

Weaving Across the Curriculum

Weaving

Weaving is an ancient tradition for humans. Fiber work is one of the oldest activities of human beings, and one of the most popular contemporary crafts. Navaho weavers created designs based on their own and borrowed symbols and styles. Middle-eastern nomadic cultures created designs and used methods specific to their tribal groupings. Central and South American indigenous peoples include local “labels” in their designs: specific color combinations or shapes that identify regions, even villages.

From ancient societies to contemporary fashion, fabrics have identified, classified, personalized, and grouped or separated people. The social implications of fabric can be great. Stone-washed and distressed jeans, for example, have become so popular that the pumice and other stone that is used to create the distressed look is mined in sometimes ecologically devastating ways.

Color in fabrics has caused wars and social transformations. Kings fought for sources of royal purple. What were the sources of purple? Sea snails of the genus *Murex*, and the cochineal beetle, which feeds on cactus. It takes a great deal of effort to get a small amount of purple dye from the *Murex* snails, which made it very rare and valuable.

Find out about *Murex* snails.

Question for research: *What other sources are there of the color purple?*

The cultivation of **woad** as a cheap and less color-fast alternative to indigo led to the democratization of the color blue, previously a color for the wealthy.

Question for discussion: *Why would a dye have been a color for the upper class?*

Where did blue jeans come from?

In fact, woad-dyed “fustian” (medieval denim) clothed common sailors in the days of Columbus and Shakespeare. It was woven chiefly in Chieri, near Milan, Italy, and carted to the coastal port of Genoa. British sailors called the blue fustian trousers “Blue Geenoas.” The label survives today as “blue jeans.”

Make a time-line of well-known historical events, and locate on it events that involved textiles in some way.

Evaluate current events for the involvement of textiles in some way.