Express Yourself (Part 1 of 2)

There are a million ways we can express our identity and what we care about. Our appearance is a huge part of that - not only what we wear, but also how we carry ourselves and interact with other people. In this activity, we'll focus on what we wear: you'll modify a piece of clothing to uniquely express you.

Materials:
- Chalk
- T-shirt or another piece of clothing to modify
- Paint or marker that works on fabric
- Cardboard
- Newspapers, plastic, etc. to protect the surface you're painting on
- Latex gloves and safety mask

Learning objectives:
- Explore self-identity
- Design - considering the details
- Modifying a piece of clothing

Time required: 45+ minutes

Context:

The clothing we buy and wear can represent our self-identity and self-expression. The clothes we buy aren't usually made just for us. This activity is to explore design, fashion, and self expression by modifying a piece of clothing you already have.

This activity is in three parts. First, you'll explore your self-identity. Next, you'll intentionally design your new piece of clothing. Finally - you'll make it and wear it!

This is intended to be an exploration. It can feel scary and vulnerable to express yourself like this! But test it out. You'll build up your design skills, and maybe know yourself a bit better in the process.

Activity:

1. Take your chalk with you outside. Find a paved area that is SAFE for you to work on (NOT in the street!) A sidewalk or a patio can be great options. If you don't have access to a safe, paved area nearby, you can use markers on a large piece of paper or cardboard instead. The area or paper/cardboard you use should be large enough for you to lay down on. If you can't find large enough paper/cardboard either, then tape some regular pieces of paper together to make them larger (enough to fit your upper body is fine).

2. Lay down on your back on the surface you found. Outline yourself.

3. Get up. Take about ten minutes to fill in your body shape with words to describe you and the things that you care about. Write as many words as you can - try to fill up your whole shape!

4. Step back and check out this form of yourself. Did you miss anything essential? How does it feel to see yourself in this form?

Activity:

5. This is the hardest part: pick the (3) most important words from your "you." These should be words that not only describe you and/or what you care about, but they should reflect how you want other people to see you. Those (3) words are what we're going to add to your piece of clothing. It can take some bravery or boldness to show people who you are in this way. Be brave. Be bold.

6. Take a few minutes to design your piece of clothing. The design can communicate a lot about who you are, too. Make a sketch of your design. Here are some aspects to think about and plan before you start modifying your clothing:

   a. Placement and size. Where are you going to put the three words, and how large or small? Small can be subtle and understated, while large can be bold and energetic. Placing the words front and center on your chest can make them easiest to read while having them off to the side and lower might be more graphically interesting.

Activity:

b. Materials and methods. Spray paint? Markers? Brushable paint? If you're using paint, make sure it works on fabric. This will have a huge effect on the "vibe" or look. Markers will look most raw and DIY. Paint might look more conventionally "nice" or give a higher quality finish. If you're using paint, the way that you apply the paint matters, too. Paintbrushes will give more curved, organic shapes. Stencils or masking will be more rigid. If you do things carefully, you'll end up with more clean lines, and if not, you might have a messier look. None of these are "better" than the other - it's more a matter of what look you're going for.

c. Color and font. What color is the piece of clothing? What color will you use on it? Colors with higher contrast (eg black on white) will stand out more and be more obvious. Colors with lower contrast (eg dark grey on black) will be subtle. Fonts will depend on which method you choose for painting, but they can range from playful to serious, to elegant, and much more. You can look through fonts on your computer for inspiration.

Activity:

7. Prep your project. Depending on what your design is, you may benefit from doing one of the following things. Only do the ones that make sense for your design.

    a. Make a stencil. Cut letters out of one cardboard sheet so that you can use the cardboard sheet as a stencil. Be careful while cutting!

    b. Mask your clothing. This is another great way to get straight lines: you can use masking tape or blue tape to create the letters you want. You can use the tape to spell out your words (the letters will end up being unpainted, with paint around them).

    c. Sketching out your idea on your clothing. Use a pencil. You can use a ruler to help with the spacing and keeping letters in a straight line (if that's what you're looking for). This can be useful if you're adding the letters freehand, with a paintbrush or marker.

8. Prep to create your design. Cover your work surface to protect it. If you are spray painting, make sure to do it outside and to wear a safety mask to protect yourself from the nasty paint fumes. Put on latex gloves and keep them on while you're working with or handling wet paint. Place a sheet of cardboard inside your clothing so that the paint/marker doesn't bleed through.

Activity:

9. Create your design! Add the (3) words to your shirt.

10. Let your design dry, if needed. Clean up, including cleaning paint brushes before the paint dries and putting everything back where it belongs.

11. Wear your new piece of clothing proudly!

12. See what other kids have made and share your work at #MadeToHack.

Reflection:

How do you feel about wearing this piece of clothing? Excited? Nervous?

Do you feel like this piece of clothing (the words + the design) is a good reflection of how you want people to see you? How would you do it differently next time?

How did you feel creating the body shape and filling it in with words? Did you have any insights or strong feelings during that process?

Once you start wearing the shirt: Do you carry yourself any differently? (More confidently? More hesitant?) Do people react or respond to you differently (more open or they seem more confident?) How do you think this form of self-expression affects you? The people around you?

Happy Making!

-Team Hack