Practitioner Article

A Passion for Fashion: Studying Fashion through Children's Literature

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ABSTRACT

Many middle and high school students used the internet during the pandemic to delve more deeply into their interests. One of those areas was the exploration of the fashion industry. However, some students may need more background knowledge of this $15 billion industry. This article aims to explore the fashion industry through children's literature. Reviews of fashion biographies, how-to books, reference books, and strategy suggestions are presented. Teachers may use the ideas in English/Language Arts, Career and Technical Education, or Arts courses.

The fashion industry is one area that saw a rise in social media influence during the pandemic, with many middle and high school students turning to the internet and social media as creative outlets (Laffier et al., 2021). Budding designers and stylists created their own media channels, blogs, and other social media accounts to share their creations and develop a following as an influencer (Meisels, 2021), defined by Geyser (2021) as:

> people who have built a reputation for their knowledge and expertise on a specific topic. They make regular posts about that topic on their preferred social media channels and generate large followings of enthusiastic, engaged people who pay close attention to their views.

These influencer accounts were worth $15 billion in 2022 (Bannigan & Shane, 2020).

The fashion industry in the United States was estimated to generate more than $100 billion in 2021 (Orendorff, 2021), with most employed in the field receiving education at the university level. Students with interest in fashion may follow influencers like Billie Eilish (Burns, 2019), BryanBoy, or Amy Song (Larocca, 2018) and can tap into the market at an early age. Students who rely only on social media to obtain background knowledge about an area of interest, such as fashion, risk missing crucial foundational information.

Millennials in the fashion industry were motivated by an entrepreneurial ideal, pathway, practice, and experience (Brydges & Hrac, 2019). Gender, age, and class also influenced the participants' creations shared through social media. Nevertheless, many created their designs and display spaces as they worked. They independently negotiated the challenges of learning content, design elements, and business practices. Their paths might have been more accessible if they had opportunities to develop background knowledge before engaging in their enterprises.

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There is little debate about the importance of background knowledge in student learning (Neuman et al., 2014). The amount known about a topic enhances the retention of information. Additionally, learners broaden their vocabulary, make more robust inferences, play with language, and better understand informational text when they deepen their background knowledge. Teachers can build background knowledge by teaching content-focused vocabulary, using comparison/contrast and analogies, providing reading experiences in content-based books, and embedding digital media in lessons.

Lupo et al. (2019) recommend using text sets to increase student background knowledge in elementary and secondary classrooms. A text set is a group of texts selected about a specified topic. There are several considerations when selecting text sets for a content-focused study. The texts should increase content knowledge, motivate students to read, and provide for a range of students' reading levels. Text sets can be used in multiple content areas to help students learn different perspectives and new content. Content from various disciplines can be integrated and students learn through authentic reading experiences. The authors caution that the selection of texts can be overwhelming but collaborating with colleagues can lighten the load of which texts to include.

The purpose of this article is to present ways in which children's literature can support the building of background knowledge about the fashion industry, using a text set appropriate for middle and high school students. This text set consists of biography, how-to, and reference books. Each genre presented includes reviews of the texts followed by a suggested strategy. Examples of products are included. Middle and high school teachers teaching art or career and technical education courses can use this text set and suggested strategies to develop the background knowledge necessary for understanding the fashion industry further.

Studying Fashion through Biography

Analyzing Characteristics of Fashion Trendsetters

Polka Dot Parade: A Book About Bill Cunningham (Blumenthal, 2018) describes Cunningham's search for residents who expressed their sense of everyday style. He snapped pictures of those who inspired, marveled, and delighted him through their clothing expressions, which he displayed on the pages of the *New York Times*. He captured those who "made" fashion instead of those who "followed" fashion. He lived a sparse life, developing his photographs at one-hour photo shops and filing his art in cabinets in his small New York apartment. He was honored for his work by the French government and through extravagant displays on New York's Fifth Avenue. He photographed his street-fashion inspirations until he died in 2016. His documentation of fashion continues to inspire the runway today.

Fancy Party Gowns (Blumenthal, 2017) is the story of Ann Cole Lowe, a well-known yet unknown gown designer. Born in Alabama, Lowe was the daughter of a dressmaker who took over her mother's business. The clientele included the upper echelon of Alabama society. From there, Lowe moved to Florida and New York to apprentice and attend design school. Typical of the times, Lowe received a segregated education, but she continued designing and dressmaking. One of her most famous dresses was Jacqueline Kennedy's wedding dress. Numerous Americans can identify her iconic creations, yet they do not know the designer's name.

Corey (2009) recounts Annette Kellerman's influence on swimsuit design in *Mermaid Queen.* As a child, Annette Kellerman could not walk well and took up swimming to become stronger. Although she became a champion racer, the public did not support a woman swimmer.

Kellerman then created water ballet, improvising a swimsuit to cover her bare legs. Annette was arrested for indecency when wearing her suit in Boston. The court judge agreed with her argument about nonsensical women's swimsuits. Bostonian women soon traded their bathing attire for Annette's one-piece, bare-legged, sleeveless racing suit style. Her ideas continue to influence contemporary swimwear.

Strategy Suggestion: Analyzing Characteristics through a Category Map

After reading the three biographies, students can analyze the lives of the fashion trendsetters through a Category Map as demonstrated in Figure 1 (Ciecierski & Bintz, 2017). The students work in pairs to expand their thinking and practice the skill of character analysis. They first list the titles across the top of the map. Then they choose characteristics they wish to highlight about the fashion trendsetters along the right side. To assist in choosing characteristics, the students can select from a substantial list (Josué, 2019). Students discuss how the trendsetters exhibited the identified characteristics and record them on the chart. Ciecierski and Binz (2017) recommend that students cite evidence of the answer locations.

Figure 1: Category Map

Polka Dot Parade: A Book About Bill Cunningham	*Fancy Party Gowns: The Story of Fashion Designer Ann Cole Lowe*	*Mermaid Queen*		
Bill Cunningham showed his passion by taking photos of those he found interesting wearing their everyday fashions.	Ann Cole Lowe showed her passion by taking over the dressmaking from her mother and creating fashions for many in high society.	Annette Kellerman showed her passion through her swimming. She took swimming to a new level when she created a new art form of water ballet.	**Passionate**	**C H A R A C T E R I S T I C S**
By photographing people on the street in their everyday fashion choices, Bill influenced others to wear what he saw in everyday attire.	Although many do not know her name, Ann dressed many famous people. Jacqueline Kennedy was one of her clients. By showcasing Ann's designs, Kennedy assisted Ann's influence.	Annette was influential because she redesigned swimsuits to be more practical and comfortable. Her revolutionary idea changed swimwear for women.	**Influential**	
Bill was committed to fashion by the number of photographs he kept. He filed them in his apartment and referred to them in his other works.	Ann showed her commitment because she faced many challenges. She had to rise above poverty and attend a segregated school. Despite the challenges, she persevered.	Annette was committed to the change in swimsuit design to make it more practical for her racing and water ballet. She had to convince others of the practicality. Her drive to do so showed her commitment.	**Committed**	
Bill used the imagination of the subjects of his photographs to spur his imagination. He used his archived photos to assist him in his fashion displays.	Ann's imagination helped her create different party gowns for each client. Since many of her clients attended the same events, Ann had to create a new gown for each client.	Annette's revolutionary idea of a sleek swimsuit was imaginative in its necessity. Because she was swimming long distances and performing in the water, her swimsuit needed to be lighter and moveable in the water.	**Imaginative**	

Comparing and Contrasting Similar Biographies

Told in first person, Elsa spoke of her drab childhood in *Bloom: A Story of Fashion Designer Elsa Schiaparelli* (Maclear, 2018). Inspired by the world around her, Elsa used her imagination to dream, thus giving her the confidence to leave home. She traveled through Paris, London, New York, and back to Paris, ready to show the fashion world her designs. Her sweater design with the illusion of a bow tie propelled her into the Paris fashion scene. Her avant-garde thinking led her to create "shocking pink," a color she used in her designs that spun the fashion world's head.

     In Hot Pink: The Life and Fashions of Elsa Schiaparelli, Rubin (2015) details the life and Schiaparelli. As a teen, Schaip, a nickname, moved to London, then to Paris, beginning her foray into fashion. Following Paul Poiret's advice, Schaip made clothes women wanted to wear after WWI. She used events and movements, such as the rise of aviators, vacationing in the tropics, and the Surrealist art movement, to inspire her designs. Her business thrived through the Great Depression as she worked with manufacturers to provide affordable clothing. After WWII, Schaip's designs fell out of favor, but she persevered, presenting new styles of hats, luggage, and Hollywood costume designs. Her imaginary thinking propelled fashion to new heights and inspired future designers.

Strategy Suggestion: Comparison/Contrast with an Adapted T-Chart

A T-chart is a graphic organizer in which two features are compared side-by-side. The T-chart is highly adaptable, and examples are available online. To create an adapted T-chart, a rectangle is drawn at the top of the paper and labeled "Similarities." The "T" is drawn below the rectangle with the titles of the books written on each side. The adapted T-chart leaves students more space to write the similarities and differences than a Venn diagram. Following Ciecierski and Binz's (2017) recommendation, the students work in pairs and cite evidence as they complete the chart as seen in Figure 2.

Figure 2: Adapted T-Chart

Similarities

How are
Bloom: A Story of Fashion Designer Elsa Schiaparelli **and**
Hot Pink: The Life and Fashions of Elsa Schiaparelli
alike?

Both books highlight the life of designer Elsa Schiaparelli.

Both share her struggles in her younger years and how she worked to overcome them.

Both books share her design of the bowknot sweater and its influence today.

Both books share her use of color in fashion design, mainly "hot pink."

Differences	
How are *Bloom: A Story of Fashion Designer Elsa Schiaparelli* **and** *Hot Pink: The Life and Fashions of Elsa Schiaparelli* **different?**	
Bloom: A Story of Fashion Designer Elsa Schiaparelli	*Hot Pink: The Life and Fashions of Elsa Schiaparelli*
Illustrated pictures	Use of photographs
More of a traditionally formatted children's book	Extended, oversized picture book format
More of a glossed-over timeline of Elsa's life	Much more detailed timeline, including her life as a single working mother
Mention of some of her mentors	Detail of mention of her mentors and how they influenced her
Story ends with touting of Elsa's influence on fashion then and now	End of the story, details Elsa's struggles to remain relevant in the fashion industry after designs fell out of favor

Analyzing Illustrations between Biographies

Different Like Coco (Matthews, 2007) describes Chanel's chronology from humble beginnings to her impact on fashion. Chanel's ability to study people yet design clothing she wanted to wear created a market for her designs. Her revolutionary, sleek, modern style made her clients want to be like Coco, not just dress like her. The illustrator's use of turned-up noses in the facial features subtly displays Chanel's view of the snobbery around her. The book concludes with a timeline of Chanel's life, including the creation of *Chanel No.5*, the first perfume conceived by a fashion designer, and the release of her concept of "the little black dress."

In *Coco and the Little Black Dress*, Van Haeringen (2015) describes Chanel's difficult upbringing in a French orphanage. While there, Coco became accomplished at sewing, knitting, crocheting, and embroidery, parlaying those skills into work as a seamstress. She spent her evenings with friends and soon realized that being wealthy was her heart's desire. She taught herself to ride to fit in with the elite crowd while wearing a pair of jodhpurs she designed. Coco then opened a millinery, creating not only hats and accessories but dresses that were practical, slimming, and did not require a corset. Her shop flourished, selling the concept of "the little black dress," a fashion staple every woman could wear while feeling beautiful.

Strategy Suggestion: Analyzing Illustrations with Access Lenses

Bryan (2019) introduces the reader to analyzing illustrations with "Access Lenses." The use of the chart guides discussion about illustrated mood. Mood is examined through facial expressions, body language, color, distance, aloneness, sounds, words, silence, big and little things, zooming in and out, and symbols and metaphors. When comparing two books on a similar topic, students can discuss how each illustrator portrayed the facets of mood. Similar incidences portrayed in each book may spur deeper conversation about how different illustrators chose to portray the same event. Students can keep track of their discussions within their reading notebooks (Rief, 2014) or display their ideas on wall charts. They should cite the pages of differing aspects of mood. The "Access Lenses" chart is available at **fouroclockfaculty.com/2015/05/visuals-access-lenses**.

Studying Fashion with How-To Books

Summarizing Knowledge with Stories and Words

In Bolte's (2014) book *Girly Girl Style: Fun Fashion You Can Sketch*, tips for drawing fashion sketches are presented. The first section offers beginning step-by-step directions with an introduction about the style. Each sketch shows ideas on blending colors and sketching in pencil. The subsequent pages provide the budding designer with a four-step drawing process. Suggestions for sketching specific features or styles of clothing, Sketch designs for edges, beachwear, cold-weather wear, and vintage clothing are suggested. The book concludes with ideas for adding accessories to the designs.

The collaboration between author Ware (2018) and illustrator Papier is dynamic in *How to be a Fashion Designer.* Ware introduces the world of fashion to the reader, while Papier's vibrant collages include photographs and sketches with illustrated models from diverse backgrounds. Entries introduce the background content needed to be a fashion designer, including using tools, creating a mood board, selecting color, and finding inspiration for design within the environment. A "do-it-yourself" page where the budding designer is encouraged to practice follows the information. Suggestions for accessories to complete the inspired looks are also included. The last section of the book includes space for the designer to sketch. Back matter includes a glossary of fashion vocabulary and an index.

The premise of *The Fashion Book: Create Your Own Cool Looks from the Story of Style* (Beeden, 2014) is to show the novice designer how contemporary style is influenced by past designs. The designer is shown how to style themselves and others using information from ancient, medieval, and Victorian eras and fashion icons. The collage illustrations are enhanced with photographs, paintings, and sketches and supported with informational text and quotes about the fashion displayed. The illustrator shows how to assemble a complete style look within each section. Career opportunities in fashion, including student designers, shoe designers, make-up artists, and runway models, are highlighted. The back matter includes a detailed glossary, a list of influential designers, and an index.

Strategy Suggestion: Story or Vision Board

A story or vision board is a frequently used tool in design. Students are encouraged to "show what they know" by creating a vision board after the design concepts are taught and practiced. Tebbets (2008) recommends the final storyboard display theme, fashion illustration, typography, color, composition, and artistry. The theme of the storyboard drives all the other components. The illustrations show design ideas based on research. The typography must reflect the period or event portrayed on the storyboard and selecting appropriate colors, both essential to the theme's message. Composition and artistry refer to the visual presentation of the board's content. Movement of the eye from the viewer's perspective and attention to minute details of the final product are critical to the presentation of ideas. Figure 3 is an example of a vision board displaying the essential components.

Figure 3: Example of Vision Board

Studying Fashion History

Why'd They Wear That? Fashion as the Mirror of History (Albee, 2015) is an iconic fashion history book like one used in many undergraduate costume design programs (Tortora & Marcketti, 2015). The Grade 5–12 reader can explore fashion from the ancient world to the 20th century. True to the quality of a book published by National Geographic, photographs, great works of art, paintings, and sketches enhance the text. Each chapter is themed and details that era's social, political, economic, art, and people movements. The book concludes with a message about the fashion industry's impact on the environment and what the reader can do to decrease consumption. The back matter includes a fashion history timeline, bibliography, index, and illustration credits.

The Complete Book of Fashion History: A Stylish Journey through History and the Ultimate Guide for Being Fashionable in Every Era (Sedláčková, 2017) contains 24 informational chapters from prehistoric to contemporary fashion. Each chapter is collaged in differing modern cartoon styles and enhanced by short paragraphs, captions, and bubble quotes. The content contains biographies of influencers, types of attire, accessories, hairstyles, make-up, and production of the period's fashion. The book concludes with illustrations of fashion worldwide, fashion icons, swimwear, wedding dresses, accessories, shoes, and notable designers.

Strategy Suggestion: The Fashion Zine

Students can practice their skills of writing, revising, editing, and illustrating fashion design from history by creating a fashion zine. A zine is a handmade, reproducible, adaptable, and inexpensive way to create a magazine (Horst, 2015; Vanneman, 2010). For instance, students could study the clothing worn by people of an era. Figures 4 and 5 are examples of pages of a fashion zine entitled *The Lords and Ladies of Fashion-1776* created by a fifth-grade student as part of a unit of study on the American Revolution. The zine showcases six fashion designs, three for women and three for men, of differing social classes and positions in the war. A description accompanies each design. Fashion vocabulary such as "weskit," "breeches," "bodice," and "petticoat" is used to describe the fabrics and ensemble. Students should include a table of contents and reference page when creating an informational zine.

Figure 4: A Sample Page from Lords and Ladies of Fashion-1776

High Classy Lassie

This outfit is perfect for summer and spring. Made from silk shipped in from England, this gown is blue, pink, gold, and white. The fabric is accented with purple threaded flowers. The bodice is tight-fitting, and joined with the loose skirt. The skirt opens to reveal a petticoat that is not an undergarment. This could be accessorized with an emerald-shade, silk cape.
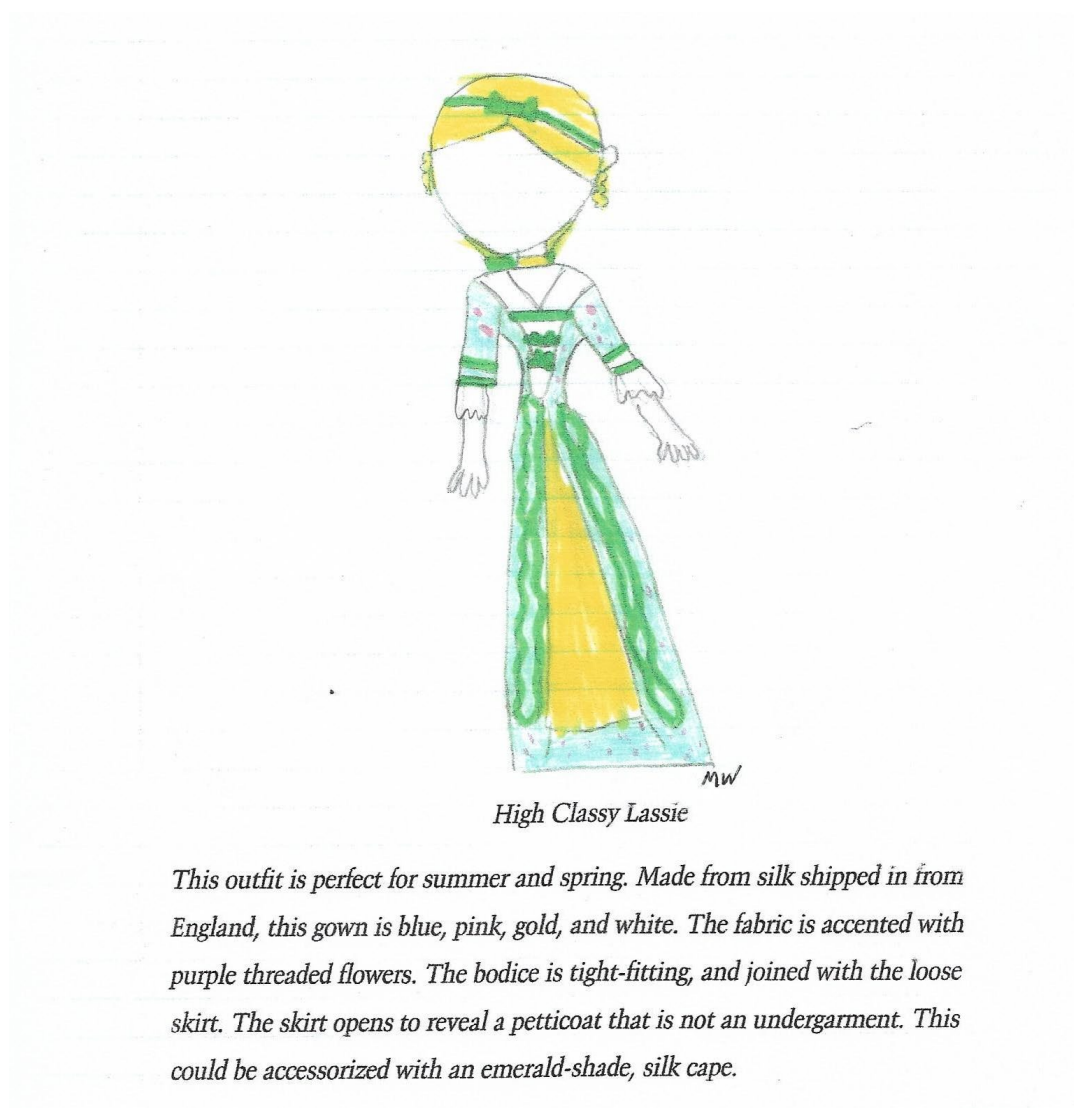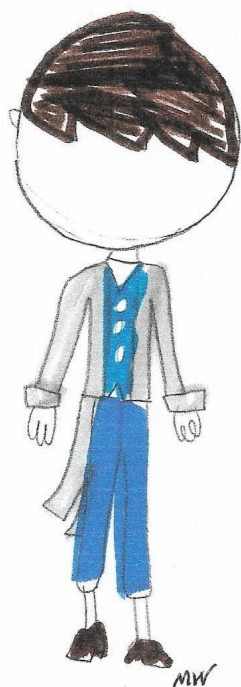
Figure 5: A Sample Page from Lords and Ladies of Fashion-1776

Rebel Lad

You'll be patriotic in this silver, tailed coat with a navy blue weskit. The coat sleeves are cuffed and the coat is fitted. The weskit is made of linen and the coat is made of silk. The socks are hand-knitted, and the shoes are common made out of leather.

Conclusion

Text sets and literacy strategies can be used in instruction to build background knowledge in content-focused instruction (Neuman, 2014; Lupo, 2019). The presentation of this text set and accompanying strategies highlighted how they could be used in a study of the fashion industry, most likely in art or career and technical education courses. The strategies presented here can be adapted to other middle and high school content areas (Lupo et al., 2018). Biography is frequently used in English/Language Arts, social studies, and science courses. Teachers in these content areas also teach students the process of comparison/contrast. Therefore, the comparison/contrast strategies shared here can support student understanding of this comprehension process. Students across content area courses can also create a vision board or zine to present what they have learned. This format allows students a "flexible, open-ended, and welcome alternative to the usual paper and/or slide show presentation" (Gresham, 2018, p. 34).

Students returning to the classrooms after an extended time of online learning will likely be more adept at delving deeper into the digital and social media world. Some of these students may have spent time creating social media accounts related to fashion. However, many secondary students need to learn how to find and evaluate resources available at the click of a button (Gleason & von Gillern, 2018). Providing middle and high school students with the background knowledge

necessary to gain a deeper understanding of fashion can help them make better-informed decisions. Using children's literature in teaching can expand the knowledge of the fashion industry by introducing influencers, techniques, and history to secondary students. Students' analysis of this multibillion-dollar industry can support their aspirations to become designers, stylists, and social media influencers.

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