

Changing Materials

Fashion would be nothing without the materials that make it. Designers have always tried to use existing materials in new ways. There have been times when certain materials were too expensive. Sometimes only royalty was allowed to wear them.

Cotton may be one of the most common fabrics now, but it wasn't always. It takes a lot of time and effort to separate cotton from the husks that it grows in. This painful job was often given to slaves owned by the plantation. It still took a long time to get enough cotton to make a garment. Making something like a sail for a ship would have taken nearly two years just to make enough yarn.

We are surrounded by textiles now. It is almost impossible to imagine a world without them. You have fabric curtains, bedclothes, tablecloths and sofas. You have wardrobes filled with clothes. Pretty much every room in your house will contain fabric of some sort. This is a very recent state of affairs.

The first pilgrims set off for North America in 1620. They were told to take clothes and bedding because they couldn't get any when they landed. The town of Massachusetts once made it law that everybody had to spin yarn at home. It was the only way that they could get enough fabric to make enough clothes.

Even the most basic clothing was valuable because of how long it took to make. Thefts from washing lines were common. People often left their clothes to their children in their will.

The idea of fashion didn't exist for a long time for most people. It didn't matter what kings and queens were wearing if you were struggling to make enough material for a pair of trousers. Royalty and wealthy barons may have looked to each other for ideas of what to wear, but most people were happy to have clothes at all.

Wealthy people began competing with each other in the 14th century. They showed how wealthy they were by changing their clothes and styles often. Sometimes things became fashionable because of political pressure.



King Louis XIV of France and King Charles II of England began to lose their hair in the 17th century. They both hired wigmakers to help them out. Suddenly, it was incredibly important for wealthy people to show their support for their king. These heavy wigs often itched terribly. That didn't stop people from shaving their own healthy hair and replacing it with an uncomfortable wig!

For most of history, clothes were custom-made to fit. The idea of buying clothes from a shop didn't really exist until the middle of the 19th century. Fashion trends as we know them now began to emerge in the late 1800s and early 1900s.

RETRIEVAL FOCUS

1. When did the first pilgrims set off for North America?
2. Which town made it a law for people to spin yarn at home?
3. When did rich people begin to follow fashion trends?
4. What happened to clothes when people died in the past?
5. Why might clothes have been stolen from a washing line?

VIPERS QUESTIONS

S

Why was cotton so expensive at first?

S

How did a king encourage people to wear wigs?

I

Why might people have regretted their decision to wear wigs?

V

Find three words in the text that all describe what clothing is made from.

I

Why was changing which clothes you wore a sign of being rich?



Christian Dior

Christian Dior was one of the top French designers in the 20th century. He was born in 1905 and had six siblings. He was a keen artist from an early age. During the Second World War, designers wanted to keep people interested in fashion. Dior's artistic skills meant that he found lots of work designing clothes at that time.

Once the war was over, Dior created his own fashion label. He created a style known as the "New Look". He particularly focused on women's clothing. After the First World War, North America, France and the UK had their own fashion style. Paris was the centre of the fashion world. During the Second World War, Germany occupied Paris. Many designers left the city, and it lost its position as the home of fashion.

During the war, Dior worked for a famous fashion designer called Lucien LeLong. Part of his work involved designing dresses for the wives of Nazi officials and others who supported the German invasion. He never said that he supported the Nazis. The fact that he worked with them has been a sore point for the brand ever since.

Paris was liberated in 1944, and the city was determined to bring fashion designers back. Christian Dior was one of the most influential French designers. He launched his "New Look" in Paris. People immediately began flocking to the city for ideas. His range debuted in 1947. During the war, people were restricted by rationing. That meant that they were only allowed certain types and amounts of material for clothes. People were bored with the simple designs. Dior offered them something new and exciting.

It may have been called the "new" look, but Dior based his ideas on lots of designs that had been popular before the war. One of the most important parts of his new range was the long, flowing skirts. People weren't used to using so much material. It was exciting to see something that seemed to use more than it needed to.

Dior launched his own fashion house in 1946. He became famous for creating styles that had interesting shapes and silhouettes. The fact that these designs used so much material wasn't always popular. There were



protests when his new range launched. Coco Chanel was another famous designer at the time who hated the “New Look”.

It may not have been universally loved, but the “New Look” brought the home of fashion back to Paris. Dior became one of the trendsetters for the next decade. If Dior designed it, other fashion houses followed suit.

A young designer named Yves Saint-Laurent took a job as Dior’s assistant in 1955. Dior died of a heart attack in 1957. Saint-Laurent took charge of the company just as Dior had asked. He went on to become one of the most famous designers in the world.

RETRIEVAL FOCUS

1. How many brothers and sisters did Dior have?
2. When was Paris liberated from the German invaders?
3. When was his first range of clothes released?
4. Which designer didn’t like his clothes?
5. Who took over his company when Dior died?

VIPERS QUESTIONS

S

Why was calling it the “new” look not quite true?

V

Which word is most closely linked to “silhouette”?

dress skirt outline

V

Find and copy a phrase that means “liked by everyone”.

I

Why might Paris have been grateful to Dior?

V

What impression do you get of a place from the phrase “Home of fashion”?



Fast Fashion

There's no denying the fact that clothes are important. They keep us safe from the elements. Uniforms help people to identify help. Fashionable pieces help us to stand out. All of that comes at a cost.

People who are passionate about fashion often want to be seen in the latest clothes. This might be to their friends or on social media. Many trendsetters don't want to be seen in the same clothes twice. They make sure that they are always wearing something new. This has led to a trend called "Fast Fashion".

Fashion designers usually release two or three different lines of clothes each year. They might design different clothes for winter, summer and then possibly autumn. Fast fashion designers often produce a new range every month.

Part of the problem is impatience. When a big designer puts on a fashion show, people want to buy the clothes quickly. It can take several months for those designs to hit the shops. Fast fashion brands realised that they could create their own versions immediately and sell them.

Clothes don't appear out of thin air. They are often made in large factories overseas. They are sometimes made using child labour or by people who aren't paid a fair wage. Fast fashion companies are particularly guilty of these practices. When new clothes are produced so often, the amount of natural resources that they use goes up. They also produce a lot more damaging gases. When they are shipped over to your country for you to buy, they produce even more greenhouse gases. The more clothes that are produced the greater the damage to the environment.

That's not the end of the problem. Fast fashion clothes are poorly made because people aren't expected to wear them many times. Even if you want to keep them for a while, they probably won't last. When they are thrown away, they are either sent to landfills or donated.

Donating clothes sounds like a good thing. It can actually be very



damaging. Over 100 billion items of clothing are sold by fast fashion chains each year. Only 1% are recycled. The others are either sent to a landfill or sent to other countries as donations. The other countries don't really want them. Nearly half of the donations are too damaged to wear. They eventually get sent to a landfill in another country after producing even more greenhouse gases travelling there.

Places like Ghana are particularly impacted by these practices. In the capital city of Accra, used clothing is blocking rivers. Overfull landfills reduce the habitats of wildlife and destroy communities. Local African clothing companies can't compete with the prices of donated clothes. They are slowly going out of business.

Whether you want to stay "on-trend" or not, it's important to make informed choices about what you buy.

VOCABULARY FOCUS

1. Which word in the first paragraph means "saying no to".
2. Find and copy a word that describes somebody who other people want to copy.
3. Find and copy a phrase that means "out of nothing".
4. What does "donated" mean?
5. If you make an "informed" choice, what does it mean?

VIPERS QUESTIONS

I

Why do you think it is called "fast" fashion?

R

Where does most fast fashion end up?

R

Which country takes a lot of unwanted clothes?

S

How are donated clothes bad for the environment?

S

How might people be negatively affected when they make clothes?



Stella McCartney

Stella McCartney is a fashion designer known for her conservation and animal-friendly designs. It's perhaps no surprise that she has such strong views on saving the world. Her father is a famous musician named Paul McCartney. He was one of The Beatles. He has campaigned to end things like animal testing and cruelty for decades. Stella's mother was a photographer and musician named Linda McCartney. She was an animal rights activist for her entire life.

When Stella was a child, her parents were both in a band called Wings. Her father was the singer, and her mother played the keyboard. The band was very successful. Stella travelled the world with them. Her parents still wanted her and her siblings to have a normal life, so she went to a state school.

It was at her high school that Stella first became interested in designing clothes. She designed her first item of clothing when she was only 13. It was a jacket. By 16, she was working as an intern for a famous designer named Christian Lacroix.

Stella has been a vegetarian for her entire life. She has always refused to use leather and fur in her designs. She also uses her designs to carry messages about her views on animal welfare and the world around us.

Fashion isn't Stella's only creative outlet. She also has a line of perfumes and skincare products. She launched her own fashion house in 2001 and her first perfume in 2003. Her skincare range was launched in 2007.

Women's and children's clothes made up most of McCartney's designs for a long time. She didn't launch her first men's clothing range until 2016. They were mostly casual outfits that looked a bit like pyjamas.

Stella has designed clothes for many famous people. The wedding dress that Megan Markle wore to marry Prince Harry was designed by Stella McCartney. She teamed up with Adidas in 2004 to create a line of sportswear. These clothes have been worn by some of the most famous female sports stars around the world.



She has worked with Disney to create a line of jewellery based on Alice in Wonderland and with Taylor Swift to create a fashion line based on one of her albums.

Outside of her own designs, McCartney has worked to change fashions in other areas. She joined forces with an organisation called PETA in 2010. PETA try to get fairer treatment for animals around the world. Together they petitioned the British Ministry of Defence. Guards for the British Army wear black hats made with the fur of Canadian black bears. PETA and McCartney wanted the Ministry of Defence to stop doing this.

In 2020, McCartney used her fashion show to tell the world to stop using fur in fashion. Models came out onto the catwalk dressed as zebras, cows and rabbits. She also used the fashion show to talk about making fashion more sustainable for the environment.

VOCABULARY FOCUS

1. If somebody “campaigns” for something, what does it mean?
2. What is a “creative outlet”?
3. What impression do you get of her menswear line from the word “casual”?
4. Can you think of an antonym for the word “casual”?
5. Which word in the final paragraph is linked to something being good for the world around us?

VIPERS QUESTIONS

R

What was the first item of clothing that Stella designed?

S

Why did Stella have the opportunity to travel the world as a child?

R

Who did she work for at first?

S

How has Stella enforced her animal-friendly views through her own designs?

R

What animal is used for clothing by the British Ministry of Defence?

Vivienne Westwood

Born in 1941, Vivienne Westwood was a world-famous British fashion designer. She was born in Derbyshire, but her ideas and skills had an influence on fashion the world over. Westwood didn't just design clothes like other fashion designers. Instead, she used her designs to tell stories and express a message about topics that she cared for.

Vivienne wasn't always a fashion designer. Her first career was as a teacher. Her maiden name (the surname she was born with) was Swire. She married Derek Westwood in 1962 and took his surname. They divorced in 1965, but she remained Vivienne Westwood until she died in 2022.

After divorcing Derek, Vivienne fell in love with a man named Malcolm McLaren. This relationship would change her life. McLaren was a punk rocker. Punk Rock was a movement in the 1970s filled with people who wanted to rebel against what they were told to do. They wore ripped clothes, leather and lots of metal accessories like safety pins and studs. Vivienne loved the idea. Punk was an important influence on her designs.

McLaren was a band manager and looked after several punk bands. Vivienne was fascinated by clothes and fashion. Together, they opened a market stall called Let It Rock. They sold second-hand clothes and rock records. Vivienne started to modify vintage clothes and make them more "punk" in style. These were extremely popular.

In 1971, they opened their own shop and began to work on a range of clothes of their own. They showcased their first full range in 1981. It was called Pirates. Westwood and McLaren separated soon after but continued to work together for another five years.

Punk wasn't the only influence on Westwood's designs. She took inspiration from classical art, historical fashion and the ways that different materials work together. Her brand was named after herself, which is common for fashion designers. She owned several shops around the world that sold everything from bride's dresses to glasses and perfumes to shoes.



Climate change and the impact of fashion on the world were always important to Westwood. The idea of Punk was to fight for what you believed in. This stuck with her throughout her life, and she often used her designs to get across messages that she believed in.

Fast fashion was one thing that Westwood didn't like. She encouraged people to buy clothes that would last for a long time and could be worn again and again. She designed clothes that fit this ethos. She produced two different ranges for men and three for women each year. Fast fashion brands tend to produce new ranges each month. Her hope was that people would think more before buying new clothes.

RETRIEVAL FOCUS

1. What nationality was Westwood?
2. Who did she marry?
3. Who did she go into business with?
4. Which style inspired Westwood, particularly early on?
5. Which type of fashion was Westwood against?

VIPERS QUESTIONS

V

V: Which word means "change"?

modify range vintage

V

V: Which word best describes something from the past?

modify range vintage

S

S: How did Westwood support her views on fast fashion

V

V: Write a definition for the word "ethos".

Answers - Changing Materials:

1. 1620
2. Massachusetts
3. The 14th century
4. They left them to their children in their will
5. They were very valuable

S: It was hard work and took a long time to produce

S: When King Louis XIV and King Charles II started to go bald and wear a wig, the other wealthy people wanted to support them

I: They itched a lot and were heavy

V: Material, textile and fabric

I: They were expensive, so owning lots meant that you had lots of money

Answers - Christian Dior:

1. 6
2. 1944
3. 1947
4. Coco Chanel
5. Yves Saint-Laurent

S: The designs were based on older designs from before the war

V: Outline

V: Universally loved

I: He made it the home of fashion again

V: All or most important fashion happens or comes from there

Answers - Fast Fashion:

1. Denying
2. Trendsetter
3. Out of thin air
4. Given away
5. You have the information needed to make the choice wisely

I: It is quick to hit the shops and quick to be thrown away

R: Landfill or donated

R: Ghana

S: They clog rivers and create extra greenhouse gases

S: They are underpaid or use child labour

Answers - Stella McCartney:

1. They fight for it / to get other people to do the same thing
2. A way to do something creative
3. It isn't very smart or posh / it is comfortable
4. Smart
5. Sustainable

R: A jacket

S: Her parents were in a band and she travelled with them

R: Christian Lacroix

S: None of her designs use fur or leather

R: Canadian black bear

Answers - Vivienne Westwood:

1. British
2. Derek Westwood
3. Malcolm McLaren
4. Punk
5. Fast fashion

V: Modify

V: Vintage

S: She encouraged people to buy clothes that lasted and only release a small number of clothes each year

V: Something that a person believes in