



Capitalist Opportunities and Louis Vuitton

by Wendy C. Potter, 2016 CTI Fellow
David W. Butler High School

This curriculum unit is recommended for:
Apparel and Textile Production, I and II, Career and Technical Education
Grades 9th-12th

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Teaching Standards: See [Appendix 1](#) for teaching standards addressed in this unit.

Synopsis: Louis Vuitton (LV) saw an opportunity to meet the demands of travel among the elite and affluent. Even in the 19th century, the basic business principle of knowing the needs of the customer was just as powerful as it is today in the 21st century. These variables of success will be addressed in this curriculum. Louis Vuitton is a brand that has been in existence since the mid 1800's. I submit that this luxury brand continues to exist and succeed in the market for several reasons: craftsmanship, name legacy, investors, and marketing, all within a capitalistic market. Although the brand has a history of craftsmanship and a story of heritage, it continues to thrive by way of a business model known as "the luxury strategy." This strategy is very different from the business model used in fashion. Luxury and fashion operate in two opposing concepts.

I plan to teach this unit during the coming year to 70 students in Apparel and Textile Production II.

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Capitalist Opportunities and Louis Vuitton

Wendy C. Potter

Introduction

In 2007, I made a purchase I resolve that I will never again repeat. Traveling to New York City, NY with my apparel students, I anticipated the excitement of buying a designer handbag from the back alleys of China Town. It was an activity purposefully planned on our itinerary. Seasoned teachers briefed the students and me on how to go about this adventure inconspicuously and safely. Wandering through the crowded streets of China Town, we split into small groups and began our adventure. As mysterious vendors approached us on the “down-low”, we disappeared into small rooms packed wall to wall and ceiling to floor, with scrumptious designer bags at modest prices. After a day of bartering and scavenging, I returned to our bus with 4 handbags, each with their own luxury brand logos and hardware. I spent under \$150.00. Just one of the bags would’ve cost ten times that price in the retail market.

Years later, I viewed a popular television show of individuals taking personal possessions to be appraised by an antique dealer. There is a story of an antique trunk that was brought to be appraised. This huge trunk, roughened by travel and careless storage, bared the logo of Louis Vuitton. The owner of this trunk shares her story of how she purchased it from a lady who had an overwhelming amount of “junk” stuffed in a double wide mobile home. Her price was a mere \$50.00 to remove the trunk from her stash. The antique dealer shared the history of this original Louis Vuitton trunk, dating it to the 1890s. He then revealed that her modest purchase was valued at \$10,000-\$15,000.

Fast forward to today in 2016. I still have in my possession, two of the designer bags that I purchased from the black market. At the time of purchase, I was naïve enough to think I was possibly getting a genuine designer bag. But I have researched enough to know how to distinguish genuine from counterfeit. Thanks to the increased accessibility of the internet, information is at our fingertips, giving us the power to make well informed decisions.

School/Student Demographics

I have taught at my current school for 16 years. What I value most about this school culture is the diverse population that it serves. Our current enrollment of 2,135 students includes 44 percent Caucasian, 32 percent African-American, 19 percent

Hispanic, and the remaining 5 percent represent other ethnicities including Asia, Pacific Islands, and American Indian. Within my Apparel and Textile Production classes, Caucasian students make up roughly 10-20 percent, creating a “majority minority.” Other students represent Asia, Nepal, Brazil, Ecuador, Ethiopia, Mexico, African American, Africa and the Middle East. We have about 40-45% of students who receive free or reduced lunch. Overall, our students represent the working class and are a good representation of the overall Charlotte Mecklenburg Schools population. Although very few of my students (if any) come from an affluent family, they are still very fascinated and fond of designer brand fashion. In my class, we study history of fashion, which includes the admiration of French designers as well as the rising of American designers. A biography video will always capture the attention of the high school student. When fashion designer research projects are assigned, students will have a variety of interests, from urban 21st century designers to luxury brand designers from the 19th century. Students often argue who gets to choose their designer first. Louis Vuitton and Chanel are always of interest to the students. It’s safe to say that regardless of a student’s socioeconomic background, there is a high level of curiosity for the luxury brand fashion designers.

Looking at a Louis Vuitton bag, a luxury brand product, and then seeing the retail price, I would quickly dismiss it as a product for me. My mind is quickly flooded with the many other purchases I would rather make with \$2000. The LV bag appears to be of high quality and aesthetically pleasing and versatile enough to coordinate with any clothing ensemble. But so do many other handbags that cost a tenth of the price of the LV bag!

Within my circle of friends, I only know of two people own a LV bag. The bag is easily recognizable by its logo and style. Both friends are upper middle class, frugal with their money, and have good taste in fashion. They regularly look for bargains when it comes to items of fashion, but they are willing to purchase the LV bag at retail price. This bag apparently has a value that is unquestionable and unchanging – no bargains will be found for a LV bag!

Nevertheless, in the eyes of the student from a high school represented by low to middle-income socioeconomic backgrounds, the expense of a luxury Louis Vuitton bag seems absurd. What one person values for its signs of wealth and exclusivity, will differ from another person. Collectors of luxury bags treat their collection as an art collection, a visual representation of wealth and appreciation for the finer things. Likewise, the young person spending all his money on various colors and styles of Nike sneakers values his sneaker collection for the status it gives among his peers. We learn to place value on things based on our experiences growing up and our identity among our peers. However, what we value as a young person will most likely change once we establish our place in the workforce with adult responsibilities. So, while collecting luxury bags or sneakers each represent different price points in the fashion industry, they both stem from a long

history of consumer consumption that was fueled by the beginning of the department store.

Rationale

This unit will challenge the students to stretch their knowledge about capitalism and the fashion industry while also challenging them to form opinions about ethical fashion practices, while reflecting on their own personal spending habits.

Regardless of socioeconomic level, most people, especially teenagers, find the experience of shopping satisfying, whether in a mall, grocery store, or yard sale. Consumer consumption has fueled the economy at a significant pace since the Industrial Revolution began, when shopping became a form of leisure and entertainment. At the heart of this activity is capitalism. Many forms of capitalism exist around the world, but in this unit, I will focus on France.

It is common knowledge that France is the “fashion capital of the world.” In Apparel and Textile Production I, students learn about French designers and their influence on style before and after WWII, while in Apparel and Textile Production II, students learn the basics of trade, entrepreneurship and the fashion construction. High school students recognize the Louis Vuitton logo and print on the popular Speedy bag. They also know that it is VERY expensive. What they do not know is that Vuitton started out making trunks, grew up among hard working family on the farm, and that he was NOT a fashion designer. The well-known logo is seen throughout fashion magazines, but it is technically NOT fashion. LV handbags and luggage are considered “soft luxury” goods.¹

Unit Goals

Building on prior knowledge from Apparel and Textile Production I, students will learn to differentiate the luxury brand of Louis Vuitton from fashion derived from a fashion business model. Identifying Louis Vuitton as a luxury brand, apparel students will discover how this brand grew from humble means and hard work through carpentry skills gained from traveling rural France. Having a large percentage of its population in the rural countryside, students will come to understand how France slowly grew in the Industrial Revolution compared to other countries. Louis Vuitton has grown to become a luxury empire while being passed down through the Vuitton family and invested in globally. The story of Louis Vuitton is a great example of how capitalism in many forms can grow and stabilize a company for centuries. Students will collect and organize new knowledge through foldable activities and a lap book. This will provide support for students as they encounter many historical and relative facts worth remembering.

Finally, this unit would not be complete without a cumulative project, which involves basic carpentry skills, production design and sewing skills. A handbag will be designed to

assess students' application of knowledge through product design, development and marketing.

Content Research

Louis Vuitton 1821-1837

Louis Vuitton was born August 4, 1821. Vuitton was born in Anchay, a small rural community in France. He came from a family of builders and carpenters, which were part of the working class. His father, a miller, owned a farm and his mother was a milliner. Good craftsmanship was certainly in his blood! His mother's work, a respected craft, was bought by merchants and taken into the city guilds.² How carefully and thoughtfully the beautiful hats must have been packed for the trip into the city. It is most likely that the merchant traveled by cart. Louis probably heard bits and pieces of the life beyond the farm, as urbanization was growing. The first railway in France was in operation in 1827 for goods, which brought about many possibilities for growing cities, but it was developing at a slower pace in France due to the limited iron industry.³ Surely, Vuitton heard many exciting stories of industrialization, which would bring France out of a struggling economy. However, it is important to review historical events of France prior to Vuitton's birth.

Eighteenth century France had three classes of people, known as First (Clergy), Second (Noble), and Third (Common) Estates. The Vuitton family, most likely of the Third Estate, were part of the growing bourgeoisie. Louis came from a family of builders, carpenters, and farmers well established in the small village of Anchay. From this, we can picture his family as one of modest living, paying taxes on the land from their hard-earned money. On the other hand, those of the First and Second Estate residents did not pay taxes. This increased the gap between the wealthy and the peasants. The economy of France was suffering due to previous wars and the French Revolution. Many recall hearing of Marie Antoinette and her frivolous spending on an extravagant life style. Although her enjoyment of life and luxuries are not condoned, she was not the main culprit of the French Revolution. There was resentment among the common people over the privileges granted the nobility and clerics, which eventually led to open rebellion and violence.

With most of France's population living in the countryside (taxpayers), the gap between the wealthy and the poor only grew larger. Royal debt from the cost of wars along with the lack of growth from a small amount of exports also created a weak economy. Textiles were beginning the industrial revolution in France, but at a gradual pace, compared to Britain and Germany. The Napoleonic wars only added to the challenges facing the textile industry. Even when the country's state of affairs seemed to be improving, the lower class rarely benefited. The bourgeoisie gained strength politically and economically. The July Monarchy ushered in a new regime with the

crowning of Louis-Phillipe as “King of the French”, the people’s King!⁴ While changes were in the making of the French affairs, changes were also inevitable for the young Louis Vuitton.

Imagine the sadness Louis experience when, at the age of ten in 1831, his mother died, possibly due to cholera, a common bacterial disease during that time. Although the Industrial Revolution was well on its course, proper sewage treatment had not yet been developed. Louis’ father remarried, introducing a strict stepmother into the home. Louis quietly planned his escape. A determined and stubborn young fellow, Vuitton secretly left home at the age of 13 in the spring of 1835. Walking toward Paris, about 300 miles, he survived by carrying out odd jobs for food, cash and lodging. It was quite common for vagrants to wander through France. Some of them were veterans from the Napoleon wars. Farming had not yet been mechanized, so seasonal workers were often hired in exchange for food and cash. Picking up a wide variety of jobs, Louis developed skills for working with metal, stone, fabrics, and wood, all which would come in to play for his future business. It took Vuitton a couple of years before finally reaching Paris in 1837.⁵ Around the same time, the first railway line to the city of Paris was opened. A train would have been nice in getting Vuitton to Paris sooner, but he would not have had the working experiences he gained while on foot.

Louis Vuitton 1837 – 1867

Traditional retailing of this time was still deeply influenced by the Guilds, a system traced back to the 13th century (there is record of a shoemaker’s guild in Barcelona in 1202). This system placed limits on pricing and specialization so that neighboring businesses were not infringing upon one another’s livelihood. Guilds guarded special techniques, not willing to share them with the new manufacturers of the Industrial Revolution. It was also common to set a minimum price to prevent “unfair” competition.⁶ An emphasis was placed on craftsmanship, instruction and a set of standards. At times the guild could be political in nature, separating the “haves” from the “have nots” and restricting entrance into the guild.

Despite guild restrictions, Louis Vuitton was fortunate in his first years in Paris. Louis Vuitton received an apprenticeship experience with Marechal’s, a well-respected trunk maker and packer. Once trained, Vuitton entered a Journeyman program, typically seven years in length. At this time, with travel by ship, trunks were designed to have a rounded top to allow water run off that might occur at sea. This made stacking of the trunks difficult. During this time, Louis was closely supervised as he worked on building trunks, learning the skills for each phase before moving on to the next. Part of his job at Marechal’s was that of a packer. The affluent hired professional packers to carefully pack their belongings for their travel. It was common to pack an enormous number of belongings for to escape the summer heat of Paris.⁷

Continuing to work for the small manufacturer of Marechal's, Louis Vuitton became a Master Craftsman and finally part of the middle class. But now in France, the middle class did not carry voting privileges, making it difficult for him to open his own business. By June of 1848, Louis-Philippe was overthrown and replaced by the Second Republic. Despite this, Napoleon III appointed himself emperor, declaring the second French Empire in 1852. This important event would lead to Vuitton's success.

As Louis Vuitton continued to become a favorite among clients, Napoleon III's wife, Empress of France Eugénie de Montijo, requested his services. Gaining a client of royalty was sure to jump-start Louis' entrepreneurial career. From this opportunity, Louis became even more skilled in his craft. He now had a loyal client on which to build his reputation and in 1854, Louis Vuitton opened his own store. What was it like to open a store in France, 1854? Capitalism was gaining ground as the guild system was fading away and new shops known as *magasins de nouveautés* (dry goods stores) offered one-stop shopping experiences. Urbanization and the middle class was growing as well as their buying power. Shop owners expected to sell when a customer walked through the door. A purchase was expected if you entered the shop. Upon entering, the customer would bargain with the owner, discussing the product and the value placed upon it. Prices were left to bargaining. The caveat – there were no returns. It was up to the customer to examine the product before exchanges were made.⁸

The Department Store

As *magasins de nouveautés* began to emerge, so did their variety of dry goods expand. Dry goods included drapery, ribbon, woolens, gloves, silks, and the like. Merchandising started to include low prices and high turnover with products as some owners purchase in bulk, wholesale. This new approach in retailing took time to take root, as merchants were set in their traditional ways of minding the guild system. The guild's control of how many entered certain trades and the conditions under which they operated was a system dating back to medieval times.⁹ It is not easy to break with tradition, but window display, store décor were already common in London, and Parisians were certainly willing to join their British competitors in retail. *Magasins de mode* (fashion houses) were already in existence in Paris by the end of the 18th century, and by 1840, the convenience of ready-to-wear fashion was a threat to master tailors and shoemakers.

For the next 20 years (1840-1860), a revolution in retailing was taking place. Stores such as Petit Dunkerque, Petit Saint-Thomas, and Ville de Paris were in operation with fixed and marked prices, along with low prices for high turnover. These stores allowed free entry and offered exchanges or reimbursement if the customer was not satisfied. The customer became King! But this revolution in retailing was also beneficial for the store owner as their sales volume continued to increase. This brought about the need for more manufacturing and production along with an increase in the workforce. Similar growth was taking place in New York (Macy's), Philadelphia (A.T. Stewart's), Chicago

(Marshall Field's), and London (Whitley's). Some stores expanded their inventory to include books, toys, and furnishings. Diversification was a prominent feature of the new retail innovation of the 19th century. Such an enterprise was here to stay.

Many of these stores employed hundreds of workers creating a highly organized and managed system. Supply and demand were in place, the population was growing, and the wealth of the country increased. However, with change, there will be challenges and these larger stores certainly brought about some new ones. New construction, need of investors, employee payroll, theft, and poor management were some of the struggles of this new retail phenomenon.

Promotion and Merchandising

While this retail revolution was taking place, marketing and advertising offered many new innovations. In the past, advertising was limited to street cries, street signs, and almanac listings. One dreamer was sure to shake things up. The dream of Aristide Boucicaut was to become a reality, shaping the future of merchandising.

Aristide Boucicaut, his wife and associates envisioned a way to expand their modest, but already large store, Bon Marché. The cornerstone for the new store was laid in September of 1869. Bon Marché became a mecca for the leisure activity of shopping. This enormous building of iron and glass created all sorts of visual staging to encourage shoppers to enter and purchase. Elaborate displays, trading picture cards, and concerts are a few examples of marketing used by Bon Marché. Support for the artistic community was also declared by the addition of reading rooms and an art museum. White sales and agendas declared their lowering of prices, which only urged customers to consume more.

The social culture of this time began to contribute to France's annual growth rate. Between 1840 and 1870, France maintained a per-capita rate of growth of 1.84 (high for this period). The amount of savings deposits is a good indication of growth for Paris. The amount grew from 62,000,000 francs in 1835 to 632,000,000 francs in 1870.¹⁰ This was clearly an economic boom for France. Department stores depended on mass production and mass production depended on retail. Both depended on the railroad system and the Paris renovations of Hausmann.

Travel

A dramatic event in history that changed the landscape of the economy was that of the laying down of railroad tracks. Just as the internet today, the development of the railroad made possible increased movement of goods and money. It brought about trade and consumption of all sorts of commodities.

Prior to the railroad, movement through the city of Paris was limited to walking or horse and carriage. In Paris, walking was common due to the inefficient lay out of the city.¹¹ Various groups of people were housed in common areas, but was segmented in a way that hindered the use of horse and buggy much of the time. It was inconvenient sometimes to go into certain areas of the city to make necessary purchases.

Hausmann changed all of that when he designed the roads of Paris. Upon being appointed in 1853 as Prefect of the Seine by Napoleon III, Hausmann was fully committed to improving the lives of all of Paris, regardless of social class. Within 7 days of his appointment, Hausmann presented a map of his plan to the emperor with the intent to unify the city.¹² The boulevards and roads removed barriers between neighborhoods and created a logical traffic flow. Also benefiting were the shops and factories. Making purchases were no longer hindered by the haphazardly designed avenues. The new boulevards and widening of avenues encouraged the growing population of Paris to explore other parts of the city and places of trade and work. No longer was it difficult to cross to the left or right bank. Hausmann also worked to improve water and gas lines by appointing Eugene Belgrand to renovate Paris' infrastructure. While costly and sometimes met with resistance, Hausmann and Belgrand's work improved the water quality, the health of citizens, and brought light and cleaner air to a city longing to expand in 19th century capitalism and industrialization.

By the mid-1800's, France was industrialized. Coming out of the "Steam Age", the railroads and brilliant roadway design allowed France to continue to grow. The textile industry played a prominent role for what we would come to know as "the fashion capital of the world." The economic infrastructure over the years had developed many small and specialized tradesmen, because of both the regulations set by trade guilds and the unevenly dispersed population. Keep in mind Louis Vuitton's family lived in the small town of Anchay, France. The small town of Anchay was the home for Vuitton's ancestors, many that had skills in carpentry. It was common for small towns in France's countryside to be home for many family owned businesses. Trade within the family and/or town is a source of pride and security, especially financial security, so it was common for fabric types to get their name from a contributing town. Denim, a global textile for blue jeans, was first developed in Nimes, France. Therefore, "from Nimes" (de Nimes) morphed into "denim." Chantilly Lace, usually black and worn when mourning a death, originated in Chantilly, France. Today, this lace, with its distinct corded outline, comes in a variety of colors and used for special occasion wear. Just as many fashion terms find their origin in France, other fabrics can offer an interesting case for research (toile, chenille, tulle).

France continued to grow with the rest of the industrialized countries and Louis Vuitton continued to gain success while also meeting his future wife, Clemence-Emilie Parriaux. They were married in 1854 and shortly thereafter, opened his own shop after resigning from Marechal's shop. Louis set up shop in a high-end area of Paris. Outside

his shop was a sign that said, “Securely packs the most fragile objects. Specializing in packing fashions.”¹³ Surrounded by top couturiers, Louis was able to pick up more clientele by providing stylish and personally made boxes for the tailor made dresses.

A common event to showcase innovations and products of trade was an exhibition, much like a World’s Fair where people come from all over the world. London held the first Great Exhibition in 1851, and then in 1855, Paris hosted the next exhibition, focusing on the celebration of French luxury goods. This was certainly a springboard for the globalization of products.

In 1857, Emile Vuitton gave birth to their son, George. Providing for a family, Louis continued to perfect his products. Demand for his luggage grew as he created the “slat trunk.” This trunk was made of a sturdy gray canvas and brass trimming to give it a modern look. By 1858, his luggage was the preferred baggage of France.

The increase in demand created a problem for the small shop. There was not enough room to manufacture the large volume in the back of his shop. Because the city had become overcrowded, Napoleon III annexed a few areas outside of the city set up as suburbs. These areas were popular with small businesses that needed room to grow for manufacturing purposes. Vuitton bought a large plot of land in Asnieres-sur-Seine, five miles north of Paris.

This new location provided adequate space for his growing workshop needs. It was also close to the river, which made exported goods and importing materials more feasible. The shop in Paris remained for the retail of his luggage. Along with his new workshop, Vuitton build a large home for his family with antiques and art. Louis Vuitton’s customer base grew to include high-profile clients.

The third exhibition in London (1862) then the fourth in Paris (1867) continued to bring more exposure to the famous trunk maker. The International Exhibit of 1867 was one of the largest. From 42 countries, 52,000 exhibited their products, with Vuitton being one of them. From clocks to scientific discoveries and medical innovations, this exhibition decided to award medals to the most successful exhibitors. Vuitton walked away with the bronze medal, bringing more endorsements as the leading baggage maker in the world.

1870-1892

Events took a turn for the worst while Vuitton's entire business was flourishing. On July 16, 1870, France declared war on the Germans, beginning the Franco-Prussian War. The Prussian army dominated, causing Vuitton to make the decision to move his family within the city wall of Paris. His workshop and home were in dangerous territory. The Prussian army sieged his factory, damaging most of its contents or stealing materials. Paris was becoming just as devastating as there became a shortage of food, leading the people of Paris to survive on horses, pets, rats, and even animals from the zoo. Paris finally surrendered to the Prussians after the city had been destroyed by shelling. Prussians moved into Paris and refused to leave until 5.5 billion gold francs in war reparations had been paid to Prussia.

While Paris was damaged in many ways, Vuitton had saved money over time. He returned to his factory in Asnieres and immediately started to rebuild what was left of the less than one-year-old factory. Property prices were low due to the war, giving Vuitton an opportunity to buy a new shop in the city of Paris. Business soon picked up after his new shop was established near high-class hotels, boutiques and the famous Jockey Club. By 1872, the newly built factory was in operation and Vuitton continued to create new designs and types of luggage. New printing technology made it possible for his newly created fabric. A striped fabric was designed that came in either red and beige or brown and beige. Other luggage makers were in business and Vuitton was constantly staying ahead of the competition with new designs that met the growing needs of the population. By doing so, Vuitton's luggage and trunks stood out from the rest and again in 1888, he created another design – the beige and brown Damier canvas. With a store opened in London, Vuitton continually faced “knockoffs.” This time, his new design included ‘marque L. Vuitton deposee’ (Louis Vuitton registered trademark).

In 1892, Louis Vuitton passed away leaving his empire to his son, George Vuitton. George continued the heritage of his father's business. He took his father's brand to show at the Chicago World's Fair in 1893, adding to the global awareness of Vuitton. In 1896, in another effort to stand out from the rest, George created the monogram canvas we know today, with the quatrefoils and flowers. Even in Louis Vuitton's passing, his son continued the story of his father's brand. Jenni A, of Goose Design, writes that the four key components of successful brand DNA are heritage, culture, story, and values. Of story, she says:

The history and evolution of a brand tells a story and creates another way of projecting a brand. Reflective manifestation of a story through company products, advertising, branding and design is integral to creating a successful brand and allows consumers to connect with what you are selling.¹⁴

20th century

The story and heritage of Louis Vuitton continued even after his passing. But the story was not always good. Prior to his passing, George Vuitton brought about three other signature bags – the steamer, Keepal, and the Noe bag. However, when George passed away, his son, Gaston-Louis took charge of the family company. The history of this company remains vague for the World War II period. Resources reveal that Gaston-Louis collaborated with the Nazis during their invasion of France in 1940. The Vuitton family had already suffered through one German invasion, so it was likely that their collaboration with the Vichy leader was an effort to protect the business. Henry, Louis Vuitton's great grandson was even awarded a medal by the pro-Nazi government for his loyalty. Gaston-Louis could keep the factory running and even set up another factory to produce commemorative busts of memorabilia of the Vichy leader, Marshal Petain. This part of the Louis Vuitton company history is not completely transparent as company records were said to have been destroyed by fire. The company could survive World War II, remaining strong and growing.

Luxury empires

While department store owners offer a variety of products to maintain a continual flow of goods and profits, the moguls of luxury brands have bought out a variety of fashion brands for other reasons.¹⁵ Remember that luxury needs time and it does not depend on mass production and overturn of products. For this reason, luxury empires create growth by owning many brands. These other brands are chosen carefully and retain their individual identity. Moguls such as Bernard Arnault and LVMH have continued to grow because they have not depended on one luxury brand for its earnings. The Economist reports a study by the Boston Consulting Group, which “finds that a retail brand saves around 30% of its commercial costs (advertising rent, shop assistants and so forth) each time it doubles in size.”¹⁶ Beginning in 1984, Bernard Arnault started buying out brands one by one, starting with Christian Dior. Eventually, over 60 of his brands would fall under his empire known as LVMH (Louis Vuitton Moët Hennessy). It is the world's largest luxury empire.

21st century

“Fast fashion” summarizes the climate of the 21st century fashion industry. Fashion trends are identified and quickly put on the market; a direct result of mass production. Within this topic, it is important to define fashion. **Fashion** is defined as the style of clothing worn by a group of people at a *given time*. The very basic characteristic of fashion is that it *changes*. Fashion is cyclical, often repeating styles of clothing like a former period. Styles typically repeat in a 30-year cycle, but with the internet, styles are changing at a much faster rate, putting more demand on the supply of fashion. The change of fashion is what feeds the industry, keeping it growing and thriving. Herein lies

the problem of the business model of the fashion industry. Growth in the fashion industry depends on the ever-changing fashion trends. With trends being short lived, the fashion industry sets out to get their product to as many people as possible, as quick as possible, before that product becomes obsolete. This is where mass production serves the fashion industry well.

Ethical Practices

No longer are sweatshops a problem in the US, but they can still be found in many under developed and emerging countries. With the prevalence of the internet, society has become more aware of unethical practices within the fashion industry and therefore more compassionate toward people all over the world. Knowing that their clients are aware of the ugly side of the industry, fashion leaders are beginning to join efforts to eliminate poor working conditions among their manufacturing factories. Since the Rana Plaza Bangladesh tragedy in 2013, groups have organized to begin correcting the unsafe conditions of factories overseas. The Accord is an effort to correct and bring working conditions to safe standards.¹⁷ Fashion companies that sign on to The Bangladesh Accord, commit to use factories that maintain high standards and working conditions concerning their employees. However, some North American companies such as Walmart and The Gap have refused to sign on to the Accord because of perceived liabilities. So, large companies continue to mass produce their products using factories that may be questionable in regards to the safety of factories.

The problem with sweatshops is that it is a consequence of the fashion business model with the goal to profit from the constant change of fashion trends. Mass production and obsolescence feeds the growth of the fashion industry. The fashion industry relies on mass production for getting the product out to as many people as possible, as fast as possible. Soon the 'fashion trend' is no longer desirable, creating obsolete items in the closets of many. Clothes become waste or given to second hand thrift stores, giving the consumer reason to buy more clothes – clothes that fall in line with the present trend. Rather than buy clothes every time a new trend hits the sales floor, Tansy Hoskins passionately urges consumers to re-evaluate their needs. She believes that our closets are filled abundantly because, "fashion is not about answering human need but about producing corporate profit."¹⁸ These false needs keep us shopping for more clothes. To serve the fast cycle of fashion, mass produced items are becoming less durable, of lower quality and relatively cheap. Some may argue that this approach makes fashion egalitarian, making style accessible to all. While others may insist on having access to luxury brands by participating in the black market. The black market is big business for luxury handbags and making them accessible to all.

The Black Market

The United Nations Office on Drugs and Crimes along with the Department of Homeland Security are both a part of cracking down on illegal trade practices. They have linked the sales of counterfeit designer handbags to child labor, organized crime, terrorist organizations, and poor working conditions.¹⁹ When you make a purchase from a counterfeit marketer, you contribute to a bigger problem. I would argue that the bigger problem is class disparity and oppression in many underdeveloped countries. By not paying taxes, not practicing fair trade, or not providing safe and healthy working relations, counterfeit marketers corrupt capitalism. Today, LVMH (Vuitton's parent company) uses half of its communication budget to employ people for anti-counterfeiting efforts.

As pointed out in the introduction, I took part in the search for designer bags, hoping to purchase a bag at a fraction of the cost for luxury bags. I was naïve to think this was a harmless activity and that it was a must for visiting New York City. It was another world to step behind a secret wall and search for the perfect "designer" bags. Tourists are competitive with one another by trying to find the best deal and the most authentic of designer bags. This activity especially increases during the pre-holiday season as shoppers look to provide such a badge of affluence for a gift. The pre-holiday season also finds an increase in luxury bag thefts. Selling counterfeit bags is illegal, just as selling stolen genuine designer bags. The growing business of selling online is contributing to this illegal activity. The United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime report on global trade that "counterfeit goods in East Asia and Pacific areas alone account for \$24.4 billion in sales.

If it is a priority to own a luxury designer bag at a lower price, then one should purchase from an authorized dealer. Second hand luxury bags can be purchased from consignment, but that is not always legitimate. When purchasing second hand it is important to know how the owner obtained the bag and how the authenticity of the bag can be proven. Often, consignment owners require an original receipt or proof of authenticity before purchasing from the public.²⁰ Legit consignment owners will often pay an authenticator to come in and inspect a bag if its genuineness is in question. Be an informed shopper as well by researching the telltale signs of counterfeit bags. Sloppy stitching, the materials, hardware, and loose stitches are some of the first to be inspected. Inspecting the logo closely is a definite must, as fake bags often have inaccuracy in the font or minor details of the logo.

Sustainable Design

In the 21st century, pricing in the fashion industry is increasingly effected by the notion of sustainable design. Fair trade, organic materials, environmental awareness, and sustainable design are moving to the forefront of manufacturing practices. Altruism

comes in many forms in fashion circles. Tom's provides a pair of shoes to the impoverished each time a pair is bought in the retail market. A handful of American corporations like Abercrombie and Fitch and American Eagle have signed onto the Bangladesh Accord. For those looking for fashion pieces that meet several ethical standards, websites like goodtrade.com offers a wealth of information. However, it is not my goal to expose the evils of mass production that we know exists. My goal is to bring to light the luxury industry and it's directly opposing approach to growth.

Luxury is all about time and patience. It takes time to produce a product of high quality. Luxury items are not mass-produced but produced in limited quantities. Its growth does not depend on mass production but on rarity and long-term value. Usually the luxury market is associated with greedy, white, billionaires and their attempt to remain secluded and immune from the struggles associated with the proletariat. With this association, the luxury market is viewed as a threat to social equality, with a cry that the "rich get richer and the poor get poorer." Prager U, an online resource, makes a case for the benefits of the rich and their success. The capitalistic society gives freedom to the innovative minds that achieve wealth from their innovations. In turn, production of such increases, and thereby increasing the accessibility to the rest of us; price is lowered as items are made available to the masses.²¹

Many luxury brands, like Louis Vuitton, would argue that ethical practices and good environmental practices have always been a part of their practices. Sustainable design efforts focus on the life cycle of the product and its impact on the environment, natural resources and human rights. Luxury brands create high quality products of value, meant to last for a long time. Louis Vuitton products are not mass-produced. They limit the number of items made, contributing to its rarity. "Real luxury is by definition durable."²² The rarity contributes to the growth of the luxury brand. A crucial component of luxury brands is its unique business model. Luxury brands adhere to following the following elements as laid out by Jean-Noel Kapferer:

The Elements of the Luxury Business Model²³

- Full control of the value chain
- Full control of the retail experience
- Highly selective distribution
- One-to-one relationship with clients at retail level
- High level of personalized services
- High level of craftsmanship
- Exceptional level of quality
- No licenses
- No super-sales, no promotions
- Developing brand awareness well beyond the core target
- Always increasing average prices

Strong involvement with arts
Beware of celebrities

To have survived several wars, depressions, and recessions, speaks to the strength and heritage of the brand of Louis Vuitton. For many years, it remained in the Vuitton family then eventually bought by another prominent family, the Arnault family. Under the auspice of LVMH, the Arnault family continues to grow and innovate the brand of Louis Vuitton. The 21st century Louis Vuitton brand is still recognized for its quality and heritage. The company continues to be committed to the luxury business model while also incorporating new technology, trends, and diversification.

Louis Vuitton is a brand known worldwide, with 456 stores around the globe. It may be common to believe LV manufactures products in China, but this is not the case. LV manufactures zippers and some hardware components in Asia but bags, shoes and accessories in 17 small and specialized factories. Seventeen factories manufacture bags and accessories (12 in France, 3 in Spain, and 2 in California) using highly trained workers. To meet the growing demands for LV products and maintain its exclusivity, LV now uses a new factory format called Pegase. This system uses less time to produce products. Inspired by Toyota Motor Corporation, workers are now less specialized and organized in small teams of ten or twelve. Creating U-shaped clusters for workers managed to add 10 percent for floor space for a factory. The use of robotics also aids workers in efficiency. Patrick-Louis Vuitton, fifth generation member of the family, states that this new system is “about finding the best ratio between quality and speed.”²⁴

As far as consumption is concerned, China is the second largest consumer of luxury goods worldwide. The move toward a capitalistic country in 1980's was significant for China's economy. This change in the economic culture is in effect why China has a larger middle class. An of young people are also evidence of the growing wealth of corporations in China. Louis Vuitton is not only a favorite among the Chinese, but it is also more accessible than ever. This increase in accessibility gives LV the image of being a “brand for secretaries in the eyes of the wealthier Chinese.”²⁵ Nevertheless, China will continue to provide a large market for luxury goods. With a new generation, receptive to fashion branding, China's status consumption culture provides growth. This is true historically for other countries as well, as luxury goods demand is viewed by investors to be linked to GDP growth.²⁶

One longstanding feature that seems to secure growth for luxury brands is its ability to maintain a family business. In April 2015, Forbes reported on the value (monetary) of the largest 500 family firms. Half of these firms are from Europe. Look more closely at the top 25 family owned companies, and you will find Dior listed at number 25. Dior is owned by the Arnault family, which interestingly, also owns Louis Vuitton. A new study conducted by the Center for Family Business at the University of St. Gallen stressed that family owned businesses are important for GDP and job growth. These companies are

“really superior in leading in generational transition”, says Peter English of Global Family Business Center of Excellence. Their long-term focus reaches beyond the next quarter and into the next generation. Of the 500 largest family owned companies, 44% are owned by the 4th generation or older.²⁷ As mentioned earlier in this curriculum unit, Bon Marché originates from the family of Boucicaut. Even when family brands merge with other corporations or empires, it has passed from one family to another. In 2011, the LVMH (Arnault family) owning more than 60 brands, added the Bulgari hard luxury brand (Bulgari family). The Bulgari jewelers have been around for over 100 years. More interesting, is the discovery by my research that Bon Marché (the department store led to success by the family of Aristide Boucicaut is now owned by the luxury empire of LVMH today. With heritage, commitment to rarity and quality, Louis Vuitton (LVMH) a luxury brand worth following. My decision to own a designer bag has become so much for than a status symbol of wealth. In spite of my lack of wealth, I find myself researching various LV handbags in the hopes of one day owning a genuine Louis Vuitton investment.

Teaching Strategies

The overall goal of this unit is for the student to make historical connections with the development of the Louis Vuitton luxury brand.

Factors to Consider

Planning teaching strategies for this unit about Louis Vuitton and capitalism takes into consideration two factors: the student and the learning environment. The first and most important factor to take into consideration is the student population of my classroom. As mentioned earlier in this unit, the students in my classroom are from diverse cultures. The classroom includes those of Hispanic, African-American, or African, with a minority of Caucasian students. Academically, many of my students perform low on tests, show little interest in reading, and wish to spend most of class time with sewing construction projects. Their hands-on technical skills maintain their attention greatly in comparison to activities that include reading, writing, or direct instruction. The student’s expectation and my expectation of the class goals conflict at times. Taking the elective of Apparel and Textile Production I or II is usually out of interest in creative arts and not for career preparation, although it is my goal to introduce students to a career field that may suit them well, while also building 21st century skills for a vocational field. With the student in mind, this unit will include a game, an interactive portfolio, and one construction project. These active and tactile projects will support the student in reading and critical thinking processes.

The second factor for planning strategies for this unit is the learning environment of the 21st century. The student of the 21st century has various technology as part of their daily life. Technology is often visual, fast, and interactive. Fortunately, schools are being

provided with laptops and other technology for students regardless of their socioeconomic level. It levels the playing field somewhat for students as it relates to availability of technology. The use of laptops and desk top computers is infused into every class throughout the school day. This builds the student's skills needed for the workplace upon graduating from high school. It does, however, change the student's receptivity to direct instruction. This unit will include small sessions of direct instruction, with built in participation activities to keep the student engaged. An online module of activities is in place to keep the student as an active learner. Each student should have a laptop or Chromebook on his desk during direct instruction time. Today's learning environment has also changed with regards to interactions. The traditional classroom of perfectly aligned desks and quiet children is no longer the norm. Collaborative learning groups and movement around the classroom has become an essential for deepening the learning of concepts. Problem solving and critical thinking skills are strengthened when the student is required to put knowledge to use. It is said that 5% of learning retention is generated from lecture while 75% of learning retention is generated from practice. Peer group discussions offer a 50% of learning retention. This unit will include two peer discussions, one group presentation, one product construction and one field trip.

Time Span of Unit

Because the scope of activities spans more than one essential standard for Apparel and Textile Production II, it is suggested that the activities in this unit be spread out over the course of 4 weeks. Lessons and activities from this curriculum unit can be inserted separately into related lessons. The interactive portfolio will give the student a product that includes all the learned concepts, displaying them in a way that shows their connection or cause/effect relationship.

Student Activities

Essential Standards

The following activities from this curriculum unit could be spread out through the course of a few weeks, which is about one half of an academic quarter or throughout the semester. Technically, this curriculum unit relates to every NC Essential Standard for Apparel and Textile Production II. There are 4 Essential Standards that represent Revised Blooms Taxonomy cognitive dimension level 2, to *understand* apparel engineering, technical design, to *understand* construction, to *understand* the apparel and textile market, and to *understand* the global markets. Specific objectives related to each Essential Standard are provided. This NC curriculum also recognizes the knowledge dimension of Revised Bloom's Taxonomy, *Conceptual Knowledge*. It is important to stress the learning of *Conceptual Knowledge*. Educators need to differentiate between *Conceptual Knowledge* and *Factual Knowledge*.

Lesson 1: France and Capitalism (3 days)

Lesson one integrates World History standards WH.H.1.1 Use chronological thinking to identify the structure of a historical narrative or story and WH.H.1.2 Use chronological thinking to interpret data presented in timelines and create timelines. Within the Apparel and Textile Production II curriculum, FA32 1.01 Understand technical design, reserves time in the curriculum for fashion history and sources for design inspiration. Using an interdisciplinary approach, students will identify events in the history of France that have influenced not only fashion design, but also specifically, the luxury brand of Louis Vuitton. Emphasis is given to capitalism and the economy as it relates to the growth of the Louis Vuitton brand. It is helpful to highlight terms that relate to the history of France such as *feudalism*, *mercantilism*, *guilds*, *capitalism*, *bourgeois*. Educational applications on an android or smart phone would make learning terminology fun.

In preparation for group research, find three short reading excerpts for students (1/group member) to read about a certain time-period for France. Each small group (3 students/group) is assigned a time-period. Focus on segments of time from the 18th, 19th, and early 20th century. Adding a short video for each group to review will add interest. Be sure to find pieces that include fashion. Using the readings provided by the teacher, each group organizes their important facts using a graphic organizer. Each group then creates a video to present historical findings to the class. The graphic organizer will give students focus and scaffolding. The video should be in the form of a news broadcast, challenging the students to add drama and humor. Groups share the videos with classmates, making the learning of history fun and engaging.

To assess students, students will take their history findings to create a timeline on a large classroom wall. Use wide, colored, painter's tape to create the timeline structure. Each group is required to summarize the most important facts using 5 index cards and 5 printed images. Place these on the wall in chronological order. Enjoy the final timeline with a Gallery Walk, French pastries and coffee.

Summarize their findings with a web/graphic organizer. This is a crucial part for the teacher to support students in the synthesis of new knowledge. Using questioning strategies to prompt the students.

Lesson 2: Louis Vuitton, Entrepreneur (1 day)

Lesson 2 is centered around Essential Standards FA32 2.02 Understand global production and manufacturing and FA32 4.02 Understand the buyer's market. Each student will create a lapbook with foldables to organize historical facts about Louis Vuitton. This will serve as an assessment. Important terms to know are soft luxury goods, hard luxury goods, distribution, and logistics. The teacher will give direct instruction summarizing the history of Louis Vuitton. This can be done with PowerPoint slides and/or a guest speaker.

Utilize a Module on Canvas or other online classroom platform to lead the student to discover more about Louis Vuitton. The Module should include power points, videos, and readings to guide the student through the history of the Louis Vuitton brand. Be sure to include interactive assignments to assess students understanding. This module should focus more on the aspects of entrepreneurship, trade, distribution, and marketing for the LV luxury brand. If time permits, have students add another layer to the classroom wall timeline. The students with their previous group, is to contribute 3 index cards and 3 images. Use yarn or ribbon to connect items to the timeline (wide painters tape) as you add the Louis Vuitton “layer” of information.

Lesson 3: Culture of Consumption (1 day)

This lesson has the students thinking about societal issues and the psychology of consumption. The standard of focus is FA32 2.02 Understand global production and manufacturing. To build literacy, this lesson will include close reading strategies (annotation with highlighting, post-it notes, etc.) Students will use learning groups as in the previous lessons. The teacher is to provide one article for each group. Students read to themselves silently while using annotation. The teacher will introduce a group discussion protocol, such as “Save the Last Word for Me”. Terms to know include fast fashion, conspicuous consumption, slow fashion, bespoke, automation, and ready-to-wear.

Discuss guidelines/protocol for the discussion group. Emphasize the importance of speaking in turn. Give groups an opportunity to practice this protocol using a basic document such as the school dress code, or Dear Abby column. The teacher provides feedback as students learn the protocol. Once the teacher is confident that groups understand the protocol, provide an article about fast fashion or slow fashion, following “Save the Last Word for Me” protocol. Assess students thought process by having groups summarize their thoughts on poster paper. Each group shares with the class their conclusions.

Lesson 4: The Marketing Mix and the Luxury Strategy (1 day)

Standard FA32 3.01 Understand the marketing mix, will include direct instruction and additions to the student lapbook. Students will be able to analyze and differentiate the luxury strategy business model and fashion business model. Terms important to this lesson include niche, market share, break-even point, and mark up. Provide no more than 20 minutes of direct instruction on the luxury strategy business model. Students will then summarize the marketing mix, luxury strategy, and fashion business model (compared to the luxury strategy) using foldables demonstrated by the teacher. Add the new foldables to the Louis Vuitton lapbook to summarize the marketing mix, luxury strategy, fashion business model.

Lesson 5: Craftsmanship (4 days)

This lesson is cumulative, allowing the student to apply learning concepts from the previous lessons from this unit. Standards addressed also include the learning of new product construction. Teacher demonstrations play a crucial role. 1.01 Understand engineering, technical design; 2.01 Understand product construction. (teacher demonstrations); 3.01 Understand the marketing mix; 4.01 Understand product-labeling guidelines.

Students are to design a purse using a cigar box. This can be done individually or in pairs. Terms used are prototype, packaging, logo, self-casing, patch pocket, edge-stitching, clipping, notching, and seam allowance.

It is important to allow inquiry and trial and error. This project provides a great opportunity to solve problems with design and production, something all entrepreneurs like Louis Vuitton have to be willing to tackle. Build in time for specific demonstrations in techniques and methods of construction. The first demonstration to set the stage is that of taking measurements for designing the lining of the cigar box. Other demonstrations to include are advanced seam construction, casings, clipping and notching, and attaching hardware. Along with creating the prototype for the cigar box purse, each purse must be submitted to the teacher with a portfolio including the following:

Cigar box purse with Product Summary (submit in a ½” binder)

1. 4 P's of the marketing mix
2. Logo
3. Materials List
4. Production Steps

Appendix 1: Teaching Standards

North Carolina Essential Standards for Apparel and Textile Production II

FA32 1.01 Understand engineering and technical design.

Engineering and technical design relates to fashion history, design inspiration sources, and design illustration. Typically, the focus is on fashion/apparel. This unit will add the luxury industry/soft luxury goods. Louis Vuitton products have a long history that complements fashion history. Students will further their design knowledge and inspiration by creating a cumulative project (purse).

FA32 2.01 Understand product construction.

Just as luxury goods place quality and craftsmanship as a priority, the Apparel and Textile Production II course spends a great deal of time developing quality construction skills in students. Demonstrations and practice of construction methods will play a part in the cumulative project.

FA32 2.02 Understand global production and manufacturing.

Logistics and types of manufacturing methods used in the industry are highlighted. The LV brand has highly sophisticated manufacturing methods that are crucial in understanding the difference between the luxury business model and a fashion business model.

FA32 3.01 Understand the marketing mix.

The marketing mix is the foundation for planning and implementing a business. This will be put into practice when designing a purse. The marketing mix will also be studied as it relates to Louis Vuitton.

FA32 4.01 Understand product labeling guidelines.

Students will be required to apply previous knowledge to create a product label that is to governmental standards.

FA32 4.02 Understand the buyer's market.

Visual merchandising is a distinct feature of the department store. This will be discussed when viewing various ways to market a product. If time permits, a visual display design/plan component can be added to the cumulative project.

North Carolina Essential Standards for World History

WH.H.1 Use chronological thinking to:

1. Identify the structure of a historical narrative or story.
2. Interpret data presented in timelines and create timelines.

This unit offers the opportunity to have an interdisciplinary feature.

Appendix 2: Cumulative Project

Product Development: From a Cigar Box to a Purse

Essential Standards:

NC Career and Technical Education

FA32 Apparel and Textile Production II

- 1.01 Understand engineering, technical design.
- 2.01 Understand product construction.
- 3.01 Understand the marketing mix.
- 4.01 Understand product labeling guidelines.

Required Elements

Lining with a patch pocket

Handle or cross body strap

Outside

1. Must be fully decorated/stylized so that the original cigar labeling/wording do NOT show
2. Two layers required: decorative collage pieces of paper and dimensional fabric and trim
3. The collage layer must have a sealant over flattened graphics before adding any trim, embellishments or materials

Product Summary (submit in a 1/2" binder)

1. 4 P's of the marketing mix
2. Logo
3. Materials List
4. Production Steps

Equipment and Materials

Hammer

Small nails

Purse feet

Decorative corner pieces

Buttons

Rubber cement or hot glue gun

Batting

Fabric for lining

Poster board

Sewing Machine

Thread

Cigar boxes

Various handle materials

Drill

Various trims, laces, fabric scraps

Various paper with graphics and modge

podge

Seam gauge and rulers

Tailors chalk

Screw eyes

Chain for strap

Cutting tools (shears, small scissors, etc)

Appendix 3: Classroom Resources

[Save the Last Word Activity](#)

"Save the Last Word for Me." Save the Last Word for Me - The Teacher Toolkit. Accessed October 06, 2016. <http://www.theteachertoolkit.com/index.php/tool/save-the-last-word-for-me>.

This resource will assist with planning "Save the Last Word for Me" activity.

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