



***Pockets to Purses: Fashion + Function***  
Lesson Plan - Creating the Fashion Figure

**Abstract:** This lesson plan focuses on the ways that pockets and purses are essential in creating a fashionable silhouette. It will draw from the accessories and garments in *Pockets to Purses: Fashion + Function* to analyze each object as a function of fashion. For the first part of the lesson, students will be given a brief introduction to the history of pockets and purses since 1800. Students will then visit the museum exhibition featuring both garments with pockets as well as other accessories. They will then be encouraged to think critically about the objects they see, and to create original work inspired by the exhibition's content.

**Grade/Level:** High school, grades 9-10

**Subject:** Visual Arts, Fashion History, Accessories Design, Fashion Design

**Time Required:** 1 hour, 15 minutes

**Materials Required:**

- Bristol paper
- Markers
- Watercolor paint
- Paint brushes
- Pencil
- Eraser

**Educational Standards:** New York State Learning Standards for Arts Education, grades 9-12  
(<http://www.p12.nysed.gov/ciai/standards.html>)

- Standard 1: Creating, Performing, and Participating in the Arts  
Students will actively engage in the processes that constitute creation and performance in the arts (dance, music, theatre, and visual arts) and participate in various roles in the arts.
- Standard 2: Knowing and Using Arts Materials and Resources  
Students will be knowledgeable about and make use of the materials and resources available for participation in the arts in various roles.
- Standard 3: Responding to and Analyzing Works of Art  
Students will respond critically to a variety of works in the arts, connecting the individual work to other works and to other aspects of human endeavor and thought.
- Standard 4: Understanding the Cultural Contributions of the Arts  
Students will develop an understanding of the personal and cultural forces that shape artistic communication and how the arts in turn shape the diverse cultures of past and present society.

**Lesson Overview:** After visiting the exhibition and learning the ways people have historically utilized both pockets and purses, the students will apply those concepts to contemporary fashion. They will create a fashion illustration that utilizes either pockets or purses as part of their design's silhouette. By allowing

high schoolers to visit the exhibition and relate it to their own interests and that of the class, there is an added level of context for the students and their interpretations of the exhibition. Ideally, their designs will directly reference at least one of the objects seen in the exhibition.

### Lesson Objectives:

- Reinterpreting historical objects to create contemporary designs
- Understanding the historical approaches to pockets and purses
- Critical thinking about how these objects relate to their societal context
- Experimenting with the ways pockets and purses differ to accommodate a variety needs

### Time Breakdown:

- 10 minutes: Background and overview of session. Establish general rules and introduce activity.
- 35 minutes: Tour exhibition
- 5 minutes: Discussion
- 25 minutes: Introduce design contest for individuals. Students will create an original design for an entire outfit that is inspired by the exhibition. Winners will receive a prize and/or be featured on our exhibition website. If time allows, students may begin the assignment during class.

### Gallery Tour: [35 minutes]

These questions should be utilized to help guide the students as they visit the exhibition. They are designed to inspire critical thinking that will help them apply historical approaches to pockets and purses to a contemporary context.

1. Eighteenth century pocket/Man's waistcoat:  
Consider why men's and women's methods of carrying their belongings were different. What kind of life would each individual lead?  
*Answers may consider women's roles inside the home and men's presence in the public sphere. This is echoed by the placement of these pockets: a woman's were worn under skirts while a man's were built into his coat or waistcoat and were visible.*
2. Reticule bag from man's waistcoat:  
Point out this literal instance of a woman's fashion appropriating a menswear design. Urge the students to keep this in mind as they continue through the exhibition and ask them to point out any other examples of objects shifting from men's to women's items (or vice versa).  
*Appropriation of the opposite gender's pocket and purse elements can be seen in the watch pocket on the woman's bodice, miser's purses, the briefcase bag, the "murse," the Versace suit jacket, etc.*
3. Nineteenth century woman's bodice with watch pocket (blue):  
Consider why a woman would need such a small pocket. Are there any similar examples of pockets designed for particular objects in our clothes today?  
*Answers may include pockets built especially for electronics and other similar utilitarian designs.*
4. Man's black overcoat:  
Point out the ticket pocket. As with the watch pocket on the blue bodice, consider the way pockets were designed for particular objects.  
*See answer for number 3.*
5. Molyneux dress:  
Introduce Molyneux as a designer. Point out the nearby Schiaparelli ads and explain the way Molyneux used the same silhouette as the belt bags to create a silhouette to emphasize the waist.  
*Molyneux and Schiaparelli were both Parisian designers working in the first half of the twentieth century. Their designs are compared here to highlight the tensions between fashion and function. Schiaparelli's bags are utilitarian wartime designs while Molyneux utilized the same silhouette to instead emphasize a fashionable nipped waist.*
6. Bonnie Cashin raincoat:

Ask: What was happening in the midcentury in terms of women's equality? Why would a designer like Cashin create clothes like this rain jacket?

*Bonnie Cashin emphasized practicality and functionality in her designs. Often, this included deep, practical pockets that would be appealing to mid-century women who were entering the workforce. Similarly, her designs for handbags allowed for women to have purses also created with function in mind. This relates to the fact that women were becoming increasingly autonomous in the public sphere during this period.*

7. Novelty bags:

Ask: Were these bags more functional or fashionable or both?

*Answers may vary.*

8. Bill Blass dress vs. historical pocket:

Consider the evolution of the pockets that we have just encountered. How have the students' understandings of pockets and purses changed?

*Answers may vary.*

**Discussion:** [5 minutes]

Under the leadership of the instructor, students will recount highlights from the exhibition and brainstorm potential objects to be used as inspiration for an original design.

**Activities/Projects:** [25 minutes]

Drawing on the various objects seen in the exhibition and how they relate to their historical context, students will create an original design that utilizes a pocket or purse as a way to establish a silhouette. The assignment will be given in class and completed at home.

Students will begin by sketching an ensemble that features pockets on the garments or incorporates a bag. Ideally, the designs should be for entire outfits, or a complete silhouette. Detail and color may be added at will.

**Due Date:** Students will have one week to complete the assignment. (Due March 24)

**Educational Objectives:** Students will have the opportunity to engage in the creative practice of accessories design through linking the past with the present. Through studying historical pockets and purses, students will think critically about how these objects relate to larger society. By designing their own garments featuring handbags or pockets, students will be able to experiment with the interplay between fashion and function.

**Assessment:** Designs by successful students will:

- use a historical pocket as a reference in their design
- reflect one or more themes discussed in the tour, such as appropriating menswear, advances in technology, etc.
- show interpretation of the functional aspect of pockets and purses by integrating at least one element of personalization
- be categorized as contemporary fashion by relating the design to today's societal context
- demonstrate an understanding of fashion illustration, drawing from previous sessions in the course

**Relevant Vocabulary:**

- Reticule
- Minaudiere
- Purse
- Tote

**Resources:**

- [bibliography]