

Lesson Plan

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Upper-level undergraduate or graduate theatre students

Topic: Costume history/costume design research: resources and critical considerations

Objectives:

- Distinguish between primary and secondary sources
- Search strategies for locating primary source images
- Critical evaluation of image resources and images

Materials:

- Projector and screen for librarian (that's you)
- Computer lab with internet access for students
- Gathered resources for example show/movie (images, costume designer interview/sources)
- Gathered resources for student searching (museum websites, photo repositories, etc.)
- Search strategy worksheet (see end of document)

Activities:

75 minute session

(10 minutes) Introduction/Framing Activity

- Ask if students have watched period piece show (Stranger Things, Mad Men, Downton Abbey, etc.)
- Whether yes or no, show images of costumes from show and ask if they think they are accurate representations of the time
- Whether yes or no, ask how they know – how have they developed their conception of what this time period “looks like?”
- Show interview/source examples from costumes designers of show, making visible their reliance on primary sources

(5 minutes) Primary/Secondary Sources

- Explain the difference between primary and secondary sources, giving examples
- Emphasize that both are useful – primary for direct evidence, and secondary for context

(10 minutes) Keyword Brainstorming

- Depending on class size, split into 2-4 groups and assign characters from an example play
- Explain that they will spend the next 25 minutes searching for images that would help them costume this character
- Have each group brainstorm keywords that describe their characters – making clear how searching for a character name will bring up images of other productions, but likely not primary images, so they should focus on other aspects of the character – occupation, region, gender, etc.
- Have each group brainstorm out loud for the class in turn so that classmates can see their process and so that you can provide guidance if necessary

(20 minutes) Group searching

- Students search in their groups for images for their assigned character, within image/primary source locations you have selected
- Having a small assortment is good to introduce them to various useful resource types – museum websites, digital archives, etc.
- Have them complete the reflection worksheet as they search

(30 minutes) Group discussion

- Have each group present again on what they found, and share their answers to the worksheet questions with the class as a whole
- Ask them questions as necessary in order to cover:
 - Limiting by date, geographic region, item type, etc.
 - Keyword strategies used (broadening, synonyms, etc.)
 - Keyword vs subject searching
 - Browsing
 - Evaluation criteria such as metadata, creator/source
- Once discussion over search strategies has covered those bases, ask them about difficulties they encounter
 - It is likely that some characters were harder to search for: working class or poor characters, characters of color, women who aren't famous or rich
 - Some groups of people are also likely to be portrayed in stereotypical ways if featured in illustrations or entertainment roles
- Tactfully discuss what historical biases have led to people being portrayed this way, and what they should look out for
 - Basically, who is missing or misrepresented
 - How can they navigate these biases to find accurate representations of these people?
- Bring it back to the original period piece to see how bias plays out in contemporary period pieces
 - Do the sources/inspiration from the professional costume designers show any of these biases?
 - Do the period pieces themselves show any bias?
 - How will they navigate their own biases when they're collecting research/inspiration and designing?

Assessment:

- Collect worksheets and analyze students answers to reflection questions
- Group discussion: what points do they make? Formative assessment of group discussion is loosey-goosey but you do what you can with what you have

ACRL Information Literacy Framework:

- Authority Is Constructed and Contextual – Knowledge Practice 2
- Authority Is Constructed and Contextual – Disposition 3
- Information Creation as a Process – Knowledge Practice 2
- Information Creation as a Process – Knowledge Practice 8

WORKSHEET QUESTIONS (I'd tart it up a bit for the actual class)

Play: _____

Character: _____

Keywords/search terms for this character:

Answer these questions as you search for images that will help you costume your character.

1. Where did you search (websites, databases, etc.) for images for your character?
2. What features – filters, menus, collections, etc. – does this resource provide to help you find relevant images? Which features were most useful?
3. What search terms worked best? Did you try any new ones based on your initial results?
4. What difficulties did you encounter while searching for images for your character?
5. How could you tell if your images were accurate representations of clothing from this time period? How could you tell if they were not?