

BEYOND REBELLION

Lesson Plan

Beyond Rebellion: Fashioning the Biker Jacket

Abstract: This lesson uses the biker jacket as a way to explore the similarities and differences between the jacket as a utilitarian garment and as a staple of high fashion. Students will visit the museum exhibition, think critically about the objects they see, and sketch their own biker jackets based on the similarities and differences between the *Perfecto* and the *Versace*.

Grade Level: High school senior or college freshman

Subject: Visual Arts

Time Required: 1 hour and 40 minutes

Materials Required: Sketchpad and pencils

Educational Standards: New York State Educational Guideline for Lessons in the Visual Arts, Grade 12, Standard 1

“Students will actively engage in the processes that constitute creation and performances in the arts (dance, music, theatre, and visual arts) and participate in various roles in the arts.”

Lesson Overview: The biker jacket was originally designed as a utilitarian garment to protect motorcyclists from the elements. Later, due to Hollywood’s adoption of the biker jacket in films such as *The Wild One*, the garment became a symbol of rebellious youth culture and a status of “cool.” Since then, fashion designers have sought inspiration from the biker jacket and have incorporated its utilitarian features into their own designs for high fashion.

Lesson Objectives:

- Analyze the biker jacket as a functional utilitarian garment versus later interpretations of high fashion, by comparing two biker jackets from the exhibition (the *Perfecto* versus the *Versace* fringed jacket)
- To learn and understand the similarities and differences between functional utilitarian garments and high fashion
- To learn and think critically about fashion

Discussion Steps:

- At the entrance of the gallery, introduce the exhibition. Inform the students that they will see the entire exhibition but will focus specifically on two jackets for this lesson (the *Perfecto* and the *Versace* fringe jacket)
- At the gallery, point out the *Perfecto* jacket. Ask the students to describe the *Perfecto* jacket. Ask the students if the jacket reminds them of something that would be worn by a motorcyclist.
- Does the jacket look unusual or different to them? What about this jacket looks different from the rest of the jackets featured in the exhibition? Have the students list features of the jacket that they think would provide protection for motorcyclists. Point out the utilitarian features of the garment and explain the original purpose of each.

- Ask students who they imagine would wear this jacket. Where do they think it would be worn? Point out that the outfit also served as a symbol of rebellion and was worn by adolescents as a symbol of “cool.” Why do you think the *Perfecto* was adopted as a symbol of rebellion?
- Next, point out the *Versace* jacket. Ask the students to describe what they see and who they think would wear this jacket today.
- Ask the students if the jacket seems familiar or old fashioned. Have the student lists several features of the jacket that resemble the *Perfecto* (e.g. the classic *Perfecto* silhouette and functional features such as the asymmetrical zipper)
- What are the differences between the *Perfecto* and the *Versace* jackets? Ask the student which they prefer and why.

Activities/Projects:

- In the gallery, remind the students of what they saw. Give the students twenty minutes to make a sketch of a biker jacket that combines utilitarian features with fashion. Ask the students to think about the contrast between utilitarian fashion and high fashion while they create their sketches. Ask the students to think about where they could wear this new jacket and whom they would want to wear their jacket.

Assessment:

- Students will present and discuss their sketches in the classroom and explain which of their design features are functional or fashionable.
- Students will explain why they chose certain features for their designs and will describe who they imagine wearing their new biker jackets.
- Ask the students to examine their own clothing. Which features of their own clothing are functional or fashionable?
- Ask the students to explain the differences between utilitarian and fashion garments. Why do you think fashion designers adopted functional elements into their designs?
- Ask the students whether or not they think fashion is contributing to the idea of rebellion as a commodity. Can you think of other examples where fashion appropriates and simplifies cultural products or ideals?