

SHOES

The Agony and the Ecstasy

Welcome to **Shoes – The Agony and the Ecstasy** resources for teachers. This exhibition is an ideal opportunity to explore design and technology, but it can also have links to literacy and drama as well as art and design.

In these resources you will find:

- Practical information about the exhibition, themes and questions to think about on your visit.
- Suggested activities based on shoe design.
- Suggestions for literacy activities to print out for use in the classroom.
- Some shoe quotes and traditions that might stimulate your own thoughts on the topic.

The Exhibition

The **Shoes** exhibition is divided into nine themes. Each theme is introduced by a graphic panel and then illustrated using different pieces of footwear. The text for these panels is reproduced below so you know what to expect in the exhibition.

Introduction

Shoes do more than simply clothe our feet.

Shoes are the only item of clothing which take on the shape of the wearer's body. This intimate relationship connects with our souls in a powerful way. It can transform us into gods and spirits, give us authority and status, and bring us good luck, protection and freedom. As we shape them, so they shape us, inspiring rituals and rites of passage.

Shoes are also instruments of torture and abuse. We bring pain on ourselves with ill-fitting and impractical styles. But some cultures use footwear to confine and oppress others, making them wear restricting or mismatched shoes.

But ultimately, shoes can be objects of fantasy and desire. They make us feel good, they make us feel sexy.

How do you feel about your shoes?



Why do we wear shoes?

Early people fashioned footwear out of animal skins and plants to keep their feet warm and dry. Sophisticated sandals have been found in Egyptian tombs, and well-designed boots in Bronze Age Azerbaijan. But the simplest style of shoe is probably the oldest. Nothing more than a bag of skin, gathered round the foot and fastened with animal gut, versions are found as far apart as America and China.



Vanity and the need to impress others fuelled the need for fancy footwear. Impractical, fragile and highly decorated designs elevated the ruling classes from the workers. Shoes became the ultimate status symbol.

Shoes have a job to do. They protect us from harm, but they also allow us to achieve our potential in sport and at work, and help to express ourselves through dance.

Many believe in the spiritual power embedded in shoes. People give gifts of shoes in the hope of bringing good luck, protection, and fertility to loved ones.

What are your shoes doing for you today?



Boot 1967- TWCMS:S26

What is Fashion?

Shoes conjure up a strong image of time and place. The Victorian button boot, the 1920s bar shoe, and the Nike Air Jordan – they all bring a specific period in history to mind.

In the past the latest fashions were indicators of wealth and status. Certain styles were restricted by law – your rank in English society dictated the length of your toes in the 1360s.



Clog 2006 - TWCMS:2006.668

Fashions go in cycles from one extreme to another. A new design, often in contrast to previous styles, comes along and is taken up by the fashion conscious. As it becomes the next big thing, the search for something different starts all over again. The 1960s sharp outline of the stiletto gave way to the chunky squared-toed features of the platform shoe in the 1970s. It was revived again in the 1980s and 1990s, and is still around today.

Each generation discovers something from the past, giving it a twist which breathes new life into it. 1950s loafers spoke of pipes and slippers, 1990s Wannabes shouted Cool Britannia. Fashion is all about choice.

Are you a dedicated follower of fashion?

Obsession

With the average woman's shoe collection valued at £900, maybe the cliché that women are obsessed by shoes is true!

The desire to possess is what drives this need, not practicality. When President Ferdinand Marcos and his wife Imelda fled the Philippines in 1986 charged with fraud, she left behind 1,200 shoes and created a legend.

In the 1990s Manolo Blahnik already had one of the highest profiles in haute couture, but the television series *Sex and the City* made him a worldwide name. Carrie Bradshaw, the central character, frequently squandered her money on designer fashion, "I've spent \$40,000 on shoes and I have no place to live? I will literally be the old woman who lived in her shoes!"

As fashion cycles turn ever more tightly, there often seems little new under the sun. Yet the creativity of designers continues to inspire a plague of copies on the high street, whether it's the shape of a Blahnik heel or the trademark Jimmy Choo bling. But the quality of production is the real status symbol.

Whose shoes do you desire?



Must Haves

When every decade has its icon – the Chelsea boot, the DM, the Wannabe – do you know what will define this day and age? When every season has its must-haves what is being worn on the streets?

What we wear on our feet says a lot about who we are, and the shoes we choose for everyday say the most. Some people need to follow fashion, to be part of the crowd, because that is their comfort zone. Others need an edge to their style that sets them apart. Whatever their choices the brand matters, but it has to be right.

The power of the logo is hard to resist for many young people. An obsession with clothes is an easy route to a lifetime of debt for many. Schools now teach Citizenship using shopping for shoes as a way to start discussions on peer pressure, consumer politics, youth culture and globalisation. Stay cool about your shoes.

What do your shoes say about you?





Rapunzel - Rachel Benton



The nightmare before Christmas

Tengiz Chketiani

Shoe Tales

Shoes are an endless source of fascination and fantasy for children. In wearing them they enter a realm of make believe – a world of superheroes, beautiful princesses, and fabulous monsters.

Fairy stories often feature footwear with magic powers – for good and for evil. They frequently have a strict moral tone. Magic will reveal its dark side if the hero or heroine steps out of line. *Puss in Boots* brings wealth and happiness to his poor master, by outwitting a giant and a king. In the 1948 film *The Red Shoes*, a version of Hans Christian Anderson's tale, an ambitious ballet dancer dances to her death because she chooses fame over family.

Cinderella is the most popular of all fairy stories, perhaps because it has many versions from around the world, and tells a tale of good triumphing over evil. The earliest version comes from a fable of *Yeh-Shen (Yè Xiàn)* written in 860 AD. But the best known is Charles Perrault's 1697 story of *Cendrillon*. Tiny feet are common to *Cinderella* myths, but Perrault introduces the glass slipper which transforms her.

Do you have a favourite fairytale?

Fantastical Shoes

Shoes inspire flights of fantasy in artists and designers.

Salvatore Ferragamo “the shoemaker of dreams” devoted his life to making the perfect shoe believing there was “no end to the materials a shoemaker may use to decorate his creations.” Christian Louboutin follows in his footsteps, experimenting in a similar way to create theatrical designs with chic and humour.

Terry de Havilland's motto “Cobblers to the world” sums up his cheeky over-the-top approach to design. Beautifully made, flamboyant and fun, his shoes shriek glamour.

Designers like Ellen Sampson and Nik Hutchinson are influenced by the physical presence of feet. Their shoes celebrate the beauty of the human body.

Prudence Emma Staite uses chocolate in her works of art. She believes that food is art, and that “art should not only stimulate the eye but the whole body and senses.” Heels and chocolate – what more could a girl want?!

Is there anything a shoe cannot be?



Blood red Shoe - Ellen Sampson

Pain and Pleasure

Shoes thrill us. We are drawn to shapes, textures, and glimpses of flesh, buckles and straps. We love what they do for us, and for what they do to others.

High heels transform feet and legs into objects of erotic desire. The arched foot, the taut tendons, and the curved muscles all visually echo sexual tension. Wearing high heels throws a woman's body out of balance. Marilyn Monroe cut a quarter of an inch from one heel, so that she walked with her famous wiggle.

Heels can be powerful weapons in the battle of the sexes. Women feel dominant and in control when they choose their shoes, yet some people need women to be imprisoned by their footwear.

The ancient Chinese practice of foot-binding also had links to the sexual and cultural domination of women. Women with small feet were prized because this showed they did not work for a living. But this painful practice led to generations of women with damaged feet, and was not outlawed until 1911.

Are your shoes objects of desire?



Sense and Sensibility

Shoes are not good for your feet. They may soon carry a Government health warning. The British Standards Institution aims to introduce a safety mark to protect people from their footwear.

Extremes of fashion lead to dangerous designs. Wearing nothing but high heels leads to shortening of the Achilles tendon, ironically making it impossible to wear flat shoes comfortably. In 2004 a Japanese woman died after fracturing her skull having fallen off her platform shoes.

Surgery is now the preferred option if your feet don't suit your shoes. Dr Suzanne Levine sculpts and plumps the feet of the well-heeled set in Manhattan, USA. Toes can be shortened and collagen injected into toes, heels or the base of your foot.

Today ethics in manufacture and foot health are for once in step. Camper's motto, "Walk, don't run" sums up their laidback philosophy of foot friendly fashions. Birkenstock and Scholl manufacture footwear which exercise your feet through the flexing of your toes. Bespoke shoe makers will hand craft shoes made to fit and made to last.

Will you choose fit over frivolity?