

Costumes for the Stage
Who, What, Why, When and How

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Overview of the unit, which will assist readers in locating usable plans for their classes

Rationale, gives the reasons for writing the unit

Objectives indicate what the students should achieve by the end of this unit. It also addresses the Pittsburgh Public School standards that should be met.

Strategies are outlined to indicate ways the teacher will assist the student to meet the standards as indicated

Classroom Activities is a detailed description of suggested activities the students will engage in to meet the stated activities

Bibliography is a list of Books, Webb sites, Videos that teachers might use in teaching

Resource List can be useful in locating supplies needed for demonstrations and projects

Appendices will contain Definition lists, Supply lists, Rubrics, Sketch bodies, other Evaluation forms

Overview

Plays are more than people on a stage mouthing words. Each is a combination of efforts that make it function and have meaning. Plays create spaces in time where we can focus on the bits of society that interest us. It allows us to travel on flights of fancy. It might tumble us into the tough, sneaky world of political intrigue. We can, through plays, meander along trails of romantic interludes, or travel back into childhood memories.

Whatever reasons we seek out plays that appeal to us, most of us have a very limited view of what happens behind the scenes to make a play function. Some questions we must ask are “What skills are needed to function in a positive manner as a costume person?” “What information is necessary to know that will assist me in this endeavor?”

As students develop their abilities in areas of costume design they will gain a clearer understanding of the technical aspects of production and performance. To become more conscious of the design and/or style of a show requires an understanding of a variety of theatrical productions. Students will recognize this by analyzing the technical requirements necessary for selected productions.

Costumes tell a story of their own. They speak of age, personality, careers, financial status, religion, country of origin, ethnicity, personal history, and personal interests. The costumers' job is to make sure the statements made by the costumes matches the storyline of the play. To this end the costume teacher, must see that students responsible for the designing and constructing of costumes have a good understanding of how to interpret the authors or directors intent. Therefore a large part of this unit will focus on asking questions and seeking answers. Thus we can ensure that all costumes are as true a representation of the authors or directors vision as possible.

Discussion and lessons in this unit of study will include analytical play reading, intensive note taking, the making of costume, color, and action plots, and the study of the principles of design. Emphasis will be placed on the artistic possibilities of costume design through basic drawing activities and creative skills.

Rationale

This unit is written for teachers of students, middle through high school level, who desire to understand the procedure for properly addressing the dressing of a school, or community production. The researching of information for this unit will encourage students to engage in activities that raise their levels of reading comprehension and analytical proficiency. The resultant end task skills will carry over into other educational disciplines.

The teaching of costume is a continuous process for both teacher and student because the clothing of today is tomorrows' historical costume. It is also a forward thinking endeavor because much of what is conceived for the stage of today becomes the fad of the near future.

As potential designers of costumes we need to familiar with the fabrics and supplies used to create the fashions worn historically. We must also learn to be bold in the use of fabrics for current shows.

This unit will meet many of the districts literacy initiatives because of the volume of reading, analytical writing, discussions and oral presentations that are an integral part of understanding and meeting the needs of each production.

Objectives

The Course objectives are designed to address the many concerns of the subject area. Our primary concern is that we answer all of the questions posed in the title of this unit. We want to know “**WHO**” the costumes are for, “**WHAT** should the characters wear”, “**WHY** should they wear that particular piece?” What does it enhance? What does it represent? “**WHEN**” should certain pieces be worn?. “**WHERE**” should that costume be worn? “**HOW**” should that costume be worn to greatest effect, and to show what the director is trying to get across.

As we neither live nor learn in a vacuum a good teacher recognizes that most lessons have more than one educational outcome. Costume is an art form. It is also an ongoing history and literature class. So one of our objectives is to feed into and build on those areas with the work we do in the costume department.

- The students will be able to work cooperatively with other individuals and within groups.
- Students will view and critique the costumes worn in selected shows with an eye for what does and doesn't work well. They will demonstrate the ability to solve design problems.
- The student will read analytically all plays presented for their inspection. They will be able to evaluate both orally and in writing the issues involved in dressing selected shows.
- Students will develop the ability to make critical evaluations of the quality of their own work.
- Students will have a working knowledge of related careers

The final outcome for this unit will be that the students reach the benchmarks of the district standards as they study {see standards in the appendix}

Student Outcomes

- Students will learn to appreciate a variety of production genres as they study the clothing worn.
- Students will develop a working vocabulary of art, design and aesthetics
- Students will have an understanding of fashion history, its development, and it's relation to modern day dress.
- Students will understand how to work with ready-made clothing to gain a desired costume effect.
- Students will know how to turn critical analysis of their work into a positive learning experience.

- Students will design and construct an original costume.
- Students will know how to fashion a color, action and costume plot based on the play (s) read.
- Students will strengthen their reading comprehension and writing skills

Strategies

To meet the standards of learning and attain the information necessary for this unit the student will be exposed to a multiplicity of works.

As previously stated, the literacy component, which the school district of Pittsburgh has endorsed, focuses on each learning area as part of the building block for total literacy for the students. This means that this unit will deliberately include reading, research, writing, computer use, and oral presentation as part of the teaching strategy.

The students will keep a daily journal that they might better organize ideas. Part of the journal will be assigned to focus on thoughts, feelings, what you learned, what was good or bad, and what could have been done differently. We all have hindsight and this allow us to contain things we might otherwise forget.

Discussions of that which was read will encourage everyone to form an opinion. We need to be strong in our opinions if we are to be creative. The discussions will also teach us to listen to the opinions of others and increase our ability to be cooperative as we work in groups.

Individual work and practice away from the teachers influence are part of a strategy to foster the students' own creativity.

Allowing the student to be a viable part of his or her own evaluation process forges their desire to be successful for themselves.

As the teacher models proper behavior in seeking answers the students follow his/her lead toward successful behavior.

Part of the teaching strategy for this unit will be to expose the students to as many professionals in the theatre fields as we can. This will be accomplished through "Master classes" on campus, field trips and tours to the professionals arena, to the local universities, museums and to view as many productions as can be afforded.

The following lesson plans manifest the strategies spoken of through the daily work required of each student.

Lesson Plans

The type of school and kind of productions done in that school will determine the time frame for this series of lessons. Performing arts schools will see this as an ongoing unit because the numbers of productions are many in a school year. The high school that puts on a yearly major production might see this in terms of several months because it could take several months from conception to completion of the costumes needed. Elementary and middle schools can use this in a minor way even if there isn't a major performance. It can be used to focus on how and where costumes can be made or gotten from.

The lessons will be written in the order of their use with examples of each shared in enough detail that neither teacher nor student need guess at the meaning. A full reproducible packet will be located at the end of the unit.

Lesson #1

The lesson begins with **READING** the selected play. As students read the play they will take **NOTES**. These notes will enable the reader to gather information about the country of origin, season(s), place(s), and time(s) of day the action takes place. Sometimes this is not specific and must be surmised based on what is occurring at the time.

The continued studying allows the readers to place a name to all of the **CHARACTERS**. As the characters surface their peculiarities are noted. What specifically should be looked for in **PERSONALITY TRAITS** and **PHYSICAL FEATURES**?

- Are they happy, or sad?
- Do they exude confidence or are they a shy, mousy person?
- Does the wording give them the reputation for being lazy, sleazy, bright, sunny, motherly, or street corner fast?
- Is the character tall or short
- Should they appear fat or thin
- Are there parts that should be emphasized for effect or not?
- What is their nationality
- Are they light of skin or dark
- Is their hair long, short, curly, straight, red, black, or gray?

When all of the character indications have been gleaned, through the more obvious, visible traits, the costumer must then make color decisions for each

character. Society has assigned fairly specific associations for color. It is up to the costume person(s) to decide how to use this color symbolism to advance the characterization of the persons in the play. According to the common usage of the color chart the following is put forth:

- Red – is warm aggressive strong, anger
- Blue - is aloof, receding, passive, sad
- Yellow – is warm, happy, flighty, coward
- Black – is receding, older, gloomy, dangerous
- White – is advancing, peaceful, young, clean, good
- Orange – full of life, advancing, danger
- Green – cool, calm, healthy, fresh, jealousy
- Violet - aristocratic, great wealth
- Brown - Dull, calming

It is essential that the ideas of personality, physical features and color usage be discussed to generate plans for each person’s costumes

Lesson #2

The next lesson plan will be to create costume, color and action plots for each character.

These plots will be based on the information gotten from reading and discussing the play. Each student will generate a plot for all, or teacher assigned characters. At this time no specific costume will be designed, rather they will indicate that the character will wear a dress, slacks, dress suit. Etc. (see – example)

COSTUME SUGGESTIONS

Character	Act#1 (pool)	Act#2 (dance)	Act#3 (Church)
Name: Alice Age: 16 Personality: Friendly sunny, young, Phys. Description: Tall, slim. Lge. bust, long hair Colors: yellow, pink, blue	One piece bathing suit with over blouse Jeans pullover top	Simple one piece dress – Skirt and top - Slacks and sweater set	Frilly dress- hat-purse - simple heels Suit contrasting blouse. Soft colors
Name: Jazz			

<p>Age: 16 Personality: Bold, aggressive, fun loving, friendly, mature Phys. Description: Short, tiny, wild hair</p>	<p>2 piece bikini Short shorts, Halter top</p>	<p>Short skirt, Tight fitting top, Bright color. Low rise jeans belly shirt</p>	<p>Suit with short skirt. Swing skirt. Bright colors. No hat</p>
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Lesson #3

This is the point when the students will research the clothing people wore at the time of the production. The teacher will introduce them to the many ways they can secure factual and fantasized information about the clothing that finds it's way on stage.

The students will look at videos of authentic clothing of the era in question. They will look at history books, clothing dictionaries, costume books, and costume Webb sites. This shows them exactly what all people wore from the least affluent to the most.

Next, they will look at available movies with characters in that time and similar situations. Many of these costumes will be stylized. This means they have the look of the clothing of that time but have subtle differences that make them have a more modern look.

Note taking becomes an important factor at this time because the students need to remember what they saw as they did their research. These notes will be discussed in detail as decisions are made about possible costumes.

Lesson#4

Based on their studies, the students will sketch costumes they think will work for the characters they were assigned to dress. Each character has been at this time assigned colors, attitudes, etc. that will influence the clothing they will wear.

The designers will employ all of the principles of design they have learned prior to these lessons. Using these concepts of color, lines, texture, contrast, shape. emphasis, Etc. the students will produce a variety of sketches for discussion. They will also attach fabric swatches, when available, to indicate what the outfit will look like

For those classes where students won't design costumes but will rent, or scour the thrift shops instead, there isn't the need to focus on this lesson. They might instead select pictures from a variety of sources to have a visual of what to look for as they seek venues for their costumes.

Lesson#5

These costumes must be reflective of the authors, and/or director's vision. Thus we come to the lesson where it is important to learn to work collaboratively with all of the stakeholders in the production.

Does the director have very specific ideas of how the characters should look? . What colors are going to be on the stage? Costumes will be a focal point and not be lost in the colors elsewhere on the stage.

What has the lighting person designed for the stage? Some colors reflect better than others. Make sure this is worked on during this discussion period.

Will this production have dance scenes? Have the costumers taken the movement into consideration when creating? The students should sit in on a dance rehearsal early in the process so they might devise pieces that can be worn with comfort.

This is the time in the design process to clarify all costume needs.

Even in classes where sewing isn't a part of the process, the discussion of costume needs is necessary. And if there is more than one person working towards the producing of a play it becomes necessary to work cooperatively for a positive finish.(see Rubric on group work in appendix)

Lesson #6

This lesson deals with the acquisition of patterns and the building of costumes for the production. During this period, designers spend lots of time with the characters. They work as follows:

- Measure all actors accurately
- Purchase/make patterns for each character
- Purchase fabrics/supplies for costumes
- Cut /begin construction
- First fitting session
- Continue construction

- Second/last fitting session
- Participate in costume parade and dress rehearsal
- Make adjustments deemed necessary after dress.

Lesson #7

Evaluation of everything that was done for the production comes at this point. The students must look at what was learned. They must learn to critique themselves and their peers. We learn from both our success and our mistakes. Therefore we have after play discussions and we fill out evaluation forms. This will assist the teacher in final grades for this particular project (see Rubrics for construction – peer – self evaluation at end of unit).

BIBLIOGRAPHY

This is a very limited list of resources for researching fashion history and purchasing needed supplies for building costumes for selected shows. For each item listed there are many, many more. Since the list keeps changing and growing there will never be a dearth of information to choose from.

BOOKS

A Perfect Fit, Joslet, Jenna, Owl Books Pub. 2001
Clothes, Clues, and Careers, Vanderhoff, Margil, Ginn Co. Pub. 1984
Clothing, Fashion, Fabric and Construction, McGraw-Hill Pub. 1997
Fabric Sewing Guide, Scheffler, Claire, Chilton Pub. 1998
Fashion Drawing, Thames Bill, Glencoe Pub. 1996
History of Costume, Payne Blanche, Harper and Rowe Pub. 1965
Pattern Making for Fashion Design, Armstrong, Helen, Harper/Collins Pub. 1998
Plays, The Drama Magazine for Young People, Plays Inc. Boston MA.
Play Production Today Beck, Roy National Textbook Co. Ill. Pub. 1987
Stage Costumes and How to Make Them, Thompkins, Julia Plays Pub. 1969

Magazines /Major Publications

Sew News
Sewing Savey
Threads
All Fashion Magazines
Womens Wear Daily (newspaper)

Webb Sites

Encarta
www.costumes.org
www.reasofelegance.com
www.library.kent.edu
www.fashionabout.com
www.accessoryweb.com
www.lindyhopping.com
www.fashion.net
www.thecostumepage
www.fashionicon
www.thehistoryofcostume
www.hollywood-costumes.com
www.theatrelibrary.org/links/Technologies.html

Resources

Clotilde Inc. - B3000 - Louisiana, Mo 63353
H.P.Farber Co - Sewing Supplies.- Trenton, N.J.
G - Street Fabrics, Rockville Md.
Hancock Fabrics
Jo-Ann Fabrics
Vintage Dress Stores
Second hand stores (Salvation Army – Goodwill)
Local Museums

Pittsburgh Public Schools Content Standards **[Please see charts immediately following this page]**

The following standards have been met in this curricular unit

- Communications 1-9
- Family and Consumer Science 1
- Mathematics 2,4,6
- Arts and Humanities3,4
- Citizenship 1,7,8,,11
- Science and Technology 9
- Career Education and Work 1,2,3,4

RUBRICS and EVALUATION FORMS

Costume Design Checklist

Students Name: _____

Peer Reviewers Name: _____

Date: _____

Resources ___ Used a variety of resources when collecting information
 ___ Consulted resources that showed different perspectives on the
topic

 ___ Used electronic resources [internet, C-D ROMS]
 ___ Used print resources [books, magazines etc.]

Preparation ___ Planned time wisely to assure success
 ___ Brainstormed questions that needed to be answered about the
costumes

 ___ Brainstormed details and accessories to help support
costumes

 ___ Used feedback from others to refine costumes

Media Use ___ Used original art, animations, or photographs of costumes

Appearance ___ Costumes are appropriate to the era of the play
 ___ Costumes are consistent with the setting of the play
 ___ Costumes do not blend into the set or camouflage the actors
 ___ The leads were dressed to give them stage dominance
 ___ Fabric swatches were included with costume rendering

PEER/ SELF EVALUATION

Student name _____ Peer Name _____

Project Description

How would you rate the overall presentation on a scale of 1 – 4

___ Interesting ___ Creative ___ Fun

___ Informative ___ Concise

Given a chance would you have done anything differently? Explain in detail.

Other Comments/ Grade