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Why'd They Wear That?: Fashion As The Mirror Of History



Synopsis

Move over Project Runway. Get ready to chuckle your way through centuries of fashion dos and don'ts! In this humorous and approachable narrative, kids will learn about outrageous, politically-perilous, funky, disgusting, regrettable, and life-threatening creations people have worn throughout the course of human history, all the way up to the present day. From spats and togas to hoop skirts and hair shirts, why people wore what they did is an illuminating way to look at the social, economic, political, and moral climates throughout history.

Book Information

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Age Range: 10 - 13 years

Grade Level: 5 and up

Customer Reviews

This is a great book for teenagers who are interested in clothes; for grownups with the same passion, it's fun, even if it doesn't tell you much you didn't know. The writing is amusing, and the illustrations are big, bold, and very frequent. Organizationally, it follows a rough time line from the cave to the cubicle, but throws in lots of interesting digressions -- like, how did knights in armor go to the bathroom? I think it's more likely to hold the interest of young readers than a straight linear narrative, plus it gives them lots of "fun facts" (many of which are pleasingly icky) to share with friends. It will also, as some other reviewers have noted, give young readers a dose of history with something to tie that history to -- like cavaliers are the ones with the lace, puritans the ones in black.

For an adult reader who wants a serious history of what dress meant, there are better choices -- notably Anne Hollander's "Seeing Through Clothes" and "Sex and Suits". This book, however, is a great starting point.

I have always had an interest in fashion and costume design. This book provides a small insight (literally) into why people wore what they wore when they wore it. The sections are short and interesting. This book would be a great intro book for someone just starting to learn about the history of fashion/costume design.

This book has fabulous photographs and lots of interesting information about the history of fashion. I relied on it heavily for a presentation I did for a middle school audience. I think it would be a great addition to any public or school library.

The minute I heard about this book I was intrigued. History I've always enjoyed reading, but I've never looked at it through the lens of fashion. I was not disappointed in the least. The book fascinated me with its look at the fashion choices people have made over time and how those choices were made in the context of the time. It was interesting to know that people's impractical and often painful fashion choices haven't really improved much over the years. The book is divided up by time period with particular fashions from each period highlighted, everything from suits of armor to corsets to bound feet to ruff collars. The author includes side notes about various jobs related to fashion none of which sound particularly enjoyable. It was eye-opening to ponder why people dress the way they do both past and present. While some current fashions seem practical and comfortable, there are just as many uncomfortable even painful fashions that still exist (stiletto heels, anyone?). For readers who enjoy reading about fashion or history I highly recommend this wonderfully fascinating book.

Synopsis- Have you ever wondered why the Greeks and Romans draped cloaks over themselves? Why we have "Royal Purple"? How ladies walked in gigantic hoop skirts? Well, this book tells the answers to these questions, and many more. They make you wonder, laugh, and feel sorry for the wearers (did they KNOW they were poisoning themselves???). Plunge into the history of fashion!
What I Thought- This is a really cool nonfiction book. It goes through a history of the known world, and teaches about how they made clothes or why they did them like that. I like how this book teaches kids more than they would think about a time period. The book is written in paragraphs, with

little fact boxes, captions, and real photos/paintings/art. It makes it all visually interesting. The paragraphs are in columns, like a newspaper, but dotted with pictures and mini fact boxes. The book mostly focuses on the rich of the time, mostly because they were the ones with the most outrageous fashions. It explains that in Renaissance times, women would eat arsenic wafers to get that shade of deathly pale just right. Ms. Albee has written a wonderful nonfiction book that will get kids thinking about history from a different point of view. This was a really cool book that makes you really wonder about the history (and future) of the world!*Note I got a free copy of this book in exchange for an honest review

Why'd They Wear That? is full of colorful images and interesting sidebars and boxes with factoids that will keep tween fashionistas interested as they're learning about fashion through the ages. They'll be learning about history as well, though they probably won't even realize it since this book is such a fun read. The history presented in this book is pretty Euro-centric but there a few tidbits from other cultures. It would great if this was the first book in a series. Asia, Africa and the Native Americans could each easily fill a volume with the history of fashion in their cultures I'm sure. I learned a lot reading it even as an adult as well. I was especially interested how fashion has shaped our language. For instance, the term "mad as a hatter" came about because mercury was one of the ingredients used to make a hat from a beaver pelt. Mercury poisoning can cause erratic behavior and personality changes. Mercury poisoned hatters roamed about towns and cities - thus "mad as a hatter". I liked the light-hearted tone and humor with which Why'd They Wear That? was written. The description of polyester had me cracking up, "Polyester can spring back into shape after wear and look just as awful as when new." Why'd They Wear That is a fun and educational book for kids of all ages.

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