



Project Runway: A Common Thread

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Students studied various fashion trends throughout the twentieth century as a gateway to analyzing significant cultural, social, and historical movements. They explored key movements such as First Wave Feminism, the Chicano Movement, Civil Rights and Black Power, Gay Liberation and Ballroom, Disco, and Third Wave Feminism. In Spanish class, students examined the history of clothing in the Americas and how fashion production and design shifted with European colonization. The class focused on the historical importance of traditional design and processes within indigenous communities, particularly in Oaxaca (Tehuana), Chiapas (Tsotsil), Hidalgo (Otomi), Nayarit (Wixárika), and Veracruz (Nahua). Students analyzed how these traditions preserved ancestral knowledge, cultural values, and cosmology, with special attention to the Wixárika's evolution of traditional designs into beadwork and the connection between language preservation and traditional art forms.

Students selected two fashion movements to research, exploring how these movements either disrupted or reinforced cultural norms. Examples included disco fashion emerging from soul, funk, and Motown; the role of drag in the gay rights movement; and the evolution of women's fashion influenced by second and third wave feminism. Students identified thematic and historical connections between both movements and presented their findings in a research paper. For their final exhibition, students showcased their learning through a fashion show. They created two original pieces representing their chosen fashion movements, along with a vision board, outfit sketch, in-depth artist statement, and a music video to educate the audience about the cultural significance of the movements they studied.

Teacher Reflection

Students benefited the most from small group instruction when it came to learning new skills. While we did plan a few workshops with community partners on how to modify clothing and use sewing machines, moving forward, I would amplify the amount of instruction and support students received in these skills. I would want to bring in partners more frequently to run small group instruction so they get more targeted practice with the complex skill sets required to create a beautiful piece.

—Michelle Babick

Student reflection

This project has made me reflect on our past history and how different groups have fought for their rights. Clothing helped with that- this was something I never knew before.

—Chiara M.

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