

Stitched in Time: The Bustle and the Breakthroughs (1870-1880)

Lesson Overview

In this lesson, Madisyn will explore the dramatic "Silhouette Shift" of the 1870s. We will look at how high-fashion bustles and bold colors were influenced by the industrial revolution, new inventions like the telephone, and world-changing events like the Great Chicago Fire. By the end, Madisyn will act as a Victorian "Fashion Influencer" to design a look for a specific historical event.

Learning Objectives

- **Identify** the key characteristics of 1870s fashion (the bustle, natural form, and aniline dyes).
- **Connect** three major historical events (1870-1880) to changes in technology and clothing production.
- **Design** a historically accurate outfit for a specific 1870s persona or event.

Materials Needed

- Sketchbook or drawing paper
- Colored pencils or markers (specifically bright pinks, purples, and greens)
- Access to the internet or library books for image references
- Fabric scraps, ribbons, or lace (optional for a mood board)
- A printed or hand-drawn "croquis" (fashion figure template)

1. Introduction: The Hook (10 Minutes)

The Scenario: "Imagine it's 1870. For the last ten years, women have been wearing massive, bell-shaped hoop skirts so wide they couldn't walk through a door sideways. Suddenly, the trend changes. The 'hoop' is out, and the 'pouf' is in! Everything moves to the back."

Discussion Questions:

- Why do you think people get tired of a fashion trend?
- If you had to carry your 'style' entirely on your back, how would that change how you move?

Objective: Today, we are going to learn why the 1870s was one of the most decorative, "extra," and inventive decades in history.

2. Body: Content & Practice (40 Minutes)

Part A: The "I Do" - The Fashion Evolution

The educator explains the three main phases of 1870s style:

- **The Early 1870s (The Soft Bustle):** High waists and fabric gathered at the back. It was all about the "over-skirt."
- **The Mid-1870s (Natural Form):** The bustle disappears! The dress becomes very tight and slim around the hips (like a mermaid tail), making it hard to take big steps.
- **The Late 1870s (The Grand Finale):** The bustle returns with a vengeance, becoming more structured and "shelf-like."
- **Science Connection:** Explain *Aniline Dyes*. For the first time, scientists created chemical dyes. This meant clothes weren't just "earth tones" anymore—they were neon purple (mauve), bright green, and electric blue!

Part B: The "We Do" - History Meets the Wardrobe

Let's look at three events and discuss how they changed what people wore:

1. **1871: The Great Chicago Fire.** Thousands lost everything. *Connection:* This led to a rise in "ready-to-wear" clothing catalogs because people needed clothes quickly, rather than waiting for a tailor.
2. **1876: The Centennial Exposition (Philadelphia).** The U.S. celebrated 100 years. People traveled by train from all over to see it. *Connection:* "Travel suits" became a major fashion category for the first time.
3. **1879: Edison's Lightbulb.** *Connection:* Suddenly, evening parties were much brighter! Fabrics like silk and satin were chosen because they shimmered beautifully under electric light compared to dim candles.

Part C: The "You Do" - The Designer's Challenge

Activity: Madisyn will choose one of the following scenarios and design an outfit in her sketchbook:

- **Scenario 1:** A young woman attending the 1876 World's Fair. She needs a practical but stylish traveling ensemble.
- **Scenario 2:** A guest at a high-society dinner in 1879, testing out the "new" electric lighting.
- **Scenario 3:** A survivor of the 1871 Fire who is ordering her first "catalog dress" to restart her life.

Success Criteria: The design must include a bustle or "natural form" silhouette, a specific color made possible by aniline dyes, and one accessory relevant to the time (e.g., a parasol, a tiny hat tilted forward, or a fan).

3. Conclusion: Closure & Recap (10 Minutes)

- **Recap:** Ask Madisyn to name the "3 B's" of 1870s fashion (Bustles, Breakthroughs in tech, and Bright colors).
- **Share:** Madisyn presents her sketch and explains the historical details she included.
- **Big Picture:** "Fashion isn't just about looking good; it's a mirror of what's happening in science, war, and technology."

Assessment

Formative: Checking for understanding during the "We Do" discussion about how the lightbulb or fire affected lifestyle.

Summative: The final fashion sketch. Use the following rubric:

- **Historical Accuracy (40%):** Does the silhouette match the 1870-1880 timeframe?
- **Event Connection (30%):** Does the outfit fit the chosen historical scenario?
- **Creativity (30%):** Use of color, texture descriptions, and accessories.

Adaptability & Differentiation

- **For Struggling Learners:** Provide a "mix and match" worksheet where Madisyn can cut out different bodice styles and skirt styles to glue together before coloring.
- **For Advanced Learners:** Research the *Franco-Prussian War (1870-71)* and explain how the fall of the French Empire temporarily moved the "Fashion Capital" of the world or influenced military-style trimmings (like brass buttons and braid) on women's coats.
- **Multi-Sensory Option:** If possible, find a piece of heavy silk or polyester and try draping it over a chair to see how "volume" is created with fabric folds.