From a TOPSS unit lesson plan on Gender published by APA in 2023. This activity is intended for teachers for use in their classes. Any further use requires additional APA permission.

ACTIVITY 2.2

Culture and Gender Expression Through Fashion

CONCEPT

Students will explore historical examples of gender expression fluidity and understand that gender expression is not rigid. This activity is intended to prompt discussion among students and have them reflect on how gender expression has changed over time.

MATERIALS

Culture and Gender Handout

TIME

15-25 minutes

INSTRUCTIONS

Ask students to go through the following images or descriptions and answer the associated questions.

NOTES/SOURCES FOR TEACHERS

Image 1

The portrait is Mr. John Freake, a wealthy merchant and attorney in Massachusetts.

https://worcester.emuseum.com/objects/2313/john-freake

James Freake © Worcester Art Museum, Sarah C. Garver Fund. Reprinted with permission.

Image 2

This is Franklin Roosevelt.

Image downloaded from https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Franklin-Roosevelt-1884.jpg

Image 3

This is author Ernest Hemingway as a young boy, along with his twin sister.

Photo credit: Ernest Hemingway Photograph Collection/John F. Kennedy Presidential Library and Museum, Boston. Copyright law allows for unrestricted use of this image for editorial, creative, and educational purposes.

Teachers can find images online of the other three examples via a search browser. For example, teachers can search for "Billy Porter red carpet" for the first example (e.g., https://www.elle.com/uk/fashion/celebrity-style/g30673216/billy-porter-met-gala-oscars-fashion).

Handout: Culture and Gender



This is someone dressed in Puritan fashion in 1674.

Based on this picture, how would you describe this person's gender? What was the basis for your guess/description?



This is a Victorian era photo of a famous American who made history in the 20th century.

Who do you think it might be? What is the basis for your guess?



Based on this picture, how would you describe this person's gender? What was the basis for your guess/description?

What do you notice about Billy Porter's red carpet styles?

Egyptian men and women used makeup (kohl). Wealthy Egyptians wore jewelry and heavily perfumed wigs (scented cones), regardless of gender. How does this contrast with traditional gender role expectations held by many in our current society?

Hanfu is the traditional clothing worn by the Han Chinese that emerged during Shang dynasty; the clothing was unisex. Both females and males could both be seen wearing a similar version of the hanfu called shenyi, a long robe with connecting top and bottom parts. How does this compare or contrast with typical clothing worn today in China or the United States?

Reflection: What do these current and historical pictures or descriptions demonstrate about the fluidity of gender expression?