

# HOW WOMEN'S CLOTHING CHANGED OVER TIME



## How Women's Clothing Changed Over Time

### Introduction

In this activity, you will look at six photos that show how women and girls dressed in the past. These photos will help us learn what kind of clothes different groups of women wore in the past, how women's clothes changed over time, and how clothes that we wear today differ from clothes that women and girls wore in the past.

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Photo 1: Color print of five women in Godey's fashion dresses for January 1866 (Charlie May Simon Collection)



Photo 2: A group of women, referred to as "The Kettle Drum," pose in front of Mrs. James Read's house, 1897 (Clubs and Organizations Photograph Collection, ca. 1880s-1927)

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### Questions:

1. What clothes are the women in Photo 1 and Photo 2 wearing? Describe their clothes.
2. When was each of these photos taken? How did women's clothes change between 1866 and 1897?
3. Do you think that the women in these photos were wearing these clothes every day? Or were those clothes for special occasions?
4. The dresses in Photo 1 and Photo 2 were expensive and difficult to make. Were all women in the past able to wear these types of dresses?
5. In the past, people did not buy clothes in stores. Some people made their own clothes, but others paid a tailor or a seamstress to make their clothes. Do you think that the women in Photo 1 and Photo 2 made or bought their dresses?
6. Do the clothes in these photos are like clothes that women wear today?
7. Do you like the clothes in these photos? Do you think they were comfortable to wear? Would like to wear similar dresses today?

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Photo 3: Workers pick cotton in a field, not dated, early 20<sup>th</sup> century (Agriculture photograph collection, ca. 1893-1941)



Photo 4: Berry pickers with fruit in Springdale, ca. 1900 (Agriculture photograph collection, ca. 1893-1941)

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### Questions:

1. What clothes are the women and girls in Photo 3 and Photo 4 wearing? Describe their clothes.
2. When was each of these photos taken?
3. Do you think that the women and girls in these two photos were wearing these clothes every day? Or were those clothes for special occasions?
4. The clothes in Photo 3 and Photo 4 were not expensive or difficult to make. Did all women and girls in the past wear these types of clothes?
5. In the past, people did not buy clothes in stores. Some people made their own clothes, but others paid a tailor or a seamstress to make their clothes. Do you think that the women and girls in Photo 3 and Photo 4 made or bought their dresses?
6. Do the clothes in these photos are like clothes that women wear today?
7. Compare clothes in these photos to the dresses from Photo 1 and Photo 2. Are they similar or different?

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Photo 5: Women in a home economics class sit at their desks with their teacher looking on, ca. 1942-1945 (Life Interrupted Collection, 1903-2005)



Photo 6: Photograph of a class of Dunbar High school students in a gymnasium, ca. 1952 (National Dunbar Alumni Association Historical Collection)

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### Questions:

1. Where were Photo 5 and Photo 6 taken? Who are the young women in these two photos?
2. What clothes are the women wearing? Describe their clothes.
3. Do you think that the women in these photos were wearing these clothes every day? Or were those clothes for special occasions?
4. Do the clothes in these photos are like clothes women wear today?
5. Do you like the clothes in these photos? Do you think they were comfortable to wear? Would you like to wear similar clothes today?
6. Compare the clothes in these photos to the clothes from Photos 1, 2, 3, and 4. Are they similar or different? How did women's clothes change over time?
7. Do you think that all women wore the same kind of clothes in the past? Do all women wear the same kind of clothes today?