

Thread and Time: Fashion and History of the 1860s

Materials Needed

- Internet access (for virtual museum tours or image searches)
- Sketchbook or heavy paper
- Drawing supplies (pencils, colored pencils, or markers)
- Scraps of fabric (optional) or textured paper
- A printed "History vs. Fashion" timeline template (or a ruler to make one)
- Digital device for research

Learning Objectives

By the end of this lesson, Madisyn will be able to:

- Identify three major historical events that occurred between 1860 and 1870.
- Describe the evolution of the 1860s silhouette (from the round crinoline to the elliptical hoop).
- Explain how technological and social changes (like the sewing machine and the Civil War) directly impacted fashion choices.
- Design a historically accurate outfit based on a specific year within the decade.

Part 1: The Hook (Introduction)

The Scenario: Imagine you are living in 1862. You want to cross a room, but your skirt is five feet wide! You are wearing a "cage crinoline" made of steel hoops. Suddenly, you hear news that a new machine—the sewing machine—can now make a dress in hours instead of days. At the same time, the world is changing: wars are being fought, and new dyes are creating colors humans have never worn before.

The Big Question: Is fashion just about looking good, or is it a mirror of what is happening in the world?

Part 2: I Do (Historical Context & Fashion Basics)

In this section, the educator presents the core concepts.

The "Big Three" Events (1860-1870)

1. **The American Civil War (1861-1865):** In the North, factories began mass-producing uniforms, which led to standardized sizing (S, M, L). In the South, fabric shortages meant women had to "make do" and "turn" old dresses inside out to look new.
2. **The Invention of Aniline Dyes (The Mauve Decade):** Before 1860, colors came from plants or bugs. In the 1860s, chemists created synthetic dyes. The most famous was "Mauveine." Suddenly, everyone was wearing bright purples, magentas, and electric blues!
3. **The Rise of the Sewing Machine:** Isaac Singer's machine became a household item in the

1860s. This meant more ruffles, more trim, and more complex designs because they didn't have to be sewn entirely by hand anymore.

The Silhouette Shift

- **Early 1860s:** The "Bell Shape." Huge, perfectly round skirts supported by steel hoops.
- **Mid 1860s:** The "Elliptical Shape." The hoop moved the volume to the back, making the front flatter.
- **Late 1860s (1868-1870):** The "Crinolette." The hoop starts to disappear, evolving into the bustle (a pad on the lower back).

Part 3: We Do (Guided Exploration)

Work together to analyze the "Garibaldi Blouse."

Discussion & Research: Look up an image of a "Garibaldi Blouse" from 1863. This red shirt with black trim was a massive fashion trend for women in the 1860s. Why?

- **History Link:** It was named after Giuseppe Garibaldi, a general who was fighting to unify Italy. His soldiers wore red shirts.
- **Activity:** Let's compare a picture of Garibaldi's uniform to a fashion plate of a 1860s lady. Can you spot the similarities? (Look at the sleeves and the color).
- **Check for Understanding:** Why would a woman in 1863 want to wear a shirt that looks like a general's uniform? (Answer: To show support for liberty and revolution).

Part 4: You Do (Independent Creative Project)

The Challenge: The 1860s Time-Traveler's Lookbook

Madisyn will choose one specific year between 1860 and 1870 and create a fashion design entry for that year.

1. **Step 1: Choose Your Year.** (e.g., 1864 - The height of the Civil War; 1869 - The year the Transcontinental Railroad was finished).
2. **Step 2: The Sketch.** Draw a figure wearing an outfit appropriate for that year.
 - If it's early 1860s, draw a huge round hoop.
 - If it's late 1860s, draw a flatter front and a decorative back.
3. **Step 3: The Color Story.** Use bright, "synthetic" colors (like magenta or deep purple) to show the influence of new chemical dyes.
4. **Step 4: The Historical Detail.** Add one accessory that represents an event. (Example: A mourning brooch for the death of Lincoln in 1865, or a "Garibaldi" style sleeve for Italian unification).
5. **Step 5: The Justification.** Write 3 sentences explaining why your dress looks the way it does based on what was happening in history that year.

Part 5: Conclusion & Recap

- **Recap:** We learned that the 1860s started with huge round skirts and ended with the beginning of the bustle. We saw how war and technology (sewing machines and dyes) changed what people

wore.

- **Madisyn's Share:** Madisyn presents her Lookbook entry.
- **Reflection:** "If you had to wear a cage crinoline for one day, what would be the hardest thing to do? (Getting through doors? Sitting down? Playing sports?)"

Assessment

- **Formative:** Quick-fire questions during the "We Do" section about the three major events.
- **Summative:** Evaluation of the "Time-Traveler's Lookbook."
 - *Success Criteria:* Does the sketch show the correct silhouette for the chosen year? Does the written justification mention at least one historical event or technological advancement?

Differentiation & Adaptations

- **For Advanced Learners:** Research "Victorian Mourning Etiquette" and explain how Queen Victoria's fashion choices after 1861 influenced the entire world's wardrobe.
- **For Kinesthetic Learners:** Use wire coat hangers or cardboard to try and build a small-scale model of a cage crinoline to see how it supports fabric.
- **Digital Option:** Instead of sketching, create a digital mood board using Pinterest or Canva showing 1860s fashion vs. 1860s historical figures.