



CLOTHING AND DRESSES

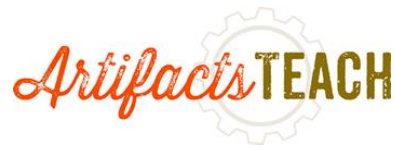
Clothing is material worn on the human body. It can be made of fur, animal-skins, fibers, or textiles. The variety of clothing is immense. The variety of clothing depends first upon function, then style, and finally composition. Where one lives, the culture in which one lives, and the availability of materials in the area are all critical to the type of clothing a person wears. An Eskimo family in northern Alaska would most certainly wear different clothing than a Pueblo family in southern New Mexico. A family living in Santa Fe will wear different clothing than another family living in the Brazilian rain forest. Function, composition and style are major facts in determining the type of clothing a person wears.

Function may be the most important factor in choice of clothing. The primary function of any type of clothing is to make a person more comfortable by providing protection against the elements. Clothing keeps us warm in the winter and prevents sunburn in the summer. It also protects us against insect bites, rain or snow or dangerous chemical compounds. Swim suits, parkas, fire-retardant "onsies", rubber gloves and space suits are all excellent examples of functional clothing.

Style is the second major factor in the choice of clothing. Style is a cultural factor. Acceptable norms of behavior in a society often govern style. For instance, women in the United States are generally free to wear what they wish. Dresses, pants, blouses and shorts are all acceptable items of clothing. In the Middle East, however, women are restricted in their choices of clothing in public. They must always have their heads covered and in some areas, must wear clothing that does not reveal their figure in any way. These types of cultural influences in clothing occur throughout the world, not just in the US and the Middle East.

Gender is another factor that influences style. In most societies, style and gender are closely associated. In the West, skirts, dresses and high-heeled shoes are affiliated with women's clothing. In the United States, it is generally acceptable for women to wear what is considered clothing associated with men elsewhere in the world. Women wear suits, pants and neckties without criticism. Other than traditional kilts worn by Scotsmen and Irishmen, however, men wearing what traditionally are considered women's clothes is not generally acceptable.

Composition is the final major factor in the choice of clothing. In part the composition of clothing depends upon what the person will be doing. Working in an office requires different kinds of clothing than planting corn on a farm in Iowa. Firefighters' clothes are made of different materials than those of lifeguards. Persons running a marathon would wear cotton shorts and shirts to keep them cool, while fishermen in Nova Scotia might wear rubber suits to keep them warm and dry.



Composition also depends upon the availability of materials. Ancient Egyptians made clothes from flax grown along the Nile River. Spanish shepherds wore garments woven from the wool of sheep they tended. Plains Indians crafted clothing from buffalo, deer and elk hides. Pueblo peoples wore clothing made from animal skins and later from cotton grown in their fields. The Industrial Revolution made cotton and wool fabrics more readily available around the world, however, traditional clothing for ceremonies and rituals is often made as it has been for centuries.

DRESSES

Dresses are normally identified as women's clothing. Dresses are comprised of a skirt with an attached bodice (top section) that gives the appearance of a one-piece garment. While the materials that comprise a dress may differ according to location, the basic design of a dress is universal.