

Guo Pei: Couture Beyond

October 13, 2018 to January 20, 2019



TEACHER'S STUDY GUIDE

FALL 2018

Vancouver
Artgallery

Contents

Program Information and Goals.....	3
Background to the Exhibition <i>Guo Pei: Couture Beyond</i>	4
Designer's Background	5
Pre- and Post-Visit Activities	
1. Background Information	6
Background Information sheet.....	7
Student Worksheet.....	8
Personal Style	9
Student Worksheet	10
2. Cultural Influences and Paper Cut-Outs	11
Comparisons.....	12
Paper Cut-Out Templates.....	13
3. Motifs and Design.....	17
Flower & Fauna Imagery in Guo Pei Designs.....	18
Vocabulary.....	19
Resources.....	20



Vancouver Art Gallery

Teacher's Guide for School Programs

This exhibition presents a striking array of work from Guo Pei's most important couture designs from 2006 to spring 2017. Included are more than forty original hand-worked outfits complete with shoes and accessories, as well as a runway video. The work is a visual feast from the world of fashion and culture that connects to history, narrative and commerce, challenging our perceptions of what fashion can be.

DEAR TEACHER:

This guide will assist you in preparing for your tour of the exhibition *Guo Pei: culture Beyond*. It also provides follow-up activities to facilitate discussion after your Gallery visit. Engaging in the suggested activities before and after your visit will reinforce ideas generated by the tour and build continuity between the Gallery experience and your ongoing work in the classroom. Most activities require few materials and can be adapted easily to the age, grade level and needs of your students. Underlined words in this guide are defined in the Vocabulary section.

The tour of *Guo Pei: Couture Beyond* has three main goals:

- to introduce students to one woman's visionary couture designs,
- to consider personal, historical and cultural connections in both Guo Pei's work and students' fashion influences,
- to explore Guo Pei's internationally recognized creations in terms of ideas, materials, technique and inspiration.

THE EXHIBITION:

Guo Pei: Couture Beyond

Guo Pei: Couture Beyond is the first Canadian exhibition devoted to the work of Guo Pei, the only Chinese national ever invited to present collections at Paris Haute Couture Fashion Week. It provides a comprehensive overview of her trajectory as a designer as well as her contribution to global fashion culture. Guo Pei has described her haute couture designs as existing at the intersection of fashion and art. In her theatrical, extravagant creations, Guo Pei mixes ancient traditions with contemporary aesthetics and original ideas. Her creations evoke Chinese history and mythology within contemporary, innovative designs.



In her own words:

"I am like an author with my clothes; I like to tell a romantic story, a fairy tale."

"I don't follow trends or try to compete with anyone. Everything I do stems from following my passion and my love for design."

"I want to make them remember. . . It is my responsibility to let the world know China's tradition and past, and to give the splendor of China a new expression. I hope that people do know China in this way."

"In order to become a successful designer, you need to keep repeating yourself and learning from such repetition. It might take ten years, with thousands of designs created each year, but eventually you will get there—success means never giving up."

"I always have a desire to create something that is fashion and is not fashion. So a dress ends up weighing 50 kilos! Every piece is not fashion anymore. It's sculpture; it's painting. I want to put all that into a dress."

"I am a product of a changing China. I never look down on my past, and I am always hopeful about the future. I'm excited about what will happen next."

Organized by the Vancouver Art Gallery in collaboration with SCAD FASH Museum of Fashion + Film and curated by Diana Freundl, Associate Curator, Asian Art, and Stephanie Rebick, Associate Curator.

DESIGNER'S BACKGROUND

Guo Pei was born in Beijing in 1967 to a schoolteacher mother and a senior Communist Party Official father. Her grandmother, who was born at the end of the Qing dynasty (1644–1912), lived with the family, and used to tell the young Guo Pei stories of the old days and describe the exquisite details of the silky fabric and vivid colours worn by the wealthy in days long gone. At the age of two, Guo Pei began helping her visually impaired mother make clothing for the family, and so began her love of sewing and designing. This was at a time when the only acceptable clothes were the blue or green Mao-style suit worn by all, and when the idea of individualized fashion was not tolerated. She says: *"I used to alter the loose dresses that my mother handed down to me so they were more stylish. When I wore them to school, my teacher angrily accused me of being a capitalist."* Her father found her passion for fashion and subsequent career appalling and threw her early designs in the garbage. Although he finally came around and is now supportive of her, she says, "He's now 80, and he still wears his green soldier's uniform every day."

Her beginnings as a designer were uncertain. In 1982 there were five hundred applicants for the first design major at the Beijing Second Light Industry School. Guo Pei was one of twenty-six students accepted into the school, graduating in 1986. She lived during the time of growing openness in post-Cultural Revolution China and immediately got a job as chief designer at one of China's first privately owned clothing companies. She has said that as the demand for fashion emerged, *"the factory would produce 50,000 pieces of one design, and they would all sell out immediately."* Women lined up around the block to wear one of her simple, basic designs.

In 1997 she opened her own design house, Rose Studio. Her husband, Cao Bao Jie (Jack), helped finance and is co-owner of the company. She began travelling across China looking for the few remaining artisans who were skilled in ancient embroidery and fabric making. She has since trained hundreds of employers to use these traditional methods and experiment with them. Her company grew quickly and today she employs close to five hundred trained artisans.

Her reputation grew rapidly and she became known for her high-quality one of a kind designs for local celebrities, politicians and business women. Her gowns were seen at red-carpet events, at the 2008 Beijing Olympics and in movies. Her next initiative was to create exquisite wedding dresses based on traditional—but innovative—designs for local brides. The event that brought her international fame was a Metropolitan Museum of Art (MET) Gala opening in 2015, an exhibition that included Guo Pei's work—which pop-star Rihanna attended wearing a stunning 50 kg gown that took five hundred artisans two years to complete. This was followed by a high-profile and successful collaborative make-up collection with MAC and for which she designed an entire fashion collection. Later the same year Guo Pei was invited to become a member of the Chambre Syndicale de la Haute Couture, the governing body of the haute couture industry in Paris, the first Chinese national to receive this honour.

After opening a studio in Paris, she showed her first Paris Haute Couture collection in 2016. She now shows there twice yearly. Guo Pei has been celebrated by *TIME* magazine, *Business Fashion*, *Vogue*, the *New York Times* and many more international publications.

PRE-VISIT ACTIVITY: Background Information (intermediate and secondary students)

Objective:

Students read, research and share information relating to Guo Pei and develop an understanding of the history and structures that shape her.

Discussion:

Students will spend time in groups working on gathering and recording information. Vocabulary terms that will need to be pre-taught include the Cultural Revolution, Imperial China, Haute Couture, Paris Haute Couture, ready to wear and one of a kind. These are all defined in the Vocabulary section at the end of this guide (page 19). Additional vocabulary might need explaining for younger students.

Materials:

- writing materials
- access to the Internet: some useful websites can be found on the student worksheet
- Background Information Sheet (p. 7) and Student Worksheet (p. 8)

Process:

1. Divide the students into five groups. Cut up the Background Information Sheet (p. 7) into five sections and assign one section to each group.
2. Give each group a copy of the Student Worksheet (p. 8), and ask them to transfer their information to the appropriate box.
3. Have students figure out what they need to know to complete the section on their artist, and find it on the Internet, either at home or at school. Some websites are suggested; students can of course find their own. Older students can find more information; younger students, just the basics.
4. Ask each group to find/copy/sketch a relevant design on a separate piece of paper.
5. Have each group present the information on their artist while the rest of the class adds the information to their worksheets. A member of each group can describe their design while the rest of the class sketches it into the appropriate square. Compare the original to the class sketches.

Conclusion:

Discuss:

- What were some of the most interesting things that students learned or discovered?
- Are there any historical periods, designs or ideas that the students would like to know more about?
- What are students curious about discovering in Guo Pei's work? What do they expect to see in the exhibition?

Background Information Sheet

Clothing in Imperial China

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Chinese_clothing

<https://www.ducksters.com/history/china/clothing.php>

<https://www.topchinatravel.com/china-guide/history-of-chinese-clothing.htm>

- Each class had its own way of dressing
- The wealthiest people wore richly embroidered silk clothes
- Shoes were important, and the materials, size and styles showed the status of the wearer
- Colours were significant—only the Emperor was allowed to wear yellow

Clothing in the Cultural Revolution

<https://www.thoughtco.com/chinese-clothing-mao-suit-687372>

http://archive.maas.museum/hsc/evrev/mao_suit.html

- The “Mao” style suit was invented by Sun Yat Sen
- Clothing was meant to be functional and show equality
- Men and woman wore much the same style, and colours were limited

Haute Couture, Paris

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Haute_couture

<https://www.harpersbazaar.com/uk/fashion/fashion-news/news/a31123/the-history-of-haute-couture/>

<https://theculturetrip.com/europe/france/paris/articles/a-brief-history-of-haute-couture-in-paris/>

- Haute Couture fashion is high end, one of a kind, made to order and completely hand-made
- In Paris the term Haute Couture is protected by law and has strict rules
- Designers must be invited to show in the annual fashion show and fulfill all the requirements
- International designers present their most creative designs as art rather than as wearable fashion

Haute Couture, Guo Pei

<https://www.vogue.com/fashion-shows/fall-2016-couture/guo-pei>

<https://fashionista.com/2016/01/guo-pei-haute-couture-spring-2016>

- Became internationally known when Rihanna wore her design in New York
- Invited to the Paris Haute Couture show in 2016
- Had to meet specific requirements and follow rules to be allowed to show her designs
- One dress, Magnificent Gold, took 50,000 hours to make; Blue and Porcelain took 10,000 hours

Guo Pei's other fashion initiatives

<https://news.bgfashion.net/article/6755/13/Guo-Pei-presented-lavish-wedding-dresses-for-wealthy-Chinese-Brides#popup2>

<https://www.forbes.com/sites/forbesasia/2015/12/03/chinas-queen-of-couture/#72b7a89a73bb>

https://www.huffingtonpost.ca/2015/05/06/guo-pei_n_7224900.html

- Began her career as a designer in post Cultural Revolution China, with ready to wear fashions
- Opened Rose studio in 1997, exploring traditional embroidery and fabric in one of a kind designs
- Made dresses for celebrities, politicians and the 2018 Beijing Olympics
- Designs wedding gowns based on tradition but with a modern look

Student Worksheet

	History & background	Ideas behind clothing	Materials used	Sketch of a piece of clothing
Imperial China				
Cultural Revolution China				
Haute Couture, Paris				
Haute Couture, Guo Pei				
Guo Pei's other fashion initiatives				

PRE-VISIT ACTIVITY: Personal Style (intermediate levels)

Objective:

Students discuss and define style, taste, personality and fashion.

Discussion:

Students discuss and broaden their understanding of the clothes they wear and the messages transmitted through their own style. Questions for discussion might include:

- How would you define your personal style?
- How does your personality reflect your style? Or, how does your style reflect your personality?
- What are your clothing influences?
- What do you want your clothes to say about you?

Materials:

- copies of Student Worksheet (p. 10)
- writing materials

Process:

1. Raise some of the questions above and discuss with the class as a whole.
2. Hand out one copy of the worksheet per pair of students. Have them go through, discuss and fill in the sheet with their partners.
3. Discuss as a class.

Conclusion

Discuss:

- Who dictates fashion?
- What are some of your influences?

High fashion? Street fashion? Culture? Peer pressure? Parents? Social expectations? Magazines?

- Do your peers influence what you wear? How? Why or why not?
- Introduce the term Haute Couture in the context of this discussion.
- Please note that the last outfit on the worksheet is a design by Guo Pei.

Student Worksheet: Young People's Fashions

	Where and when do you think this might be worn?	What do you think this outfit is influenced by?	What kind of personality might the wearer be?	Would you wear this or want your friend to? Why/why not?
				
				
				
				
				

PRE- or POST-VISIT ACTIVITY: Cultural Influences and Paper Cut-Outs (primary or intermediate students)

Objective:

Students look at types of clothing worn in particular cultures and choose one to adapt to make their own original designs in the form of paper cut-outs.

Discussion:

In Guo Pei's designs she drew deeply on historical and cultural layers and on extremely detailed work. Students consider what visual elements are important in clothing from a particular culture, to use in design of their own.

Materials:

- Sheet of Comparisons (p. 12) showing Guo Pei Designs and historical outfits
- Paper template cut-outs for figure (one per student) and outfit (at least two per student) (examples on pp. 13–16).

Students can make their own templates by drawing garment shapes and adding tabs.

- Scissors and markers, crayons or pencil crayons.

Process:

1. In pairs, have students look at the images of Guo Pei's outfits (p. 12) Have them discuss the relationship between the historical clothing and her own designs. Make sure that students understand that the designs from Imperial China were actually worn by higher-ranking figures and that Guo Pei's designs are from her own imaginings, to be worn by models on the runway. Ask students to think about the similarities and differences. Notice motifs, pattern and colour.
2. Discuss as a class, focusing on how Guo Pei has used her imagination in her designs.
3. As a class, brainstorm clothing worn by particular cultures, past and present. Ideas could include an Indian sari, Japanese kimono, kilt, Ghanaian fabric. Ask students to think about Canadian hockey culture (uniforms), kitchen culture (chefs' clothing), Mogul warriors, superheroes, etc.
4. Ask students to think of a type of clothing they would like to design and how they could change it to make it their own original, innovative work, thinking about pattern, colour, shape.
5. Give each student a copy of the figure and two copies of the clothing templates (choose from pp. 13–16). Have students cut them out. They can change the shape of the figure or outfit as long as the clothing can still fit on the figure. Turn over the cut-outs so that students have the blank side on which to create their own designs.
6. Have students sketch designs for two articles of clothing representing their culture.
7. Using chosen medium (crayons, markers, etc.), have them create their outfit and figure.
8. Display the students' work.

Conclusion

Discuss:

- Have students look at each other's work and figure out what culture/ideas are shown.
- Ask them to discuss their choices for their particular motif/design.
- Discuss similarities and differences in design, process and choices of colour and pattern.
- Discuss the process. What were some things they had to take into consideration while planning and creating their work? What would Guo Pei need to consider in her work?

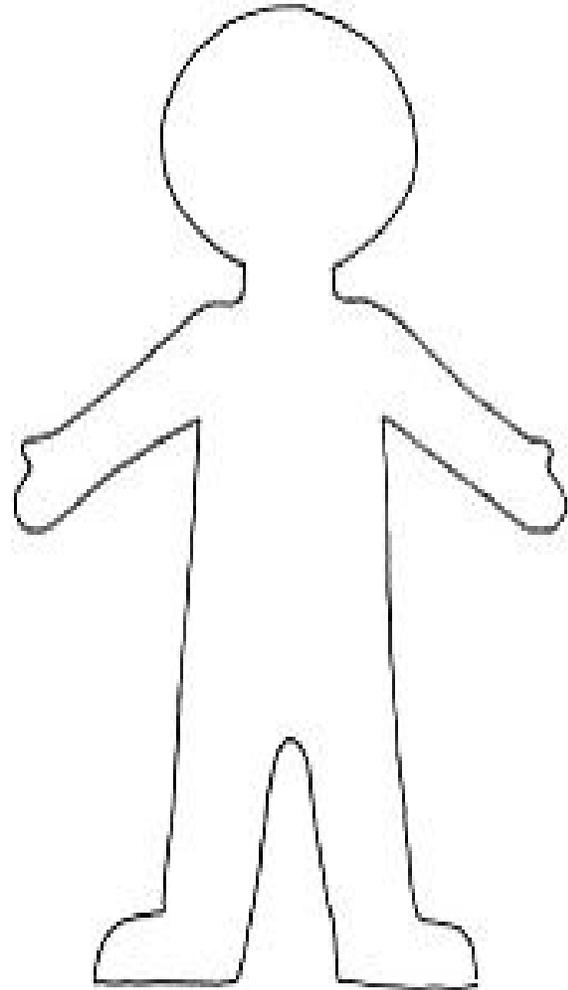
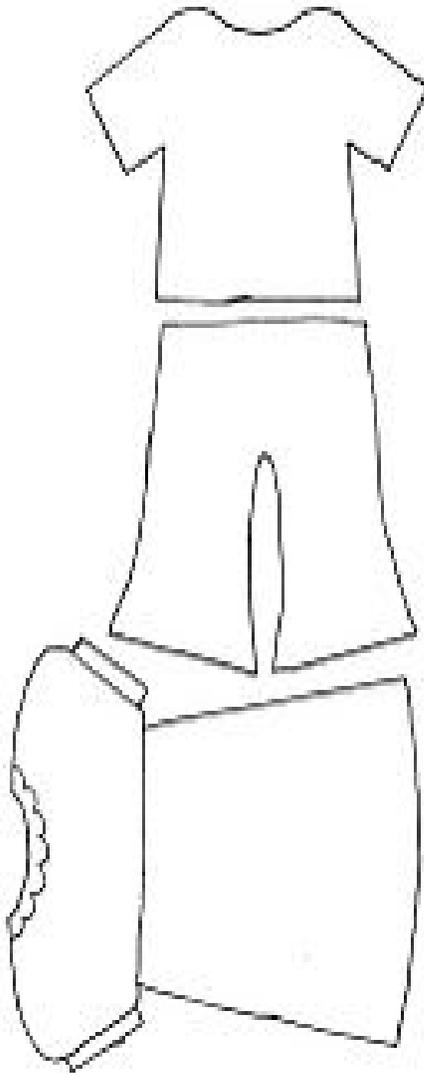
Comparisons: Guo Pei & Imperial China

Guo Pei Designs	Imperial China historical pieces
	
	
	
	
	

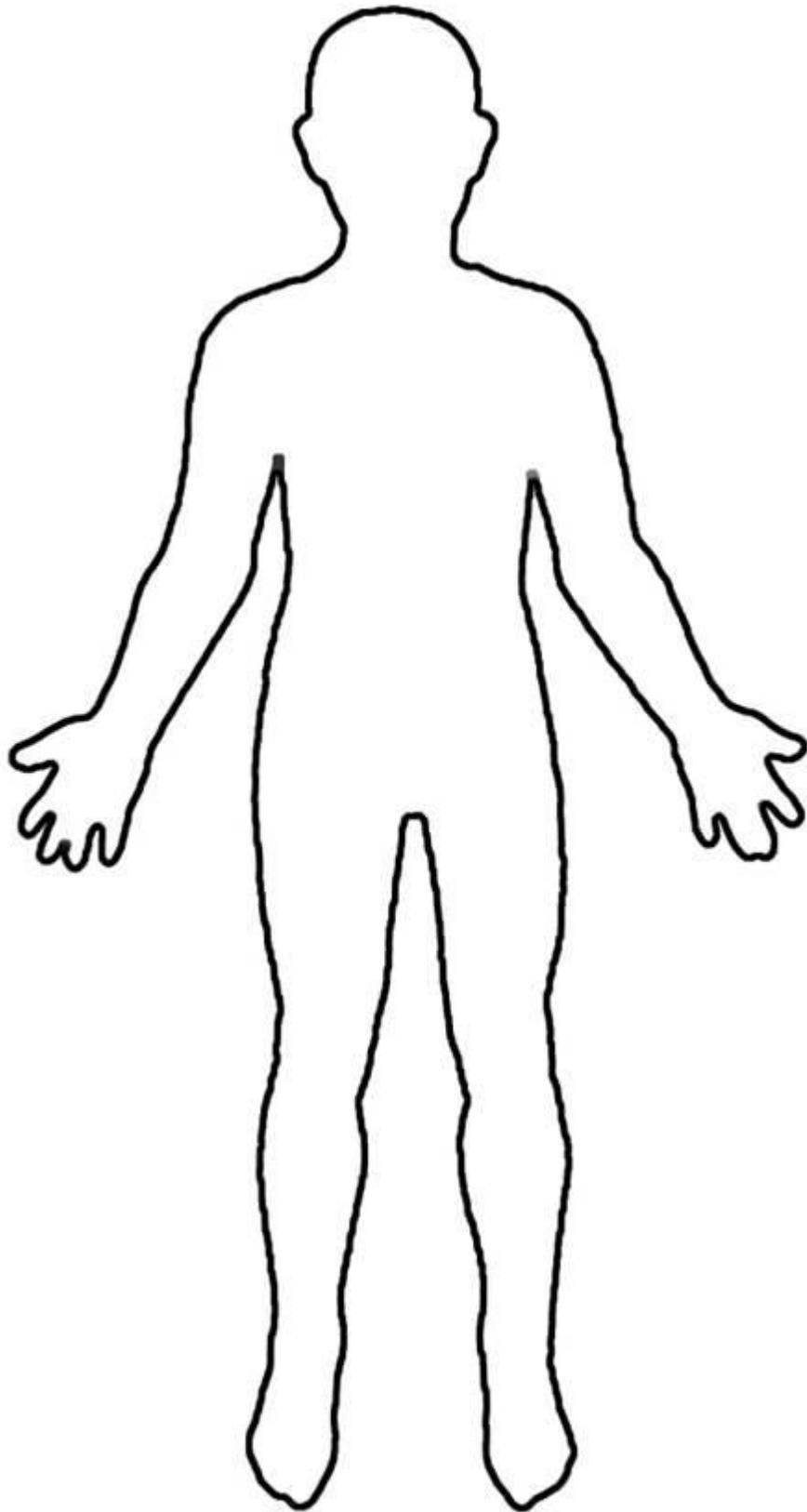
Paper Cut-Out Templates

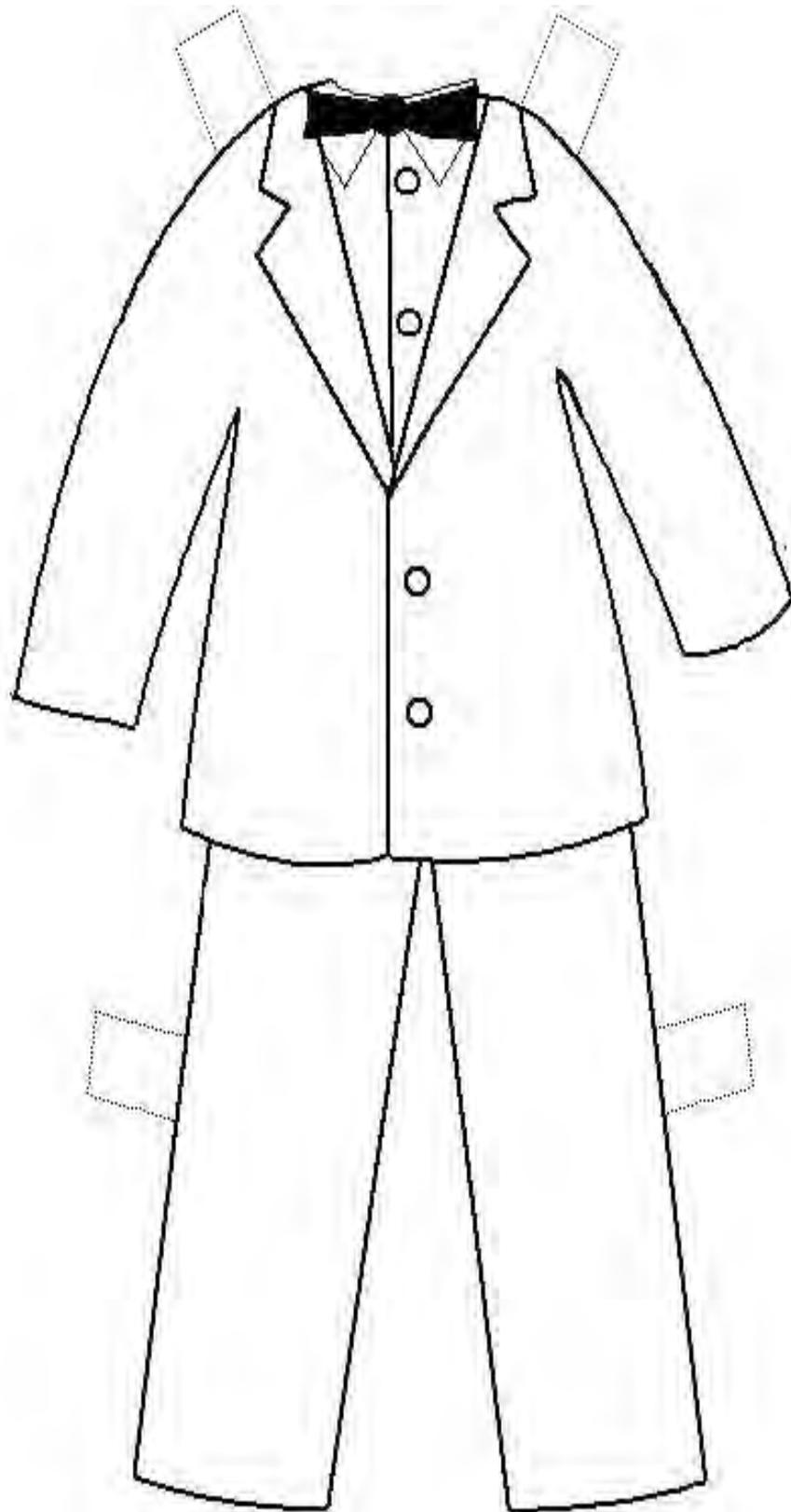
For younger students:

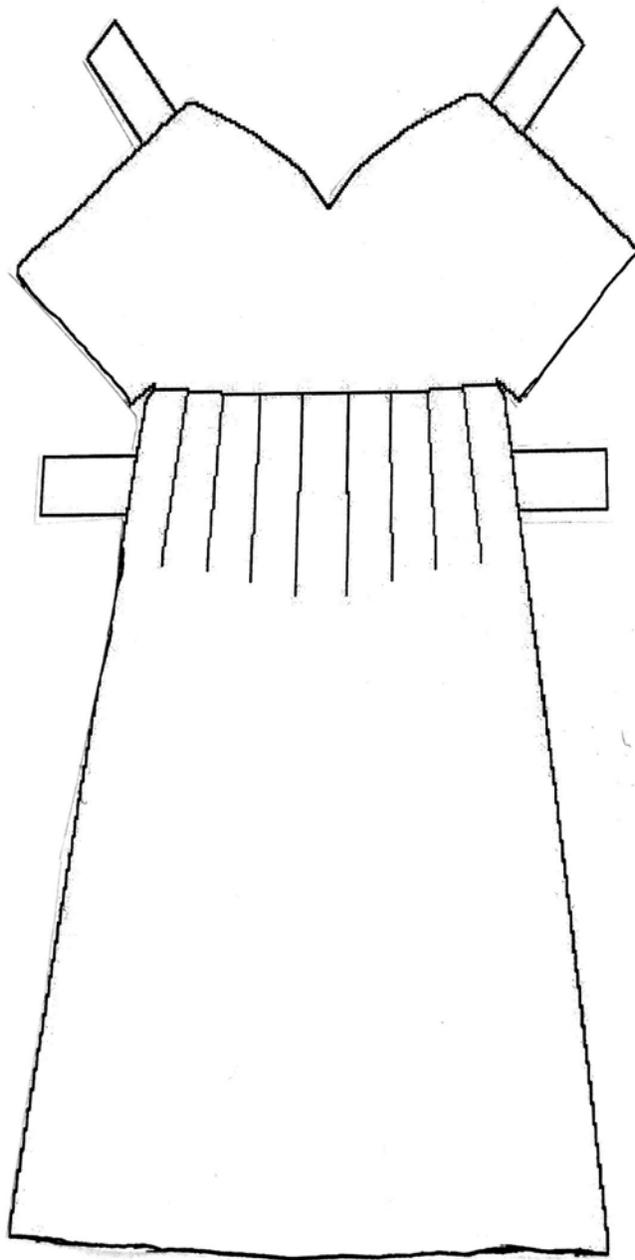
ServingPinkLemonade.blogspot.com



For older students:







PRE- or POST-VISIT ACTIVITY: Motifs & Design (all levels)

Objective:

Students use a photocopied image of themselves to create an outfit using a motif/design, preferably from nature, that is meaningful to them. Materials can include fresh flowers or leaves or gravel from nature. Collaged cut-outs may be used as an alternative.

Discussion:

Flora and fauna figure prominently in Guo Pei's designs and reflect the influence of nature in her work. She explains, *"my inspiration comes from flowers because they spread happiness, which is important for cultivating one's inner garden."* One of her collections was inspired by a historical Chinese-Buddhist saying: *"a flower contains the world; one leaf contains enlightenment."* Guo Pei often features mythical or real creatures such as the phoenix, dragons and butterflies in her designs.

Materials:

- ❑ a full-page photocopy image of each student
- ❑ photocopies of Guo Pei designs inspired by nature (p. 18)
- ❑ scissors and glue
- ❑ magazines and/or items collected from nature

Process:

1. Take a full body photograph of each student and make photocopies. Black and white is fine.
2. Have students work in small groups to look at the images on the following page. Ask them to look closely and discuss what they think inspired the designer. Focus on elements from the natural world.
3. How are the elements arranged? Random? In a pattern? Repeated? Ask them to discuss the choices the designer made in applying her designs. Notice any repeated motifs.
4. Discuss with students what they would include in a design for clothing inspired by nature. Or would they take their inspiration from other places? What? Where?
5. Either:
 - Take students outdoors to collect fallen leaves, sticks, blossoms, etc., or:
 - Have them collect items after school to bring in the following day, or:
 - Have them look through magazines and cut out images/shapes/colours, and ask them to consider repetition and pattern for their designs.
6. Have students take another look at Guo Pei's very careful designs, and then plan their designs and glue their materials onto the photocopies of themselves.
7. Display student work.

Conclusion:

Discuss:

- How are the motifs in students' works similar to or different from Guo Pei's?
- What were important considerations in making the design?
- How would their design be different if it were an actual piece of clothing?
- Would they want to wear such clothing? Why or why not?

Flower & Fauna Imagery in Guo Pei Designs



VOCABULARY

couture: original, fashionable, expensive custom-made clothing.

Cultural Revolution: a radical sociopolitical movement in China from 1966 to 1976, led by Mao Zedong and characterized by military rule, terrorism and restructuring of the educational system. Its stated goal was to preserve “true” Communist ideology in the country by purging remnants of capitalist and traditional elements from Chinese thought, and to re-impose Mao Zedong thought as the dominant ideology within the Communist Party. In the violent struggles that ensued across the country, millions of people were persecuted and suffered a wide range of abuses and sometimes execution.

haute couture: literally “high dressmaking,” a 300-year-old French legal term with very specific rules and requirements that may only be used if those terms are met. Only fashion houses invited by the governing body, Chambre Syndicale de la Haute Couture, can join and must have:

- a workshop in Paris,
- at least fifteen full-time staff,
- two fashion shows a year,
- a minimum of thirty-five garments, completely hand-made from start to finish, per show.

Imperial China: very long system of Chinese rule from 221 BCE until the formation of the Republic of China in 1912. The position of emperor was hereditary, unless deposed in a rebellion, in which case a different family would rule. Successive emperors from the same family resulted in dynasties, some lasting many hundreds of years. The emperor had absolute power and ruled a rigidly hierarchical society.

motif: a design that contains a repeated pattern or colour.

one of a kind: high-end made-to-measure clothes.

Qing Dynasty: The last imperial dynasty of China, ruling from 1644 until 1912, when the Republic of China was established.

ready to wear (prêt-à-porter): wearable clothing sold in standardized sizes.

RESOURCES

Print:

Howl Collective. *Guo Pei: Couture Beyond*. Rizzoli Electa, 2018.

Online:

<http://www.guo-pei.fr/>

<https://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2016/03/21/guo-pei-chinas-homegrown-high-fashion-designer>

<https://tmagazine.blogs.nytimes.com/2010/12/01/year-of-the-couturiere/>

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Haute_couture

<https://www.theguardian.com/culture/gallery/2017/dec/20/divine-inspiration-the-heavenly-gowns-of-guo-pei-in-pictures>

<https://www.theguardian.com/world/2016/may/11/the-cultural-revolution-50-years-on-all-you-need-to-know-about-chinas-political-convulsion>

<http://www.bbc.com/culture/story/20151007-from-red-guards-to-bond-villains-why-the-mao-suit-endures>

<https://www.cnn.com/style/article/guo-pei-haute-couture-paris/index.html>

Vancouver Art Gallery School Programs Supporters:

Financial Partner:



RBC Foundation®

Generously supported by: Ace and Hemsä Fipke

Additional support from: Sheldon Gilmour

Foundation Corporate Partners:



Visionary Partner for Community Access:

diamond
FOUNDATION