

# FASHION TEACHERS' RESOURCE

*Explore the fashion and textiles  
collections at the home of creativity  
Key Stage 3–4*

# V&A

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### Introduction

The V&A has collected fashion and textiles since the mid 19th century. The collection now includes around a hundred thousand objects, from buttons and ballgowns to silks and lace.

The Fashion gallery (Room 40) shows European fashion, fabrics and accessories from 1750 to the present day. The emphasis is on progressive and influential design. The gallery is organised into displays that reflect key concepts in the collection, from Court and Country to Radical Fashion. It includes iconic designs by Coco Chanel, Christian Dior, Mary Quant, Vivienne Westwood, John Galiano and Alexander McQueen.

Explore fashion and textiles elsewhere in the Museum. Visit Britain 1500–1900 (especially Rooms 53a and 143), Asia (Rooms 41, 42, 44, 45 and 47e) and 20th Century (Room 76)

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### Pre-visit activities

Imagine you have been tasked with collecting four key garments for a display about contemporary fashion. Research fashion blogs and websites. Look at today's silhouettes, textiles and patterns. Make an online scrapbook or use your sketchbook to record your selection.

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### The Museum visit

The Fashion gallery has 18 displays organised chronologically. We recommend rotating small groups around the displays.

Download the accompanying student activity sheets, which focus on the themes below. Start with the Introductions activity to help navigate the gallery displays.

#### Inspiration

Fashion designers take inspiration from many different sources, including history, culture, art and music. Find out how East Asian art and the clean straight lines of the Japanese kimono inspired designers at the turn of the 20th century; how the excavation of Tutankhamen's tomb in 1922 inspired a wave of Egyptian infused fashions in the sophisticated and glamorous Art Deco style; and, how in the 1970s, the energy of London's punk scene inspired Vivienne Westwood and Malcolm McLaren to create iconic androgynous and improvised designs.

#### Innovation

Innovation is a key theme in the gallery. Displays show developments in the dyeing and fabric-printing industry and inventions such as the 'cage crinoline' in the 19th century. These changes increased choice and revolutionised women's fashion. In the second half of the 20th century, experimentation with new synthetic materials like plastics and paper led to disposable and futuristic designs.

#### Silhouette

Some of the most extreme silhouettes date back to the exaggerated court dress of the 1700s. These often featured narrow waists paired with over-sized and protruding skirts. Explore the gallery further to see how the 20th century saw a new freedom for women, with Coco Chanel famously championing the trouser suit. Couturiers in the 1950s favoured slender waists and full skirts again. This was popularised by Christian Dior's 'New Look'. In contrast the gallery shows how a deconstructed silhouette emerged in the 1980s, drawing again on the influence of the East. Designers such as Yohji Yamamoto challenged conceptions of the fashionable body, with expanded and asymmetrical designs.

#### Embellishment

In the 19th century, couture houses produced exquisitely made clothes using silks, furs, lace and embroidery. The displays are rich with examples of these, as well as garments featuring ruching, appliqué, piping and beading.

#### Pattern

The gallery reveals how pattern was particularly flamboyant in the 1960s and '70s. A new generation of fashion and textile designers, including Zandra Rhodes and Bill Gibb, emerged from the Royal College of Art, creating their own patterned textiles for their designs.

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### Follow-up activities / find out more

- Compile ideas from your visit to create your own collection. Make a lookbook or mood board.
- Work with a partner to invent radical new silhouettes. Build different forms directly onto your partner's body using paper and card.
- Try to create unusual and interesting surface textures using a range of everyday materials, such as paper, plastic, bubble wrap and wire. How could you recreate these in fabric?
- For inspiration explore Search the Collections, the V&A's collection online:  
<http://collections.vam.ac.uk/>
- Watch videos of catwalk presentations by contemporary designers at the V&A:  
<http://www.vam.ac.uk/fashioninmotion>