

# Glitz, Gears, and Grandeur: The 1880s Fashion Revolution

## Lesson Overview

In this lesson, Madisyn will explore the dramatic "shelf-bustle" era of the 1880s. We will investigate how the rapid technological changes of the Gilded Age—from the invention of the electric light bulb to the dedication of the Statue of Liberty—influenced how people dressed, moved, and expressed their status.

## Learning Objectives

- **Identify** the key silhouette of the 1880s (The Late Bustle) and name three specific garments or accessories from the decade.
- **Connect** at least two major historical events (1880–1890) to changes in textile production or social fashion trends.
- **Analyze** how the Industrial Revolution changed fashion from "handmade for few" to "factory-made for many."
- **Create** an original historical fashion plate that reflects a specific event from the 1880s.

## Materials Needed

- Sketching paper or a fashion croquis (outline of a figure)
- Drawing pencils, colored pencils, or markers
- Internet access or library books on 19th-century history
- Optional: Fabric scraps (silk, lace, wool) or ribbon
- Access to a printer for "Victorian or Not?" sorting activity

---

## 1. Introduction: The "Shelf" Life (10 Minutes)

**The Hook:** Imagine trying to sit down in a chair, but you have a literal shelf attached to your lower back made of wire and horsehair! In 1885, this wasn't a prank—it was the height of high fashion.

**Discussion:** If you lived in 1880, your world was changing faster than ever. Why do you think people in the 1880s wore such "extra" and structured clothing? Was it just for looks, or was it a way to show off how much money they were making in the new factories of the Industrial Revolution?

**Success Criteria:** By the end of today, you'll be able to design an outfit that fits perfectly into an 1880s garden party or a royal ball!

## 2. The "I Do": History in the Seams (15 Minutes)

*Teacher/Parent leads a brief presentation or interactive reading on the 1880s.*

## Key Fashion Concepts:

- **The Late Bustle:** Unlike the soft 1870s, the 1880s bustle was horizontal and rigid. It was often called the "crinolette."
- **The Cuirass Bodice:** A tight, corset-like top that extended over the hips, named after a piece of armor!
- **Industrial Influence:** Synthetic dyes were brand new. People could suddenly wear "Electric Blue" or "Aniline Purple"—colors that didn't exist in nature.

## Major Events (1880-1890):

- **1883: The Brooklyn Bridge Opens.** This feat of engineering inspired "industrial" looks and sturdier walking suits for women who wanted to walk across the bridge.
- **1884: The Berlin Conference.** As European powers carved up Africa, "Orientalism" and "Exoticism" became trends, with designers using imported silks and patterns.
- **1886: Statue of Liberty Dedicated.** This sparked a massive trend in "Liberty" themes and a craze for French-inspired silhouettes in America.
- **1888: Jack the Ripper / Rise of Tabloids.** Darker themes and "detective" style capes (Inverness capes) became popular in London.

## 3. The "We Do": The Invention Connection (15 Minutes)

### Activity: Connect the Tech

Let's look at three major 1880s inventions and brainstorm together how they changed fashion. (Discuss these with Madisyn):

1. **The Electric Light Bulb (Edison, 1880):** Before, parties were lit by dim candles. Now, they are lit by bright bulbs. *How does this change the fabric choices? (Hint: Think about shimmer and sequins!)*
2. **The Safety Bicycle (1885):** The first bikes with two equal-sized wheels. *Can you ride a bike in a floor-length bustle? What has to change?*
3. **The First Coca-Cola (1886):** The rise of "Soda Fountains" and leisure culture. *What kind of outfit do you wear to hang out at a shop rather than a formal ballroom?*

## 4. The "You Do": The Time-Traveler's Fashion Plate (30 Minutes)

**The Challenge:** Design an outfit for a 13-year-old girl or a woman living in 1888. Your design must include elements that reflect the history of the time.

### Step-by-Step Instructions:

1. **Pick an Event:** Choose one event from the 1880-1890 timeline (e.g., attending the opening of the Brooklyn Bridge, watching the eruption of Krakatoa from a distance, or seeing the Statue of Liberty arrive).
2. **Sketch the Silhouette:** Draw the sharp, 90-degree angle of the late bustle and the tight, high-necked bodice.
3. **Incorporate Technology:** Use "Electric" colors made possible by new dyes, or add a pocket for a "new-fangled" Kodak camera (invented 1888).

4. **Add Detail:** Use colored pencils to show textures like velvet, silk, or wool. If you have fabric scraps, glue a small swatch to the corner of your page.
5. **Label It:** Write 2-3 sentences at the bottom explaining how your outfit reflects the specific year you chose.

## 5. Conclusion: The Runway Recap (10 Minutes)

**Review:** Summarize the three main phases of the 1880s: The rise of the bustle, the influence of the machine age, and the birth of "modern" leisure wear.

**Sharing:** Madisyn presents her fashion plate.

- What historical event did you choose?
- What was the hardest part about drawing the 1880s silhouette?
- How would your life be different if you had to get dressed in this every morning?

**Takeaway:** Fashion isn't just about clothes; it's a mirror of what is happening in science, politics, and technology!

## Assessment

- **Formative:** Check-in during the "We Do" discussion to ensure she understands the link between technology (light bulbs/bikes) and clothing.
- **Summative:** The Fashion Plate project.
  - *Does it have the 1880s silhouette?*
  - *Is it linked to a specific historical event/year?*
  - *Is the "why" behind the design clearly explained?*

## Differentiation & Extensions

- **For the Advanced Learner:** Research the "Dress Reform Movement" of the 1880s. Why were some women fighting against the corset and bustle during this time?
- **For the Hands-On Learner:** Instead of drawing, use a doll or a wire frame and "drape" fabric using pins and rubber bands to create the physical shape of a bustle.
- **Digital Option:** Use a program like Canva or Procreate to create a digital mood board for an 1880s fashion house.