

# Clothing with a Cause - Teacher's Guide

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## OVERVIEW

1. Have students answer the following questions in a quick write:
  - *What is your favorite outfit to wear? Why?*
  - *What do clothes say about who you are and what you believe?*
2. After they are finished writing, have students turn and talk to share their responses with a partner. Then, ask for a few volunteers to share with the class.
3. Introduce the compelling question for students: *How can clothing be used as a form of protest?*
4. Inform students that today's lesson will be focused on individuals who used their clothing to make a statement about, or express, their beliefs. This act of wearing clothing to make a statement can be seen as a form of protest. A **protest** is an action expressing disapproval of something in society. Ask students for some examples of protests they have learned about or participated in. Did clothing ever play a role in these protests? Can you think of examples of clothing being used as protest?
5. The examples in today's lesson will focus more specifically on women who used their clothing to protest social norms in society. **Social norms** are expectations society has for the way people are supposed to behave and look. Some women protested in organized groups, while some protested through the everyday act of wearing clothing that fit outside the social norm. As students will learn in this lesson, women have used clothing to protest social norms for decades.
6. For some historical context, explain that in American fashion, what you wore generally reflected ideas about your role and place in society as defined by gender. Society legally and socially defined women as inferior to men. Some feared that if women started wearing pants, they might start acting like men. Throughout the nineteenth and much of the twentieth century, dozens of American cities made it illegal for women to wear pants in public. However, the American West has a long history of women adopting parts of men's clothing for work, to pass as male, and as non-verbal resistance to dominant fashion and gender roles.

## PART II: BIOGRAPHIES

1. Students will examine brief biographies of some women who used pants as a form of protest. Their task will be to complete the **Clothing with a Cause graphic organizer** as they read the biographies. Students can analyze this content in groups, or on their own.
2. After students finish reading the biographies and working on the graphic organizer, ask a few to share their responses from the graphic organizer. As students share out, chart their responses on a whiteboard or document camera to make connections between the various individuals.  
Ask students:
  - **How was clothing used for protest?**  
*Consider specific examples in each biography. In all the examples provided in this lesson, women decided to put their pants on to make a statement, to assert their identity, and/or protest an injustice.*
  - **Why do you think clothing was used for protest? Why is it an effective tool for protest?**  
*Clothing makes a powerful statement about someone's identity and beliefs without verbally saying anything. The simple act of wearing an article of clothing can signify solidarity with a larger movement or can be an effective way to assert one's identity that may not fit the social norm.*

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## **PART III: CRITICAL THINKING QUESTIONS**

1. Assign students the Critical Thinking Questions to summarize what they learned.

## **PART III: CLOTHING WITH YOUR CAUSE**

1. As a culminating assignment, students find an issue in their community they want to change or address using the **Clothing with Your Cause handout**. They then design a piece of clothing as a sign of protest for that issue, or as a way to highlight that issue. They must explain how the clothing they designed responds to the issue in their community.

## **EXTENSION ACTIVITIES**

1. Learn about women from outside the American West who protested by wearing pants. Some examples include Annie Smith Peck, a mountain climber from the 1890s, and Joyce Ladner, a civil rights organizer from the 1960s.
2. Research the role clothing has played in various social movements of the twentieth and twenty-first century. *Dressing the Resistance* by Camille Benda is a helpful resource.