**TITLE**

*How Clothes Speak: Men’s Fashions of the Antebellum Period*

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**INTRODUCTION**

Today’s modern business suit has its roots in the rapid technological changes of America’s first industrial period, the Antebellum years of 1820 to 1860. This period saw the demise of cocked hats, powdered wigs, buckle shoes, and breeches. Men embraced full-length “trowsers,” experimented with new styles of facial hair, expressed their individuality through an incredible variety of hat styles, and dabbled with the very first silk neckties. Clothing became less formal and comfortable, and it even became more democratic as advances in production and shipping technology lowered clothing prices. Ready-made garments and the increased variety of available fabrics gave the common man access to fashionable clothing styles and cuts.

The rise of photography during this same period has given us a wealth of material to study and examine. Unlike earlier periods, students can see how these clothes were worn in context and not in an idealized or even stylized manner like the painted portraits of old.

**LEVEL**

Middle and high school level (grades 8-12)

**OBJECTIVES**

At the conclusion of this lesson, students will . . .

* identify and describe how clothing of the period indicated one’s status or profession.
* list the common pieces of clothing worn by men of the mid-19th Century
* appreciate the role of fashion in not only the lives of their ancestors, but also in their own lives today

**TIME**

One day (if working within a framework of 40-45 minute periods)

**MATERIALS**

You will need the following materials in your classroom to introduce and complete this lesson:

* Reproduction or original clothing of the period. This may include the following items: wool or canton flannel drawers, knit long-sleeve undershirt (red, blue, gray, or tan with paper-backed tin buttons), pleated linen or homespun shirt (falling or stand-up collar), wool sack coat/paletot/frock coat of period manufacture, wool or silk vest of period design, corduroy/wool/linen trowsers of period cut and fit, wool socks, leather boots or shoes of period design, fur felt top hat or men’s hat of the period.
* “How Clothes Speak” Power Point presentation

**PROCEDURES**

To execute this lesson, use or modify the following procedures to meet your unique classroom needs:

1. Open your class with a discussion of what makes something fashionable today. Ask your students to suggest “looks,” fabrics, and styles that they feel reflect the height of fashion in their lives. Move the discussion towards identifying different “looks” and the attitudes that come with them. Ask your kids why they might wear one outfit one day and another on another day. Wrap up the discussion with a short, written prompt that asks them to journal on the following idea:

*“Do clothes make the man, or does the man make the clothes?”*

1. Show your class the Power Point presentation entitled, “How Clothes Speak” and stop and pause it in areas that you best feel offer a chance for sharing and discussion. Have your students point out details from the photos and challenge them to speculate on how one might interpret those details. Feel free to adapt the presentation or add to it in any way that you would like!
2. Prior to class, set up a table or mannequin that adequately displays sample clothing from the period. I prefer to actually wear the clothing items and demonstrate things such as tilting the hat in a jaunty fashion and tying the cravat. I then leave the items on display on a table for the remainder of the week. I recommend that you give your students the opportunity to handle or try-on the clothing items for themselves at some point during the week or even the day of the presentation.
3. Conclude your class with a journal prompt or discussion that allows kids to share any “ah-ha!” moments that they gathered from the presentation. Have your kids share these ideas with those sitting around them. If time, try to pull at least five ideas from the whole group and list them on the board.

**ASSESSMENT**

Assessment, of course, would be at the discretion of the classroom teacher. I recommend that the teacher assess the students for their participation in the activities presented. As the material here is very subjective, the students should be focused on immersing themselves in the experience rather than trying to memorize or regurgitate haute couture of the 19th Century. Students in this activity are asked to suggest orally thoughts that they have on fashion. How this would be scored/evaluated I leave up to the individual teacher to tailor to their specific classroom setting.

**EXTENSION IDEAS**

This activity could be extended in several different ways. Groups of students could evaluate period photographs and be asked to identify as to the profession, wealth, location, status, or personality of the man depicted. Individual photographs could be placed around the room and groups could rotate from photo to photo at prescribed intervals keeping a journal of their ideas. At the end of class, each group could report on their findings to the rest of the class.

Old photos could also serve as prompts to creative writing pieces. Using their knowledge of historic garments, students could practice their descriptive writing through poems or narrative pieces that infuse details taken from period photos. Students could describe a man in a photo using fashion terms and speculate on the man’s status or profession. The teacher could redistribute the photos and descriptions to different students around the room. Students could then be asked to match the description in their hands with the corresponding photo elsewhere in the room.

**SOURCES**

**Web resources**

* The Authentic Campaigner Website and Forums   
   http://www.authentic-campaigner.com/
* Elizabeth Stewart Clark http://www.elizabethstewartclark.com/

**Books**

* *Introduction to Civil War Civilians* by Juanita Leisch
* *Who Wore What?* by Juanita Leisch

**Manufacturers of authentic historic clothing of the period**

* Corner Clothiers http://www.cornerclothiers.com
* Homespun Wares http://www.homespunwares.com/
* The Richmond Depot http://www.kabar44.com/
* The Jersey Skillet Licker http://www.skilletlicker.com/
* TP&H Trading Company http://www.benderhats.com/
* Tim Allen Hats http://www.timallenhats.com/
* Carter and Jasper <http://www.carterandjasper.com/>
* Tom Mattimore Shoes and Boots <http://www.civilwarboots.com/>
* Originals by Kay http://www.originals-by-kay.com/clothing/men/





