



***New York City's Garment Industry:  
The Tired, Poor, and Forgotten Masses***

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This curriculum unit is recommended for:  
Apparel and Textile Production I  
Apparel and Textile Production II

**Keywords:** New York City Garment District, fashion industry, immigration, Ellis Island, Statue of Liberty, fashion, sweatshops, textile industry, Chinatown, immigrant

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

**Synopsis:** This curriculum focuses on the valuable contributions of immigrants to the garment industry, with special attention given to immigration in New York City. The great immigration period of 1840-1940 shaped the landscape of New York City. As the city continued to grow because of immigration, the garment industry of New York City was established. Dependent on the skills of various groups of people, the garment industry of New York City is now considered a “fashion capital” of the world. Although sweatshops and child labor are an issue of the past in New York City, there remains an immigrant workforce that is marginalized. The glamour of fashion overshadows immigrant contributions. Through creative and hands-on activities, students will learn to memorialize and celebrate the contributions of immigration to the garment industry. With memorials, monuments, and architecture as touchstones, this unit exposes untold history of New York City’s garment industry. While natives of New York City may be aware of this concept, it is important that non-natives have a realistic view of New York City’s garment industry, rather than the often shared glamorous one.

*I plan to teach this unit during the coming year to 120 9<sup>th</sup>-12<sup>th</sup> grade students in Apparel and Textile Production I and II classes.*

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## Introduction

Around the world, monuments and memorials have been built as a way of remembering history. These structures of public art are on display as a way of expressing various feelings and reflections. Erika Doss coins a term, *memorial mania*, “an obsession with issues of memory and history and an urgent desire to express and claim those issues in visibly public contexts.” One such place of “memorial mania” is New York City. This iconic American city is visited daily by tourists from around the globe. Known as a “fashion capital” of the world, New York City is an ideal place to study or work in the field of fashion design. Common places to visit are Fashion Institute of Technology (FIT), including its revolving museum exhibits of fashion and well-respected college. Parsons School of Design is another point of interest, as it is the location for filming the popular dog-eat-dog competition, Project Runway. Fifth Avenue is a must-see area of New York City with its exclusive fashion houses and department stores. You need not go into the stores, as the elaborate and over-the-top window displays are a site to see! But while these famous places draw in the tourists, often forgotten are the many garment workers and their essential role as an ever-growing source of New York economic growth.

## Rationale

Several years ago, I facilitated a student trip to New York City for Apparel and Textile Production students. Our travel itinerary was packed full of activity including typical New York City tourist attractions along with visits to designer workrooms, Macy’s department store, and the Fashion Institute of Technology. I vividly recall one particular experience with students – the visit to Ellis Island, which included the Statue of Liberty and a museum dedicated to immigration. I remember this event because my students and I had a completely different level of interest for Ellis Island attractions. While I was moved emotionally as I walked through the museum and reflected on the history of immigration, my students grudgingly and quickly walked through the museum. Listening to their comments, it was obvious that they had one thing on their mind.... shopping!! I look back on this experience with one conclusion. I did not prepare my students prior to this trip in a way that would spark their interest, even their respect.

Prompted to discuss New York City’s fashion scene, students often imagine the glamorous side. Camera flashes, dramatic backdrops and tall muses dressed in over-the-top fashion trends are the most common images that come to mind. To others, it is the hustle and bustle of shopping sprees and colorful high fashion window displays. Feelings of excitement and desire come to the surface. However, to another segment of society, the NYC fashion scene conjures up the thought of long hours, low pay, sacrifices, and even exploitation.

The fashion industry is fast-paced, competitive, and complicated. Oscar Wilde once said, “Fashion is a form of ugliness so intolerable that we have to alter it every six months.” Although he was not a fashion designer, I believe there is some truth and humor to Wilde’s statement as fashion trends are an ever-changing characteristic of the industry. The glamorous world of fashion is driven by designers that are self-confident and ambitious. Nevertheless, society often forgets that the fashion industry is also very dependent on hard work and sacrifices of immigrants and other minority groups. In a world that places priority on outward appearances and materials, it is easy to forget. Well known celebrity icon, Marilyn Monroe once said, “Give a

girl the right shoes and she can conquer the world”. More than half a century later, no one has forgotten this icon, for today in the hallways of high schools, a popular image seen on many tee shirts worn by both girls and boys is the image of Marilyn Monroe.

While I am a fan of classic Hollywood stars, I am a bigger fan of those who live out their convictions. Prabal Gurung, fashion designer from Nepal, takes advantage of the limelight of the runway, having his models take the stage wearing a different graphic tee – ones with statements like, “I am an immigrant” and “Break down walls”. Gurung wanted to remind us that we are all connected to the “immigrant” story. The shirts remind us that “even if you were born here, your parents or grandparents, or great grandparents came here from somewhere.”<sup>1</sup>

So why do I feel compelled to create a curriculum unit that celebrates diversity within the fashion industry? The glamorous side of fashion often overshadows an essential part of the industry – the workers. America’s garment industry was made strong and promising on the hard work and innovation of a large immigration period between 1840 and 1924. But in my nineteen years of teaching Apparel and Textile Production, I have not once included the impact of immigration on the fashion industry. The topic of sweatshops is addressed, but again, immigration is not taught as an essential to the garment industry. Unfortunately, issues during America’s great immigration period (1840-1920)<sup>2</sup>, are often seen as a social problem of the past.

### School Background

I have taught at David W. Butler High School for 18 years of my 20 years of teaching experience. What I value most about this school culture is the diverse population that it serves. Our current enrollment of 2,112 students includes 37 percent Caucasian, 30 percent African-American, 22 percent Hispanic, and the remaining 11 percent represent other ethnicities including Asian, Middle Eastern, Pacific Islands, African, and American Indian. We have about 43% 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 urban population. Butler’s population should therefore have a special interest in the content of this curriculum unit. With the district’s Cultural Proficiency initiative, this unit is sure to strengthen the school community.

### Goal of the Curriculum

The goal of this curriculum unit is for the student *to reflect on the importance of immigration and diversity to New York’s garment/fashion industry*. The student will do so in a virtual walk through various New York City monuments, memorials, and architecture. These serve as reminders of those who have gone before us, making it possible to enjoy and consume the American way of life. With the debates from the 2017 Presidential election still looming, I can’t help but delve into the history of immigration in America, and more specifically, it’s role in the New York’s Garment District. Americans are divided on the issue of immigration, yet probably united if the topic of immigration is related to their own family’s genealogy.

Typically, educators and experts in the fashion industry share their knowledge of fashion history in the form of a traditional timeline. The use of a timeline is very effective in giving the student a bird's eye view. This is a practical approach when time in the classroom is limited. Factors contributing to changes in fashion are studied – celebrities, war, technology development, social issues and such. But this comes at the expense of depth and synthesis of knowledge.

This curriculum will add depth to the N.C. Essential Standards for Apparel and Textile Production I and II. To keep the students interest, I recommend inserting one lesson every couple of weeks into the usual curriculum delivery. This could be referred to as a “virtual field trip”. The teacher can find where each lesson best fits into the required curriculum of the class. Each lesson will begin with a brief history of a memorial, monument, or even architecture in New York City. The memorial will then lead the students into an aspect of New York's Garment Industry with emphasis on immigration. The history of the garment industry has been recorded through museums, census records, and monuments. But how well is it represented through existing memorials? With each lesson, the students and teacher will keep account of the past and present events that formed and continue to contribute to New York's Garment Industry.

## Content Research

The diverse groups of people to immigrate to the United States is countless and the ports of entry to the United States is scattered. But I focus my research and unit on the area of New York City because of its direct role in the fashion industry and its contingency upon immigration throughout history. Apparel and Textile Production curriculum includes the study of historical factors such as war, economy, technology, geography, culture, and values (social). Immigration is not usually a dominant theme to include within these factors. But if we look closely, we will see that New York City (NYC) does recognize its position in the fashion industry and immigration. This can be seen throughout monuments, museums, community events and tours. Often referred to as a melting pot, NYC's blanket of cultural enclaves, is also a living testament to the fashion industry. For this unit, I will use monuments and other forms of memorials to move through lessons and activities.

### SYMBOL: New York City Seal

The New York City seal is worth looking at closely for symbols related to the garment industry. This city seal has been altered several times between its initial design of 1623 and the latest revision in 1977. Symbols to add or remove from the seal hinged on debates of significant historical facts. From the use of a crown, laurel wreath, St. Andrew's crosses, a sailor, beaver, barrels and more, variations of the city seal can be seen throughout New York City. The NYC Health Department, Municipal Building, and the city flag are just a few places where the seal is spotted. It is worth noting that in 1915, the New York Historical Society supported a blue ribbon City Art Commission committee, donating \$100 towards the purchase of a set of city flags for 21 public schools across 4 boroughs. The raising of these flags would help to solidify the official the importance of the city seal, which is prominently placed in the center of the flag.

Today the seal most resembles the version set in 1686, which includes a sailor and Native American Indian, a beaver, two barrels, a string of wampum and a windmill. Three of these images represent the economic history of New York. Wampum is a string of shells used by Eastern American Indians as jewelry and currency. The beaver represents the predominant use of pelts and skin for the thriving fur industry, while the barrels represent flour that was "bolted" years later, contributing to the 17<sup>th</sup> century economy of New York City (New Amsterdam). Interestingly, the beaver was found to be a constant symbol on the many versions of the city seal.

Most of us will associate NYC with high-rise buildings, crowded streets, and a fast pace way of life. So, it may come as a surprise to see a beaver on the city seal. John Astor, an immigrant highly respected for his business success upon settling in New Amsterdam (New York's original name) built his fortune on fur trade. Born in Waldorf, Germany, Astor immigrated to America in 1784. Twenty-one years old at the time, John Jacob Astor wanted to achieve the American dream. Within two years of his arrival to the US, Astor had opened his own fur trading company.<sup>3</sup>

While hats are popular accessories today, they are not a required accessory as they were in the past for both men and women.<sup>4</sup> For centuries, wool felt was the dominant material for hats. But the combed beaver fur became predominant by the sixteenth century. Felting is a textile process that results in a non-woven material, strong and water resistant. Felt made from beaver fur remained popular fashion into the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. This staple fur was felted into hats after it was combed from the pelt.

The fur trade industry was mostly controlled by the British in Albany, NY and Montreal, Canada (Montreal merchants). Their sharing of the fur harvest created tension. Because of the American Revolution, British fur traders moved to Montreal, creating a more concentrated control of fur trade. Even so, Americans were blocked from the fur trade due to British military posts and trade regulations. This certainly presented a challenge to John Astor's business venture in the fur industry. Instead of using routes to get fur from the north, Americans were required to have fur shipped to London, then to the United States.<sup>5</sup>

### MONUMENT: Trinity Cemetery and Mausoleum

The Astor family gravesite can be found at 601 West 153<sup>rd</sup> Street in New York City. The large plot includes descendants of John Jacob Astor, a German immigrant born July 17, 1763 in Germany. Father of eight children, Astor created a family of wealth through his fur industry and later in real estate, owning a vast amount of New York City by 1848, at the time of his death. Strict with his tenants and leases, he was known to have "no leniency for those in arrears, thus earning him a reputation as shrewd and hard-hearted". The Astor family wealth continued to influence New York City. William Backhouse Astor, Sr., son of John Jacob Astor, inherited most of his father's fortune, continuing the real-estate investment.

Today, the most familiar Astor descendant is probably the great grandson of John Jacob Astor, John Jacob Astor IV, who died tragically in the sinking of the Titanic in April 1912. His gravesite stands out from the rest as it is a column, with a Celtic cross at the top and an anchor and rope near the base. But it is important not to lose sight of how the Astor family success began – through the business acumen of John Jacob Astor's fur trade.

While Native Americans were instrumental in the Astor's fur trade, the complexities of the American Revolution created obstacles. Managing relations and trade restrictions among Canadians and other oversea merchants was key. He had the "ability to understand and manipulate the unique conditions of the fur industry."<sup>6</sup> At the time that Astor entered the fur trade, in 1785, the fur trade was characterized by intense competition and slow return of profit. An important fur company at the time, North West Company, relied on Montreal merchants and "wintering partners". Wintering partners managed trade territories by hiring boatmen, interpreters, and clerks and forming relationships with Indians. In contrast to the complex business operations of the time, Astor sought to become an independent fur broker. Travel was an important part of Astor's success, traveling to middlemen to buy furs and then selling them to hatters and retailers. Shipping furs to overseas markets was also a strategy that brought profits to Astor.

John Jacob Astor's success as a young businessman remains an important part of New York's economic history, with the fur trade as an important contributor. The forests around Manhattan were full of game, including beaver, while New York City was also a bustling commercial center. Eventually, beavers became scarce around the NY harbor, but the city adapted to new trends and industry. Evidence of Astor's business success is still seen throughout New York City.

### **MONUMENT: The Immigrants**

This heroic size monument was created by the sculptor Luis Sanguino and commissioned by Samuel Rudin. Samuel Rudin's parents immigrated to the US in 1883, the date which is inscribed on the sculpture's base in their memory. It is important to point out that the bronze sculpture depicts a group of immigrants, each from a different time and place. The group of immigrants includes an Eastern European Jew, an African slave, a priest, and a worker. It is admirable that this artist viewed America from not one, but four perspectives. In the spirit of this monument, it is a reminder of the various ethnic groups, most of which voluntarily made the sacrifices to leave a homeland in hope of a better life.<sup>7</sup>

New York offered immigrant Jews what smaller cities and towns could not offer – an established Yiddish-based culture. New York's Lower East Side provided a familiar culture for Jews and support for their religious practices, mainly the observance of the Sabbath. While NYC offered a community for the Jewish workers, the Jewish workers offered skill. A majority of Jewish immigrants arriving in America possessed industrial skills. In 1897, approximately 60% of the NY Jewish labor force was employed in the garment industry, and by 1910, 47% of clothing factories in America were in New York City. Within the garment industry of New York, Jews made up 80% of hat and cap makers, 75% of furriers, 68% of tailors and 60 percent of milliners.

German Jews, Irish, and Italians are three of the largest groups to immigrate to America during 1860 and 1920. To this day, the Jewish community remains the largest immigrant based community beginning with the Sephardic settlers of 1654. The Jewish community continued to grow through three waves – the Sephardic (up to the American Revolution), the German Jews (1840-1880), and Eastern European Jews (1880-1924). Other groups represented include the Dutch, Polish, and Russian. Each immigrant's story is a unique experience, but equally remarkable in terms of their motivation, means or lack thereof, and sacrifices made for being dislocated. Some immigrants sought life and health, as the Irish escaped the potato blight. Others sought freedom and refuge, as the German Jews escaped the horrifying circumstances created by Adolf Hitler. Whatever the reason, the immigrant faced many obstacles that seem insurmountable by today's standards.

## ARCHITECTURE: The Tenement Museum

The Tenement Museum is a national historic museum that focuses on the lives of urban immigrants in New York City. Located in the Lower East Side of Manhattan, this original multi-family housing was built in 1863, home for over 7000 immigrants. Decades later in 1988, historian Ruth Abram was looking for a place to hold tours. Finding an old storefront at 97 Orchard Street was like “a little time capsule”.<sup>8</sup> The tenement was restored and preserved, and archives were gathered and studied to better understand the lives of the tenants. Abram and her co-founder, Anita Jacobson, are dedicated to sharing the stories of immigrants.

From 1850-1930, America experienced a significant immigrant population growth. Several ethnic groups immigrated to the United States through various ports of entry, which included Boston, Philadelphia, and New York. The Irish came to America to escape death from the potato blight (1845-49). Other Europeans arrived, in hopes of escaping the clutches of poverty often characterized in Charles Dickens novels. Some Europeans hoped to find that Fascism was not lurking in every corner of their lives. A common thread of motivation to come to America was opportunity for work. Asians are among the immigrants that sought opportunity for work, with the Chinese being the largest group of Asians to immigrate to the United States. Immigrants were driven to work hard to make their dreams a reality; dreams that were not possible in their homeland.

Although Paris remained the inspiration for fashion design, New York focused on what it did best – manufacturing clothing. Paris and New York are examples of geography’s influence on specialization. Paris had at its disposal, luxurious fabrics, to creatively unique and expensive designs, as well as the financing of fashion houses. New York, in contrast, had plain fabrics from which to work with along with the mechanized production system.

The Hudson River was crucial to the ease of entry, as it was heavily used by the innovation of steam ship travel. New York was also a major transportation hub due to the location of the Pennsylvania Railroad Station. These two transportation modes were crucial for access to the rest of the country, providing movement for workers, suppliers, and out of town buyers. The population growth (including immigrants) kept the garment industry in a state of growth.<sup>9</sup>

<b>Year</b>	<b>Apparel Manufacturing Firms</b>	<b>Number of Employees</b>
1880	562	25,000
1900-1905	1823	84,000



## MONUMENT: Statue of Liberty

Known as the “Goddess of Democracy”, the Statue of Liberty stands tall for the whole world to see. Everyone knows of her. Replicas of her have been mass-produced in many ways on a much smaller scale in the tourist industry. But while this statue has remained a constant image for American culture, it has not always carried the same meaning in the hearts of men. Monuments and memorials come in many forms as public art, meant for remembrance.

In 1876, the Statue of Liberty, a gift from France, was given the purpose of celebrating America’s 100 years of independence (1776). While extravagant gifts between countries were not common, it was common in those days to organize extravagant exhibitions around the world. These exhibitions promoted world trade, as well as new inventions, trends, and philosophy. But the Statue of Liberty was nothing like the exhibitions of the time.

Standing 301 feet tall, she wears a crown that represents the seven seas and seven continents. According to the National Parks website, the spikes in her crown represent the rays of the sun, a nod toward the “enlightening” theme. The prominent torch, that she holds above her head, “enlightens the world” as well and the tablet she holds is inscribed with Roman numerals, American’s date of independence, July 4, 1776.

The Statue of Liberty became a symbol of immigration with the addition of the famous inscription on her base in 1903. The text begins “give me your tired, your poor, your huddled masses yearning to breathe free”. The words are from a poem by Emma Lazarus, titled “New Colossus”, which was written in 1883 as part of fundraising efforts to build the base for the Statue of Liberty.

## ARCHITECTURE AND MEMORIAL: Triangle Shirtwaist Factory building plaques and TSF Memorial

On March 1911, a fire ignited in the Triangle Shirtwaist Factory building. The factory located on the 8<sup>th</sup>-11<sup>th</sup> floor, was a deadly fire hazard, with the prevalence of fabric lint in the air and oil residue from machinery. Worst of all, exit doors were routinely locked to prevent workers from taking breaks or stealing. Once the fire started, it spread quickly, killing 126 workers, most of them young women.

The Triangle Shirtwaist Factory tragedy changed the United States labor laws and building codes forever. Unfortunately, it took the death of hundreds to understand the urgency to develop building codes and labor policy. Students typically learn about this tragedy in American History class, so the content of this lesson will not be completely new. Discussing this tragedy, students will become familiar with the areas of New York City, with focus on location of garment workers and the growth of high-end real estate.

Sunset Park is a Brooklyn neighborhood with increasing numbers of Asian and Latino immigrants. In 1999 local government and industry groups initiated a fashion business “incubator” program, Brooklyn Mills. With its goal to support local and new talent and innovators, the program provides subsidized rent and access to product manufacturing labor.

Most of the manufacturing labor is done by Sunset Park's immigrant enclave neighborhoods. While Brooklyn Mills continues to support the garment industry of the area with "high road" strategies, it also depends on "low road" strategies to maintain the immigrant economy of the area. High roads strategies include skill development, capital improvements, product innovation, and quality control. Unfortunately, to keep a strong hold onto the industry in the area, low road strategies have been utilized. Because of the competition of the global economy, low road strategies such as few benefits and low wages are used to minimize production costs.<sup>10</sup>

In 2001, Sunset Park included 384 garment shops. In the past, these shops employed 10,000+ workers. A large percentage of them were Chinese, Dominican, and Mexican immigrant women. This segment of the garment industry is sustained by the efforts of federal and state departments of labor, United Needletrades and Industrial Textile Employees (UNITE), a garment workers union, and Garment Industry Development Corporation (GIDC). Technical assistance and tax incentives are joined with the regulation and enforcement of labor practices.

### MEMORIAL: Fashion Walk of Fame

This series of plaques embedded into the sidewalk, celebrates American fashion designers. The sidewalk memorial is located between 35<sup>th</sup> and 41<sup>st</sup> Street along Fashion Avenue in New York City. Like the Hollywood stars in California, pedestrians are reminded of the lasting impact of individuals in the industry. Unlike the Hollywood stars however, each plaque has important facts about the designer. While the rich details are quite significant, you will not find any stories of family heritage or immigration. If students research each honoree they will find that seven of those honored have a heritage from another country: Norma Kamali, Charles James, Lily Dache, Oscar de la Renta, Pauline Trigere, Mainbocher, and Willi Smith. Looking at obituaries also provides valuable information.

The Fashion Walk of Fame is certainly not an exhausted list of fashion notables. Many other influential people in the fashion industry can be traced to a country outside of the United States. Prabal Gurung, fashion designer, was born in Singapore and raised in Nepal and India. Owning a business in New York City, he is proud to say that 90% of his collection is made in New York. His decision to come to America 17 years ago was motivated by his desire to become a designer. He believes that "nothing is handed to you". Gurung says of his choice,

"I came because of the history associated with this country of immigrants: the American Dream. [There is] possibility here. You can come from a country like Nepal, make a name for yourself, and eventually dress the First Lady of America and the Duchess of Cambridge. So that was the reason why I came here."<sup>11</sup>

## MUSEUM: Harlem Black Fashion Museum

Harlem has a unique history compared to other sections of New York City. Originally settled by the Dutch in 1648, this area's landscape was nothing like it is today. Farmland for 200 years, this area became more accessible once the ILT railway was completed. Homes were built as real estate was doing well. A recession later created empty homes while World War I drew many immigrants back to their home country. It was then that more job opportunities were available to African Americans as they moved into Harlem. Michael Payton, known as the father of Black Harlem, played a crucial role, working with landlords to make housing available to black tenants. Payton's home still stands on 131st Street. Music and the arts have a history of adding flavor to this area.

One branch of the arts that has roots in Harlem is fashion. To memorialize the work of black fashion designers, Ms. Lois Alexander Lane founded the Harlem Black Fashion Museum in 1970. The Harlem Institute of Fashion had been founded already in 1966, so this museum collection, housed in a brownstone on West 126<sup>th</sup> street, was instrumental in documenting African American dressmakers until the founder's death in 2007. The collection is now curated and exhibited in the National Museum of African History and Culture in Washington D.C.

## SCULPTURE: Giant Needle and Button / The Garment Worker

At 39<sup>th</sup> and 7<sup>th</sup> Street, an unusually large needle and button draw attention to visitors of New York City's Fashion District. On the same corner, you will find the sculpture of The Garment Worker. Both sculptures celebrate New York's strong position in the garment industry. But these two sculptures are very different in artistic style.

Although once known as the Garment District, the area from 5th and 9th Avenues and between 34th and 42nd Streets is now referred to as the Fashion District. The needle and button towers over an information kiosk for tourists to begin their exploration of the area. Designed and put in place by Pentagram Architectural Services, this whimsical structure includes a 31' needle, put through a 15' button and swatch of fabric made of steel. It was designed in the style of Swedish born American sculptor Claes Oldenburg. The work of Oldenburg was the source of inspiration for this dominant piece in NYC's Fashion District. Oldenburg, who is known for creating giant sculptures of everyday items, said "I am for the art of underwear and the art of taxicabs. I am for the art of ice cream cones dropped on concrete." A button on a garment is an everyday item that we take for granted. Perhaps when designing this structure, Pentagram Architectural Services wanted to remind us of how significant a needle and button is to our everyday existence.

Artist, Judith Weller, created the sculpture of the Garment Worker in 1984 and was inspired by her father's work in the garment industry. The bronze statue, sitting at a sewing machine, is eight feet tall. A Jewish immigrant, he worked his way up through the garment industry chain. Weller, born 1937 in Tel Aviv, Israel, says, "When I was a little girl, I recall seeing him work." The statue is modeled after her late father, who was a machine operator. Wearing a yarmulke, the statue reminds us of Jewish garment workers. Fundraising for Weller's

work was coordinated by Sol C. Chaikin, President of the International Ladies' Garment Workers' Union (ILGWU).<sup>12</sup>

### MEMORIAL: "Sit, Eat, and Chew" Guided Tour / Friendship Archway

I came across this unique event when looking for memorials to garment workers in Chinatown, New York. While I could not find a typical monument or memorial, I did find "Sit, Eat, and Chew". This guided immersive dance series combines storytelling and modern dance to show immigrant narratives. The choreographer, Mei-Yin Ng, uses the Chinese proverb of the 5 tastes of cooking (sweet, sour, spicy, salty, and bitter) to tell the ups and downs of life stories, mainly of Chinese immigrants. These stories have been gleaned from Chinese locals through multiple workshops at senior and youth centers. Grateful for her life in New York City and her heritage, Ng says,

... "unspoken narratives led me to create this project. Even though I am Chinese, and speak both Cantonese and Mandarin, Chinatown residents don't share private stories easily. To begin the work, I ran story-sharing workshops at several Chinatown Senior and Youth Centers, and also found other **funny, outrageous, adventurous, and traumatic** stories from talking to local residents, going through Chinatown archives, and eavesdropping on conversations in tea houses and local bakeries."<sup>13</sup>

The tour starts and ends at the Museum of Chinese in America (MoCA). Guided through common places of Chinatown, professional and local senior dancers perform telling a story about the life of a Chinese in America. One of the stories told is one of a garment worker. The unconventional tour seems to only have run two days in October 2017, which is unfortunate considering its goal expose stereotypes and the culture in Chinatown. Compared to the standard memorials of statues and plaques, this project is more appropriately labeled a memoir.

The Asians began immigrating to the United States in 1846, when California's Gold Rush began. Looking for work opportunity in mining, farm work and railroad construction, Asians escaped the poverty so common in their homeland. You can imagine the dreams immigrants have when you read the sentiments of an adult who came to America as a child,

"How can we live on six baskets of rice which were paid twice a year for my father's duty as a night watchman? Sometimes the peasants have a poor crop then we go hungry.... Sometimes we went hungry for days. My mother and me would go over the harvested rice fields of the peasants to pick the grains they dropped.... We had only salt and water to eat with the rice."<sup>14</sup>

Because owners of the railroads believed that the Chinese men worked harder and for lower wages, the Chinese made up at least 80% of the Central Pacific Railroad workers. It goes without saying, that white workers often felt threatened, a sentiment even felt today in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Eventually, Chinese immigrants began to move East as the railroad work ended. Large cities now have enclaves known as "Chinatown", where large Asian populations reside. But New York City's Chinatown is the largest in the states.

## Instructional Implementation

### Essential Questions

- 1) How essential is immigration to the American society?
- 2) What persons were significant in establishing the garment industry in the New York City area?
- 3) What ethnicity is prominent in the workers within the garment district during the immigration period of 1840-1930?
- 4) How does learning about early immigration periods help us to understand issues centered around immigration today?

### Instructional and Learning Strategies

#### *Peer Groups*

Group work is a dominant strategy in this curriculum unit. While it's not always a welcomed strategy, it is crucial to set the expectation. This collaborative work, even if difficult for some students, will provide practice for listening to their peers respectfully. Students will not always agree with one another, so this strategy will challenge students to think about their individual ideas and perspectives. We all need the opportunity to question ourselves and our opinions that have been formed over the years. To reinforce the value of diversity in our society, the teacher should create the student groups. Groups for this CU should have diversity of race, background, and academic level. (group work rubric)

#### *Chunking*

Chunking is a literacy strategy that keeps the student from being overwhelmed with detail and large volumes of reading. Within this unit (see Classroom Resources), there are supplementary reading materials that are rich with information. Using the strategy of chunking can keep the student from losing interest or focus. It can take on many forms, but the idea is to “take small bites” at a time to process. *Carousel reading*, where peer groups move around the room to summarize small chunks of reading on a poster, is a great way to get all students moving, reading, writing, and speaking. Chunking can also be as simple as *teaching annotation methods*. When I want to summarize a current events article quickly, I divide the paragraphs out to rows of students; 1st row reads first paragraph, 2nd row reads second paragraph, and so forth. Quick summaries can then be given orally or on the board using 5 *W's* - *who, what, where, when, and why* (create columns on the board).

### *Nonlinguistic Representation*

My favorite strategy with reinforcing content and concepts is nonlinguistic representation. Basically, in this strategy, students use images, objects (candy sorted to represent groups of people in the population), drawings, symbols, charts, or even graphic organizers to represent the material. In this CU, students use census data to present a poster that represents an ethnic group. At times, I use *graphs or charts* in my lecture about immigration to show data. *Political cartoons* are a great use of images to spark a discussion on immigration, freedom, sweatshops, etc.

### *Inquiry-based Learning*

An inductive form of teaching, this instructional strategy stresses to the students, the importance of facts. Understanding how immigration/diversity has impacted the fashion industry cannot be taught through lecture. A brief history of the immigration period of 1890-1930 and the development of New York City's garment district will be delivered through lecture. But for the student to truly grasp this content, students will be challenged with researching various census data and then represent their findings with a poster. This encourages the students to adopt a deep approach to learning. As their teacher, I guide and scaffold their process of digging for facts and making conclusions.

### *Project Based Learning*

Within this unit, students will have the opportunity to create a piece of artwork. My content area of Apparel and Textile Production uses PBL quite frequently. This type of strategy in my classroom is kinesthetic in nature. Students use sewing machines, small tools, fabric, and other small notions to create a product. It is a favorite among students! If the students are skilled in CAD, this design can be created using this technology. Otherwise, I use a method of drawing, cutting, and pasting to create a "fabric repeat". When learning about various symbols from cultures around the world, students create a *textile design repeat*. Seeing a symbol or motif repeated, as on fabric, helps the student to see the impact of valuable symbols in the world of fashion. Fashion is a creative way to show heritage or viewpoints without saying a word.

## Lessons and Activities

### Lesson One

This unit starts by looking at the **New York City Seal**. But before the seal is revealed, ask students to draw any image that they would connect with New York City. This can be done on a blank piece of paper, the board, or even individual small white boards. Usually students draw skyscrapers, taxi cabs, fashion related images, or an apple, to name a few. Tape these to the board for display to the entire class or “think-pair-share” with a neighbor. Discussions of trips taken to New York City could also be included with this warm up activity.

Introduce the New York City seal to the students, asking them to identify the images they see on the seal. Provide a brief lesson on the city seal of NYC, being sure to include the various changes it went through. Questions for students to discuss could include: What did the people of New York debate over when selecting symbols or dates? Why is it important to have a city seal?

With access to a computer lab or individual laptops, guide students through establishing their personal account on [www.polyvore.com](http://www.polyvore.com). Allow time for students to navigate through the website, which should include creating a mood board. Have students create a mood board to represent their identity. This is a fun way for students to practice using this platform. It will be necessary for the teacher to move throughout the lab to assist students in the basics of using this website. Each student is to create a mood board that presents symbols of early native Americans of New York State. Through research, they are to select one tribe to represent with their mood board. See classroom resources for useful websites.

Extend the study of authentic Native American symbols into a textile design project. Each student (or pair) is to **design a fabric repeat** that reflects the use of Native American symbols that were researched in the mood board assignment. Prior to beginning their design work, students are to read the article, "Who You're Insulting When You Buy Native American-Inspired Things." Use a favorite strategy for summarizing the article. Designing a fabric repeat can be completed using Computer Aided Design, but I prefer a more hands on approach with paper, pencil, and scissors.<sup>15</sup> See classroom resources for the instructions. Display the designs in the hallway or classroom, having students write a short paragraph that supports their authenticity of a Native American symbol.

## Lesson Two

Very few, if any students, are familiar with John Jacob Astor (Senior) and his role in the development of New York City. Given a family tree form of your choice, have students research, in groups, and complete the Astor family tree. This activity should reinforce the family's impact on New York City.

At the time that John Jacob Astor, Sr. immigrated to America, New York was actually known as New Amsterdam. History can be daunting to students, but New York City's history should be interesting to unfold! Use a "Jigsaw" approach so that the history is not overwhelming. With students in groups, assign an aspect of New York City's history to each group:

- The Hudson River and trade
- Dutch Settlers of New Amsterdam
- Five Boroughs history
- Real Estate Moguls of the immigration period
- Fur industry and Flour Mills of New York City
- New York City's Port of Entry and Immigration (processing of immigrants/quotas)

Each group is to present their findings in either a Power Point, Prezi, tri-fold presentation board or a diorama. Students are very tech savvy, using various forms of technology on a daily basis. Offering alternative presentation formats will be welcoming to students that want a break from computer technology.

## Lesson Three

This lesson is focused on the most prominent American symbol, the **Statue of Liberty**.

Therefore, a different approach will be taken with this lesson. Unconventionally, the Statue of Liberty will not be mentioned until midway through the lesson.

Draping is a creative, yet technical process, for designing garments. With awareness of the crosswise, lengthwise, and bias grain, a designer drapes, manipulates, trims, and pins fabric to create a garment. Introduce the basics to apparel students, giving them either muslin, or gingham fabric for practicing this technique. If most apparel classrooms have only a few dress forms, students should be placed in pairs.

After students have had fun practicing their draping techniques, the teacher introduces "Lady Liberty". Her Roman goddess garment is an example of draping. Although antiquated, the folds of her garment are beautifully represented in the monument. A lesson in sketching fabric folds can be given at this time as well. My students have their own sketchpad for practicing fashion illustration.

Place students in groups of 4, giving each group one resource for discovering facts about the Statue of Liberty through the years. Groups take notes in their individual notebook but then present their findings to the class by writing creatively with fabric markers on a 6-8-yard piece of



fabric that is placed onto long tables pushed together. It is important to have the fabric laid out, so the entire piece can be seen. Select 100% cotton fabric, preferably light green, similar to the weathered Statue today. Once groups have drawn and recorded facts onto the fabric, challenge the students to replicate the draping of the Statue of Liberty, using a dress form. An alternative approach could be to provide each group with fabric, but this could be costly. With each group having 4 yards, it is possible to challenge each group to drape their finished fabric to design a dress that is inspired by the Statue of Liberty. Once draping is completed, have students share some of the findings that they recorded onto the fabric. Although dress forms do not typically have a head, this project could be extended by having the students design a headpiece.

#### Lesson Four

Following an introduction and viewing of **The Immigrant**, have students write questions that they have about immigrants of New York City. Keep questions to tangible data regarding types of jobs, skills, home countries, population numbers, locations of NYC, etc. Using CENSUS DATA resources in the Classroom Resources, Appendix 2, students go through data to answer their questions.

#### Lesson Five

Students will enjoy looking at these two sculptures together. Both **The Garment Worker** and the **Giant Needle & Button** were placed adjacent to each other. Discuss what students like or dislike about the sculptures. Which do they like best? Is one more memorializing than the other? Why or why not? Challenge students to design a sculpture to be placed in Harlem that is similar in style of the artist, Claes Oldenburg, but that pays tribute to a specific fashion designer or ethnic group.

#### Lesson Six

**The Black Fashion Museum**, originally located in Harlem was moved to the newly constructed National Museum of African American History. Although the construction of this national museum is long overdue, it is unfortunate that The Black Fashion Museum in Harlem was closed, moving the curated items to the national museum.

This lesson is presented in the form of a Gallery Walk. Listening to music by famous Harlem musicians, students visit 5-7 tables. Each table is dedicated to an African American fashion designer (teacher initiated). Place a picture of each designer in a nice frame. Be sure to identify the designer's name. There is only a framed picture on each table, creating an unfinished and bare display. Have students fill in the displays with interesting facts and objects that tell the story of each designer (student driven). Have another walk through of the gallery, to display all the interesting stories that are often unheard.

## Lesson Seven

The **Fashion Walk of Fame** is set up online in a way that students can “tour” the area. Have students use the provided worksheet, “Fashion Designer Bio Boxes” to research designers that are not recognized on the Fashion Walk of Fame. Students design a plaque for a designer that they feel deserves to be memorialized or celebrated. Challenge the students to find designers that have family heritage outside of the United States.

## Lesson Eight

Have students learn about the fire of the **Triangle Shirtwaist Factory (1911)** and the tragedy of the Bangladesh garment factory at Rana Plaza (2013). Compare the working conditions of the two factories. Identify similarities and differences in the incident. Discuss why working conditions continue to be unacceptable in some parts of the world. Do students feel a moral responsibility to ban products made in poor working conditions, where people are exploited?

Use silhouette of a garment cut outs (dress, shirt, pants) to display the names of victims (if known)/one silhouette representing each death; mount on a wall outside the classroom to inform others of the injustices that continue to happen in the fashion industry. There were 1,134 deaths as a result of the Bangladesh tragedy, and 146 deaths from the Triangle Shirtwaist Factory. Topics of discussion: Who were/are the owners or contractors of the factories? Did they face consequences for the deaths? Why or why not?

## Lesson Nine

Chinatown is known for great food, but it is also known for its secret hideaways for purse shopping. Stereotypes may capture the delightful nuances of a culture, but it often limits perspectives and depth of knowledge. Provide a brief history of Chinatown, reminding students that other ethnic groups, along with the Chinese, are represented in the history of the fashion industry. Share the development of the “Sit, Eat, and Chew” Immersion Dance Tour, highlighting its purpose of rethinking stereotypes of the Chinese American. Students should also take the virtual tour of the Museum of Chinese America, which is online.

In addition to sewing machine operation, apparel students learn various hand stitches. Some are essential in garment construction while some are purely decorative. Show various hand stitched artifacts from various cultures, old and new. Create a Stitchery Walk of Chinatown as a class. Each student is to identify and select an architectural structure, monument, statue, or other characteristic of Chinatown today. Be sure to include the proposed “Friendship Archway”, a gift from Beijing, China.<sup>16</sup> It is important to have a variety of images to contribute to the final “Stitchery Walk”. Draw the selected item with a fabric marker on muslin or a flour sack towel, then use a variety of embroidery stitches to create an embroidered image. Display the finished products on a bulletin board, creating the look of a map of Chinatown.

## Conclusion

Because of my researching NYC's Garment District, I challenge that students of fashion look more closely at a remnant of fashion history that includes the intricate pattern of New York City's history. The beautiful colors represented by immigration, the weaving of streets and neighborhoods, and the texturing of five boroughs by a rhythmic economy, all give a better appreciation for the city that never sleeps. Naeem Khan, fashion designer from India, posted in his Instagram, "I am the immigrant that brings beauty to make you shine. I am the immigrant that is woven into the fabric of America. I am the immigrant that loves this country as all your ancestors who were immigrants...."<sup>17</sup>

While this curriculum unit is limited in its inclusion of all ethnic groups represented in the garment industry, it is a strong foundation for reflecting on the importance of immigration. In my research, I often found myself taking many other "rabbit trails" into other cultures, reinforcing my view that immigration is truly what makes America a place of independence and democracy. But I am also reminded that while America is a dreamland for some, it is an oppressive maze for others. This curriculum will enlighten students and encourage them to share the unheard narratives of immigrants in America. In doing so, the 21<sup>st</sup> century student an instrument of change in a way that resists injustice and demands equality in America's workforce.

## **Appendix 1 - Standards**

### North Carolina Essential Standards for Apparel and Textile Production I

#### **FA31 1.01 Understand the development of the apparel industry.**

This unit focuses solely on the apparel industry of New York City, its beginning, its changes through the decades, and its reliance of the immigrant workforce.

### North Carolina Essential Standards for Apparel and Textile Production II

#### **FA32 1.01 Understand engineering and technical design.**

Draping, an engineering and technical design process is taught alongside the Statue of Liberty.

#### **FA32 2.02 Understand global production and manufacturing.**

Logistics and types of manufacturing methods often perpetuate social and ethical issues of the apparel industry, of which immigrants are affected.

#### **FA32 3.01 Understand the marketing mix.**

The marketing mix is the foundation for planning and implementing a business. Students can apply this concept to the fur business of John Jacob Astor.

### North Carolina Essential Standards for American History II

**AH2 H.1.4** Use Historical Research to: 1. Formulate historical questions. 2. Obtain historical data from a variety of sources. 3. Support interpretations with historical evidence.

**AH2 H.3.3** Explain the roles of various racial and ethnic groups in settlement and expansion since Reconstruction and the consequences for those groups (e.g., American Indians, African Americans, Chinese, Irish, Hispanics and Latino Americans, Asian Americans, etc.).

**AH2 H.3.4** Analyze voluntary and involuntary immigration trends since Reconstruction in terms of causes, regions of origin and destination, cultural contributions, and public and governmental response (e.g., new immigrants, ports of entry, ethnic neighborhoods, settlement houses, immigration restrictions, etc.).

**AH2 H.8.3** Evaluate the extent to which a variety of groups and individuals have had opportunity to attain their perception of the “American Dream” since Reconstruction (e.g., immigrants, minority groups).

## Appendix 2 - Lesson Plan Overview

Learning Objectives
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Identify ethnic groups that emigrated to New York City between 1840-1940.</li> <li>Map areas of New York City where garment industry work is found.</li> <li>Connect various NYC memorials or architectural sites to the garment industry.</li> <li>Summarize the various skills that immigrants in New York City offer to the garment industry.</li> <li>Discover and memorialize individuals that contributed to the garment industry (individuals not yet recognized through public art).</li> </ul>
Essential Questions
<p><i>How essential is immigration to the American society?</i></p> <p><i>What persons were significant in establishing the garment industry in the New York City area?</i></p> <p><i>What ethnicity is prominent in the workers within the garment district during the immigration period of 1840-1930?</i></p> <p><i>How does learning about early immigration periods help us to understand issues centered around immigration today?</i></p>

Terminology				
contractor	sub-contractor	furrier	milliner	tailor
gentrification	immigrant	native	refugee	Living wage
diaspora	emigrant	Culture appropriation	enumerator	OSHA
Red lining	Greenhorn	Tenement	labor union	Exploitation
Sweatshop	Rag trade	Communalism	remittance	Just-in-time production

TOUR STOP	LESSON	INDEPENDENT PRACTICE
New York City Seal	Become familiar with using <a href="http://www.polyvore.com">www.polyvore.com</a>	Polyvore Board – Native Inspiration Textile Design Repeat Article
Trinity Cemetery	Lesson: The use of primary sources Practice: Mapping the Astor family, using primary resources	<u>Jigsaw Research</u> : 6 groups/6 areas of research <i>Hudson River, Dutch settlers, Boroughs, Native Americans, Real Estate Moguls, NY Port of Entry and immigration</i>
Statue of Liberty	Basics of Draping on a dress form  <b>Activity:</b> Draping practice on dress forms (groups of 3)  <i>NOTE: Do NOT mention the Statue of Liberty at this stage.</i>	<b>Draping Lady Liberty</b> Group research of Statue of Liberty-record findings in a brief and creative way using fabric markers and 6-8 yards of cotton fabric (mint green in color is best)
The Immigrant	Brief history of The Immigrant  Introduce the topic using the Anticipatory Guide/map (see Appendix 2) Collecting data/Reading infographics and making analysis	Partners create <u>Data Poster</u> of selected demographics in New York Handout: “ <i>Meaningful Data Poster</i> ” <u>Tell a story</u> – Provide an article about a group of people in garment industry/NYC past or present. Use “How the Other Half Lives” for understanding the living and working conditions at the end of the 19 <sup>th</sup> century.
Black Fashion Museum-Harlem	<u>Beginning of Gallery Walk</u> – Recognition of African Americans in Fashion	<u>Bio-Poem</u> for an African American Designer Use Bio-Poem worksheets (2) Students <u>complete Gallery walk</u> with artifacts and music from Harlem.
The Garment Worker/ Big Button	Monument Types Activity: Comparison of The Garment Worker and the Big Button	Design Contest: Design a sculpture/monument for Harlem

Fashion Walk of Fame	Fashion Designers <u>Online virtual tour</u> of Fashion Walk of Fame (use Google Form to report findings and answer questions)	<u>Submit a plaque design</u> for the Fashion Walk of Fame of a designer with immigrant heritage. Use <i>Fashion Designer Bio Boxes</i> worksheet for researching information on the assigned fashion designer.
Triangle Shirtwaist Factory	Social and Ethical Issues in the Fashion Industry  <b>Guest Speaker</b> from Department of Labor, OSHA, or Fire Marshall  Use <b>graphic organizer</b> to show comparisons of working conditions prior to 1912 and after 1912	<u>Memorialize the victims</u> of garment factory tragedies past and present on garment cut-outs to display in the hallway.
Chinatown - Friendship Archway and Immersion Dance Tour	History of Chinatown Use of Museum of Chinese America and articles	<u>Stitchery Walk of Chinatown</u> – Individual work to contribute to class project

### Appendix 3 - Classroom Resources

Fabric repeat Project	<a href="http://www.polyvore.com">www.polyvore.com</a> <a href="https://www.skillshare.com/tutorials/5-Steps-to-Illustrating-a-Repeat-Pattern-by-Hand/59">https://www.skillshare.com/tutorials/5-Steps-to-Illustrating-a-Repeat-Pattern-by-Hand/59</a>
Fashion Walk of Fame	<a href="http://garmentdistrict.nyc/fashion/fashion-walk-fame/">http://garmentdistrict.nyc/fashion/fashion-walk-fame/</a>
African American	<a href="https://www.fitnyc.edu/museum/exhibitions/black-fashion-designers.php">https://www.fitnyc.edu/museum/exhibitions/black-fashion-designers.php</a>
Native American – New York	<a href="https://youtu.be/tZMc-W4wIQ8">https://youtu.be/tZMc-W4wIQ8</a> <a href="https://paththroughhistory.iloveny.com/themes/native-americans/">https://paththroughhistory.iloveny.com/themes/native-americans/</a> <a href="https://www.warpaths2peacepipes.com/">https://www.warpaths2peacepipes.com/</a>
Chinese-gentrification	<b>Article:</b> <a href="https://tinyurl.com/y8dornks">https://tinyurl.com/y8dornks</a> <i>Museum of Chinese in America (MOCA)</i> , <a href="http://www.mocanyc.org/">www.mocanyc.org/</a>
Latino	<b>Article:</b> <a href="http://themidtowngazette.com/2011/11/who-works-in-the-garment-district/">http://themidtowngazette.com/2011/11/who-works-in-the-garment-district/</a>
CENSUS DATA	<a href="#">Library of Congress infographic</a> <a href="#">census teacher guide</a> <a href="#">State Facts Interactive Tool</a> <a href="#">US Census Data Tool</a>
Maps	Library of Congress – great resource in comparing maps throughout the history of New York.



## Anticipatory Guide: Diversity in NYC Garment District




Source: [www.aaccessmaps.com](http://www.aaccessmaps.com)

1. List 6 ethnic groups that work in NYC Garment District:
2. List 5 skills or jobs are found in NYC's Garment District?
3. Where are most jobs for the garment district found? Highlight a 2" square area on the map.
4. Why did you highlight that area?
5. If you could spend the day in New York City, what would you choose to do?



## Fashion Designer/Professional Bio Boxes

<p>Fashion designer/professional:</p> <p>Date of birth:</p> <p>Describe their style of work:</p>	<p>Who were their parents? Where were their parents born?</p>
 <p>Color and label their place of birth and family heritage location.</p>	<p>List any aspects of their heritage that is a part of their design work:</p>
<p>Sketch a characteristic of this designer's work. (certain fabric prints, silhouettes, garment styles, signature piece). Add color, using colored pencils. If needed, you may use the lightbox to trace.</p>	

## BIO POEM for African American Fashion Designer

**Instructions:** After researching your assigned designer, use the format to create your bio poem. Present the poem on a poster, using color and images that relate to the designer.

### RESEARCH NOTES:

Designer Name	
Place of Birth Date of Birth/death	
Where did they reside during their career?	
Education background	
Life experiences growing up....	
Describe the designer's style of fashion	
Did the designer face any controversies during their career/life?	
What are their likes?	
Dislikes?	
What inspires them?	
Who do they admire?	
Describe their personality	
Describe their family	
Other interesting facts...	

---

(designer's first name)

**Is**

---

(four adjectives that describe the designer)

**Sibling of**

---

(or son, daughter, mother, father of)

**Lover of**

---

(three people or things the designer loves)

**Who feels**

---

(three feelings this designer has probably felt)

**Who gives**

---

(three things the designer contributed or gave)

**Who fears or does not fear**

---

(three things)

**Who wanted to see**

---

(three goals or aspirations the designer had)

**Who lived**

---

(the town or brief description where the designer lived)

---

(designer's last name)

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