in court dress for special occasions. Trains were long and full, and hair styles so high that powder wigs called chignons had to be used again.

At the end of Louis XV's reign, Marie Antoinette (1755-1793) felt finally free of her mother-in-law's control (Marie Leszczyńska, 1703-1768, daughter of the exiled King of Poland) and extravagance in fashion began.

The queen came under the influence of her dressmaker, Mlle Bertin, who acquired so much power that she was nicknamed “minister of fashion”. The arrangement of her wardrobe has been documented officially:

¥ douze grands habits de cour

(twelve heavily boned bodice, layered lace sleeve heavily trimmed skirt over a vast hoop and long train dresses)

¥ douze petites robes dites de fantaisie

(twelve informal dresses)

¥ douze robes riches sur panier pour le jeu ou le souper des petite appartements (twelve formal dresses for entertainment or supper)

were ordered for her three times a year, and many more according to the need.

Dresses became larger than ever, sometimes as much as sixteen feet around. They were generally made of tulle, decorated with embroidery, precious stones, ribbons and flowers. There were three main styles:

1. Polish

The bodice led into the skirt, or with a complete division at the waist, the skirt being set with tiny pleats into the bodice. As this was an open robe, it was worn with a skirt, usually of different material to the robe. The desired effect was a tiny waist; this was achieved by the use of small pads, or by lifting up the overskirt and arranging it in three swags of material (Galerie des Modes, 1778)

2. English

The fitted bodice was curved down at the center front and back with the fashionable width given by pads under the skirt.

3. Caraco

The skirt was much simpler with a very fitted jacket often made of linen or cotton, the material often being different from the skirt.

Women’s hair styles were so high that women had to kneel before their hairdresser and ride in their carriages in the same position. The most famous hair style was the model of a frigate called the “Belle Poule”, decorated with fruits and dolls, feathers and toys.

Male fashions were simpler: a straight-collared, open jacket and lap front trousers; a double-breasted, three collared cape called Carrick and a three-cornered hat which was often carried in the hand. Soldiers’ dress became more uniform: white trousers, a waistcoat and jacket, which was white in summer and black in winter. The color black appeared and was considered in the best of taste. Men still powdered their hair, but women went powderless, wearing high caps over low hair styles, a premonition of things to come.

THE FRENCH REVOLUTION (1789-1795)

The changes brought by the revolution affected all areas of French life including fashion. The middle class provided the firmest support for the Revolution and had the most to gain from the changes. Women were not excluded from interest in political ideas, but they were not considered equal, even by the philosophers of the time.

When the Sans Culottes first appeared in 1792, the costume consisted of a pair of trousers and a Carmagnole, a short jacket based on naval working dress. Suspenders were worn for the first time. The Sans Culottes wore also the red cap of shame symbolizing the new found liberty and freedom.

Robespierre (1758-1794) tried to introduce a national costume, but dress was not standardized until 1799: trousers worn with turned-down boots, blue or green coats, chin-tickling cravats, side whiskers and a tall hat.

Women's dresses were very simple too. For traveling the lady would use a tall hat with wide brim, trimmed with blue, white and red ribbon and rosettes, shoulder-length veil, redingote buttoned from neck to waist, large muff trimmed with silk bow, hat with upturned brim and feather trim, powdered wig, double muslin scarf tied at the back, half redingote of striped satin with belt and silk underskirt.

During Napoleon's time there was a return to simple designs. Women's clothes had a high waist-line with an Athenian look (classic look). They were also extremely light, so much so that the body shape was revealed.

Fashion followed the example of society and went from complicated and impractical as the "grand habit de cour" to simple and certainly less pretentious than before.

Fashion was not just a fundamental part of French industry, but a way of life, therefore it is easy to see that fashion does indeed give us the opportunity to assess the evolution of a country and gives us the chance to understand the reasons behind certain trends as well as certain events.

Clothing evolves again in the next century (XIXth) sometimes trying to revive past fashion, but the sumptuousness and wealth of these two centuries was lost forever.

HAIRSTYLE EIGHTEENTH CENTURY PRE-REVOLUTION

(figure available in print form)

Le pli Watteau.

(figure available in print form)

Fig. 430. Two Shoes, First Half of the Eighteenth Century

(figure available in print form)

Fig. 111. *Polonaises* . A and B (c. 1778), French; C, English.

HISTORY OF FAN

(figure available in print form)

Marie Antoinette.

MEN'S FASHION EIGHTEENTH CENTURY PRE-REVOLUTION

Fig. 89. A and B, *Perruque ^ noeuds* ; C and D, Tie-wig.

(Figure available in printed form)

Fig. 90. A and B, Catogan; C, Double Pigtail.

(Figures available in printed form)

In the early part of the eighteenth century the fan was generally in use among ladies of the middle classes. The *London Magazine*, in 1744, mentions fans two feet wide, and the writer remarks that by using them “a lady will soon screen herself and her family against all the inclemencies of the weather.” In the *Spectator*, Addison wrote his well-known and amusing satire: “Women are armed with fans as men with swords, and sometimes do more execution with them. To the end, therefore, that ladies may be entire mistresses of the weapon which they bear, I have erected an Academy for the training up of young women in the exercise of the fan, according to the most fashionable airs and motions that are now practiced at court. The ladies who carry fans under me are exercised by the following words of command: Handle your fans, Unfurl your fans, Discharge your fans, Ground your fans, Recover your fans, Flutter your fans. By the right observation of the few plain words of command, a woman of tolerable genius who will apply herself diligently to her exercise for the space of but one year shall be able to give her fan all the graces that can possibly enter into that modish little machine.” He continues: “There is an infinite variety of motions to be made use of in the flutter of a fan. There is the angry flutter, the modern flutter, the modest flutter, the timorous flutter, the merry flutter, and the amorous flutter. There is scarce any emotion in the mind which does not produce a suitable agitation in the fan—insomuch that if I only see the fan of a disciplined lady, I know well whether she laughs, frowns, or blushes. I have seen a fan so very angry that it would have been dangerous for the absent lover who provoked it to have come within the wind of it; and at other times so languishing, that I have been glad, for the lady’s sake, that the lover was at a certain distance from it.”

Lesson Plans 1,2,3

This unit will include three lesson plans, each one geared to better understanding through the different activities the fashion and the mentality of the XVIIth and the XVIIIth centuries.

Activity A

The students will be shown slides from the XVIIth and XVIIIth centuries. The slides offered will concentrate on the different styles of the two centuries. However because they include historically famous people, the teacher will have the opportunity to ask if:

1. Anyone recognizes the person shown.
2. What kind of person is he or she and how old does the individual look.
3. Does anything in the slide give a clue on his or her place in society.

This activity is part of the steps leading to Visualization, Background Check-up and Final Discussion.

A written assignment might follow, asking the student to describe the slide he or she liked the most and why.

Activity B

The student will be asked to draw a sketch of a costume of one of the periods of his or her choice. It might be a wig (hairstyle), dress, shoes etc.

The student must also specify the occasion the item has been devised for and who would use it (social class, woman, man, etc.)

Activity C: Making of a Fan

Materials sticks, cloth or paper, ribbon (optional), scissors, paints or crayons, glue, screw or pivot to connect the sticks.

The objective of this particular lesson is not only the making of a fan but also the drawing of particular French items, such as a flower (lily), a French monument (the Tour Eiffel), a curiosity (a wig). Anything that will excite the student's curiosity and is connected with the French culture will be suitable. In fact the student should feel free to choose his or her own item to draw.

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Materials for Classroom use

Slides XVIIth century

Champaigne, Philippe de—1602-74: *Cardinal de Richelieu*

Le Nain, Mathieu—1607-1677: *Guardroom scene*

Mignard, Pierre—1612-1695: *Grand Dauphin & Family*

Mignard, Pierre—1610-1695: *Portrait of Molière*

Rigaud, Hyacinthe—1659-1743: *Louis XIV, Portrait*

Rigaud, Hyacinthe—1659-1743: *Louis XV in Coronation Robes*

Slides XVIIIth century

Chardin, J.B.S.—1699-1779: *L'Enfant au Toton*

David, Jacques-L.—1748-1825: *A.L.Lavoisier & Wife*

David, Jacques-L.—1748-1825: *Napoleon Crossing the Alps*

David, Jacques-L.—1748-1825: *Coronation of Josephine*

David, Jacques-L.—1748-1825: *Coronation of Josephine: Napoleon & Josephine*

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Troy, Jean FranCois de—1679-1752: *La Lecture de MoliEre*

Vigée-Lebrun, Elizabeth—1755-1842: *Queen Marie Antoinette " en Gaulle "*

Vigée-Lebrun, E.L.—1755-1842: *Marie Antoinette and her Children*

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