

## “Set Up for Success”: Creating an Online Image Database to Enhance Learning in a Dress History Course

Erin French and Jennifer Farley Gordon, Iowa State University

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### Description of Innovative Strategy

We created a dress history teaching resource to enhance student success in our institution's undergraduate European and North American dress history survey course. During fall 2020, this course was offered in an online synchronous format due to the COVID-19 pandemic. We compiled supplemental dress history images, each of which corresponded to a textbook chapter/weekly module, into a web-based resource. This teaching tool was then utilized in a lecture to help students prepare for their final exam and achieve the following learning outcomes:

1. Recall and identify costume components and items of dress
2. Compare and contrast examples of historic dress
3. Formulate written descriptions of items of dress

## Purpose of Strategy

The teaching resource introduced additional images of representative dress items beyond those found in the weekly lectures and in the textbook. Padurano (2011) found that using images in the classroom can help instructors to teach the core principles of historical survey courses. In addition, images in the history classroom aid students in developing and enhancing critical thinking skills and help to foster deeper levels of understanding of historical topics (Schocker, 2014). This approach is also consistent with discussions of the 2019 Costume Society of America Scholars' Roundtable, where Nancy Deihl, Director of the Costume Studies MA program at New York University, called for looking beyond the dress history textbook and "finding different paths to and through the past ... to forge a more diverse approach to [dress] history" (Reddy-Best et al., 2020, p. 145).

### Implementation of Strategy

*Building the Teaching Resource.* The teaching resource was built in a Microsoft Excel spreadsheet because of the flexible format for organizing object metadata and the need for multiple revisions of the content.

[illegible]

Figure 1. An example entry from the teaching resource in Microsoft Excel.

The curriculum of the dress history course spans from the Ancient World (circa 3000 BCE) to the Crinoline Period (circa 1870). We selected five representative images of dress for each of the 12 chapters covered in the textbook (*Survey of Historic Costume*, Tortora & Marcketti, 2015). Images were appropriate for educational use because they were in the public domain or had a Creative Commons license, and they were drawn from major museum collections online such as the Metropolitan Museum of Art or the Los Angeles County Museum of Art. We prioritized the inclusion of images that depicted the dress of historically marginalized populations and images of items of dress not already in the textbook or weekly lecture. Images of a variety of sources of material evidence, such as paintings, statues, extant garments, and accessories, were selected to further benefit students.

We developed a website from the spreadsheet's contents featuring "cards" for each of the images of dress. By clicking on a card's title or on the image itself, the student can see additional object metadata such as the date, country of origin, and who would have used or worn the item. Students can search for images by title and description or sort the available images by spatial coverage (country of origin), costume components, gender of user, socioeconomic class, and textbook chapter.

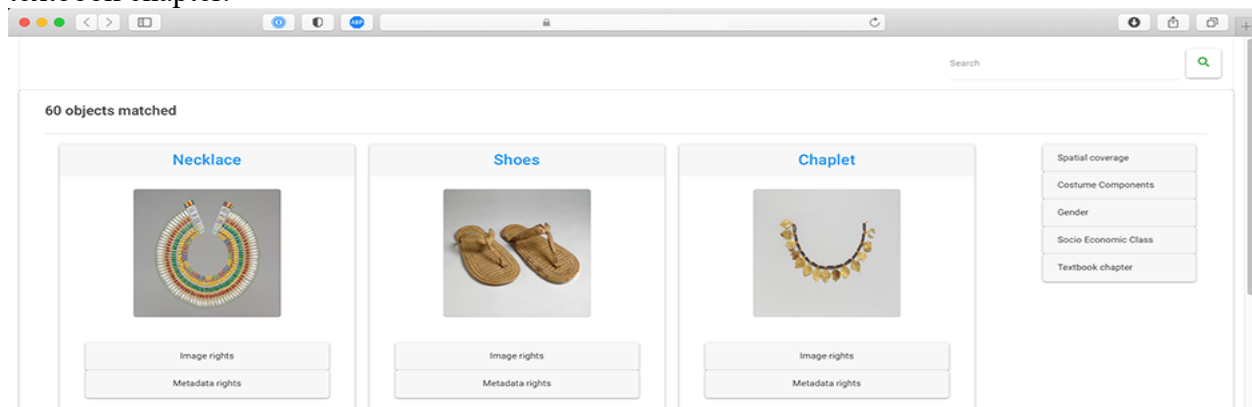


Figure 2. The website version of the teaching resource.

*Utilizing the Teaching Resource.* The final exam review lecture was divided into three parts, each of which was designed to address learning objectives one and two. The first part of the lecture was a review of silhouettes through time. Images from the teaching resource were interspersed with images from earlier lectures so that students would have some familiar images to reference. The second part of the lecture was a dress history timeline exercise using the poll feature in the Zoom video conferencing platform. Students were asked to place sets of images from the teaching resource in chronological order. The final portion of the lecture addressed the third learning outcome. Students were assigned an image at random from the teaching resource, and they were divided into Zoom break-out rooms to write three-to-five sentence descriptions.

### Effectiveness of Strategy

At the conclusion of the lecture, students provided feedback on the teaching resource and on the in-class activities through a one-minute paper. Student comments were overwhelmingly positive. One student noted, "I believe that the online resource is set up incredibly well with a

structure that is easily understandable and clear to students. Combined with the physical textbook resource, students are set up for success.”

In asking the students to place an unfamiliar set of images in historical context, they were challenged to think critically about progressions of silhouette and style change, rather than viewing each time period (i.e. each unit) as independent from the others. One student noted, “I had never thought about actually looking at a picture of a garment and putting it in order compared to other garments.” Another found the exercise useful in self-evaluation: “I ... learned more about my understanding of the history of fashion design when the images were out of context and not in chronological order.” The writing exercise also challenged students to contextualize the images and to utilize their vocabulary about dress history. One student said, “I also really enjoyed having to dive into something specific like a pomander ball, as it was cool to figure out as many details as I can. ... I think the usefulness of ... the [writing] assignment ... was extremely high, and I came out of the lecture happy with how much I learned.”

### References

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