

The Museum at **FIT**

Beyond Rebellion: Fashioning the Biker Jacket Lesson Plan



Abstract: This lesson uses the biker jacket as a way to explore the similarities and differences between the jacket as a utilitarian garment and as a staple of high fashion.

Students will visit the online exhibition, think critically about the objects they see, and sketch an original design for a biker jacket based on the similarities and differences between the classic Perfecto and a design by Jean Paul Gaultier.

Grade Level: High school seniors or college freshman

Subject: Visual Arts

Time Required: Approximately 1 hour

Materials Required:

Sketchpad/paper and pencils

Access to online exhibition *Beyond Rebellion, Fashioning the Biker Jacket*

(<https://exhibitions.fitnyc.edu/biker-jackets/>)

Educational Standards:

New York State Educational Guideline for Lessons in the Visual Arts, Grade 12, Standard 1

“Students will actively engage in the processes that constitute creation and performances in the arts (dance, music, theater, and visual arts) and participate in various roles in the arts.”

Lesson Overview:

The biker jacket was originally designed as a utilitarian garment to protect motorcyclists from the elements. Later, due to Hollywood’s adoption of the biker jacket in films such as *The Wild One*, the garment became a symbol of rebellious youth culture and a status of “cool.” Since then, fashion designers have sought inspiration from the biker jacket and have incorporated its utilitarian features into their own designs for high fashion.

Lesson Objectives :

- Analyze the biker jacket as a functional utilitarian garment versus later interpretations of high fashion by comparing two objects from the exhibition (the Perfecto verses a leather design by Jean Paul Gaultier).
- Learn how an utilitarian garment is appropriated by high fashion.
- Think critically about fashion.

Discussion Steps: (30 min.)

1. Visit the exhibition website for [Beyond Rebellion: Fashioning the Biker Jacket](https://exhibitions.fitnyc.edu/biker-jackets/) to learn about different types of biker jackets. Explore the site with students or ask them to explore independently.
2. Students will locate the Perfecto jacket within the online exhibition:



Schott, Perfecto jacket, circa 1980, United States, P89.29.1.

3. Ask the students to describe the Perfecto jacket.

Discussion points:

Questions:

- *Have they seen this jacket before? Does this jacket remind them of something that would be worn by a motorcyclist?*
 - *Does the jacket look unusual or different to them? What about this jacket looks different from the rest of the jackets featured in the exhibition?*
- Ask students to list features of the jacket that they think would provide protection for motorcyclists. Together point out the utilitarian features of the garment and explain the original purpose of each.
 - Ask students who they imagine would wear this jacket. Where do they think it would be worn? Point out that the jacket also served as a symbol of rebellion and was worn by teenagers as a symbol of “cool.”
 - Ask students why they think the Perfecto was adopted as a symbol of rebellion?
4. Next, students will locate the jacket designed by Jean Paul Gaultier:



Jean Paul Gaultier, 1987, France. Gift of Anne M. Zartarian, 2000.23.10.

Discussion Points:

- Ask the students to describe what they see and who they think would wear this jacket today.
- Ask the students if the jacket seems familiar or old fashioned? Have the student list several features of the jacket that resemble the Perfecto.
 - e.g., the classic Perfecto silhouette and functional features such as the asymmetrical zipper
- What are the differences between the Perfecto and the Versace jackets? Ask the student which they prefer and why.
- Looking at these two garments, can you discuss differences between a garment designed for utilitarian purposes and one intended for high fashion? What does the fashion designer add to the mystique of this garment?
- Which do you prefer, and why?

Activities/Projects (20 min. plus assessment time)

Give the students twenty minutes to make a sketch of a biker jacket that combines utilitarian features with fashion. Ask the students to think about the contrast between utilitarian fashion and high fashion while they create their sketches. Ask the students to think about where they could wear this new jacket and whom they would want to wear their jacket.

Assessment:

Students will present and discuss their sketches in the classroom and explain which of their design features are functional or fashionable.

- Students will explain why they chose certain features for their designs and will describe who they imagine wearing their new biker jackets.
- Ask the students to examine their own clothing. Which features of their own clothing are functional or fashionable?
- Ask the students to explain the differences between utilitarian and fashion garments. Why do you think fashion designers adopted functional elements into their designs?
- Ask the students whether or not they think fashion is contributing to the idea of rebellion as a commodity. Can you think of other examples where fashion appropriates and simplifies cultural products or ideals?

NOTES: