

Career Planning & Skills

Dress Codes & Professional Dress

**Teacher
Resources**



Michigan Supreme Court Learning Center

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Introduction

These lesson plans are structured to assist schools in career planning with their students and to prepare students for the essay portion of the ACT test. Teachers are encouraged to share this lesson plan with students when discussing the importance of dressing for the professional world, either now or in the future. These lesson plans will help them to understand the way they need to represent themselves to potential employers.

Grade Level & Curriculum Connections

This lesson plan is open to all grade levels but is most appropriate for middle school and high school students. These students are nearest in age to entering the work force and must begin preparing at an early age.

The Michigan Career and Employability Skills Standards emphasize a need for teachers to focus in each core class (English, history, math, and science) on career planning for their students. The enclosed materials are intended to help students fulfill Michigan's standards for Career and Employability, Social Studies, and English Language Arts.

In particular, students taking the ACT test would benefit from this lesson. Most often, the essay portion of the ACT test asks students to state and defend their opinion about school uniforms and dress codes. Students are expected to articulate, with evidentiary support, whether they are for or against the adoption of a school dress code. They are also expected to state and refute an opposing argument on the subject. This lesson plan provides them with the pros and cons of a school uniforms and dress codes, which the student could then apply to the ACT.

Career Planning

These lesson plans may be used in conjunction with other lessons that focus on career planning and skills, including Careers in the Law & Legal Studies, available through the Learning Center's Educational Resources web page: court.mi.gov/plc/resources.htm.

School Uniforms & Dress Codes

Time Required

1 class period.

Objectives

Students will:

- Discuss opinions about school dress codes and present their findings to the class. (CES 3:6, S.CN.08.01, S.CN.06–08.03, S.DS.06–08.04, L.CN.06–08.02)
- Write an essay stating their opinion about the adoption of school uniforms and strict dress codes. (W.GN.04)



Instructional Resources

- Blackboard, whiteboard, or flipchart
- Resources and opinions about school dress codes such as:
 - Clothing, Dress Codes, and Uniforms, First Amendment Center
http://www.firstamendmentcenter.org/speech/studentexpression/topic.aspx?topic=clothing_dress_codes_uniforms
 - Custom-Made, Fit for School, CNN
<http://www.cnn.com/2005/US/08/12/style.rules/>
 - Editorial, *Oakland Press*
http://www.theoaklandpress.com/stories/072707/opi_20070727196.shtml
- Paper and pencil

Sequence of Activities

1. Begin with a class discussion about attire. Questions to spark discussion might include:
 - What do you normally wear to school? On the weekends? Are these the same?
 - How long does it take you to pick out clothes to wear in the morning?
 - Has anyone ever had to wear a uniform for school before?
2. Have students break into groups of threes and fours. Give students the chance to talk to their peers about the pros and cons of a strict school dress code. For each argument they support, they should also state the opposing argument. For example, if they believe that “dress codes stifle individuality,” the other side might say that “dress codes help everyone feel included.”
3. Bring the students back to a general classroom discussion, with the students summarizing what they discussed in their groups. Write student responses in a two-column table of pros and cons. If needed, augment the students’ answers with those found in written resources.

4. Have students respond to the following essay question: "Are school uniforms a good idea for public schools?" Give the students 20 to 30 minutes to write on this question, stating their opinion and refuting one point for the opposing argument. Collect the essays at the end of class.

Assessment

- Return the students' essays with feedback and grades.
- Hold a writer's workshop for students. Give the students time to discuss their essay with you. Offer feedback on ways to improve each student's essay.

Extension Activities

Discuss the landmark U.S. Supreme Court case *Tinker v Des Moines* (1969), in which three public school pupils in Des Moines, Iowa, were suspended from school for wearing black armbands to protest the government's policy in Vietnam.

- *Tinker v Des Moines*, Landmark Cases.org
<http://www.landmarkcases.org/tinker/home.html>
- *Tinker v Des Moines*, Legal Information Institute
http://supct.law.cornell.edu/supct/html/historics/USSC_CR_0393_0503_ZS.html

Appearances Count: Professional Dress

There are two ways to dress in life. There is a professional way to dress and a personal way to dress.
—9th Grade Participant, Exploring Careers in the Law



Time Required

2 class periods.

Objectives

Students will:

- Discuss how appearance shapes perceptions and assumptions made about a person.
- Collect information from multiple sources about dress codes in the workplace. (CES 3:2, CES 2:1, R.CM.06–8.04, SOC.V.2.MS.2, SOC.V.2.MS.3)
- Present their findings to the class. (CES 3:6, S.CN.08.01, S.CN.06–08.03, S.DS.06–08.04, L.CN.06–08.02)

Instructional Resources

- Computer/projector or transparencies/overhead for Appearances Count presentation.
- Books, magazines, web sites, and community resources for researching dress codes related to specific occupations.
- Paper and pencil.

Sequence of Activities

1. Discuss the presentation Appearances Count (pages 10–18), using the Appearances Count Teachers' Guide that follows.
2. As homework, give the following assignment, found on the final presentation slide:
 - Choose a future occupation for one of the students pictured.
 - Research what people in that industry wear to work and why.
 - Write a letter to the student with advice for transforming their professional image.
3. During the next class period, have students discuss their findings to bring out themes in the research. Questions might include:
 - Were the dress codes always written? What if they were “understood” and informal?
 - What are the advantages and disadvantages of a written dress code in the workplace?
 - Do any dress codes address issues of health or safety?
 - Do the dress codes seem up-to-date?
 - What are the consequences for not following the expectations?

Assessment

- Return the students' letters with feedback and grades.
- Hold a writer's workshop for students. Give the students time to discuss their letter with you. Offer feedback on ways to improve each student's essay.

Extension Activity

Have students interview adults and then report back to the class about what the adults wear to work. Questions might include: Are dress codes written or understood? Do they wear uniforms? Do they like what they wear to work? If not, why not?

Appearances Count Teachers' Guide

Slide 1



(Read the quote.)

- What do you think of this quote?
- Is it fair that people make assumptions about us based on what we wear? It may not be fair, but does it happen? If we're honest, aren't we all guilty of it?
- Before we talk about expressing ourselves through individual style, I'd like to know if you've had an experience of wearing a uniform of some kind. Raise your hands and keep them up.... (Raise hand.) School uniform? Band? Sports team? Boy Scouts or Girl Scouts? Cheerleading?
- For those of you on a sports team, in band, cheerleading, etc., how do you feel when you have on your uniform?
- Now, let's talk about school uniforms. If you wear/have worn a uniform to school, do/did you like it? How did/do you feel wearing it? Is/Was it different than wearing another type of uniform?
- Uniforms communicate a lot about a person, without that person saying a word. Let's take a look at some examples: (Next slide.)

Slide 2



- What do these uniforms say about these girls? (Private school, perhaps the family is wealthy since the school likely requires tuition.)

Slide 3



- What does his uniform say about him? (Medical professional, well educated, intelligent, makes good money, works long hours.)

Slide 4



- What does her uniform tell you? (Chef, excellent cook, went to a special school, may run a restaurant.)

Slide 5



- What does her uniform communicate? (Judge, has a lot of power, well educated, makes a lot of money, knows a lot of people in the community.)

Slide 6



- Would you consider these outfits to be a uniform? Why or why not?
- Business attire is a type of uniform. Just like doctors, chefs, and judges, these professionals wear suits to communicate without saying a word. What do these business suits communicate? (Professional, intelligent, in touch with current fashion, well-paying jobs.)
- People make assumptions about others based on first impressions. The very first thing that communicates a message to others is what you wear. People will make assumptions about how much money you make, where you go to school, what kind of grades you get, how smart you are—all because of what you are wearing. It may not be fair, but it is a fact of life.
- Let's try an example. (next slide)

Slide 7



- What assumptions might we make about this guy? (Rough, perhaps didn't finish high school, probably unemployed or working a low-paying job, may have a criminal background, is disrespectful to authority.)
- Why are we making these assumptions about him? (His haircut and tattoos say that he is unconventional and rebels against social norms.)
 - Note: According to a Harris Poll in 2003 about 16% of the American population now has at least one tattoo. (http://www.harrisinteractive.com/harris_poll/index.asp?PID=407) Although tattoos are fashionable right now, you should be aware that many employers require tattoos to be covered in the workplace. Therefore, a highly visible tattoo (e.g. wrist, ankle, neck) may make getting a professional job more difficult in the future.
- Now let's imagine for a moment that you have been arrested for a crime you didn't commit. You must appear in court but you cannot afford an attorney, so the court assigns one to you. This guy walks in as your court appointed attorney. How do you feel?

Slide 8

Appearances Count

- At an interview.
- Everyday with supervisors and coworkers.
- With people you meet on the job.

Slide 8
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- From our discussion, we must conclude that they do.
- Why do appearances count in each of these situations?

Slide 9



Assignment

- Choose a future occupation for one of these students.
- Research what people in that industry wear to work and why.
- Write a letter to the student with advice for transforming their professional image.

Slide 9
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- (Read assignment.)

Appearances Count

Long before I am near enough to talk to you on the street, in a [classroom], or at a party, you announce your gender, age, and class to me through what you are wearing – and very possibly give me information (or misinformation) as to your... personality, opinions, tastes, and current mood. By the time we meet... we have already spoken to each other in an older and more universal tongue.

– Alison Lurie, author of *The Language of Clothes*

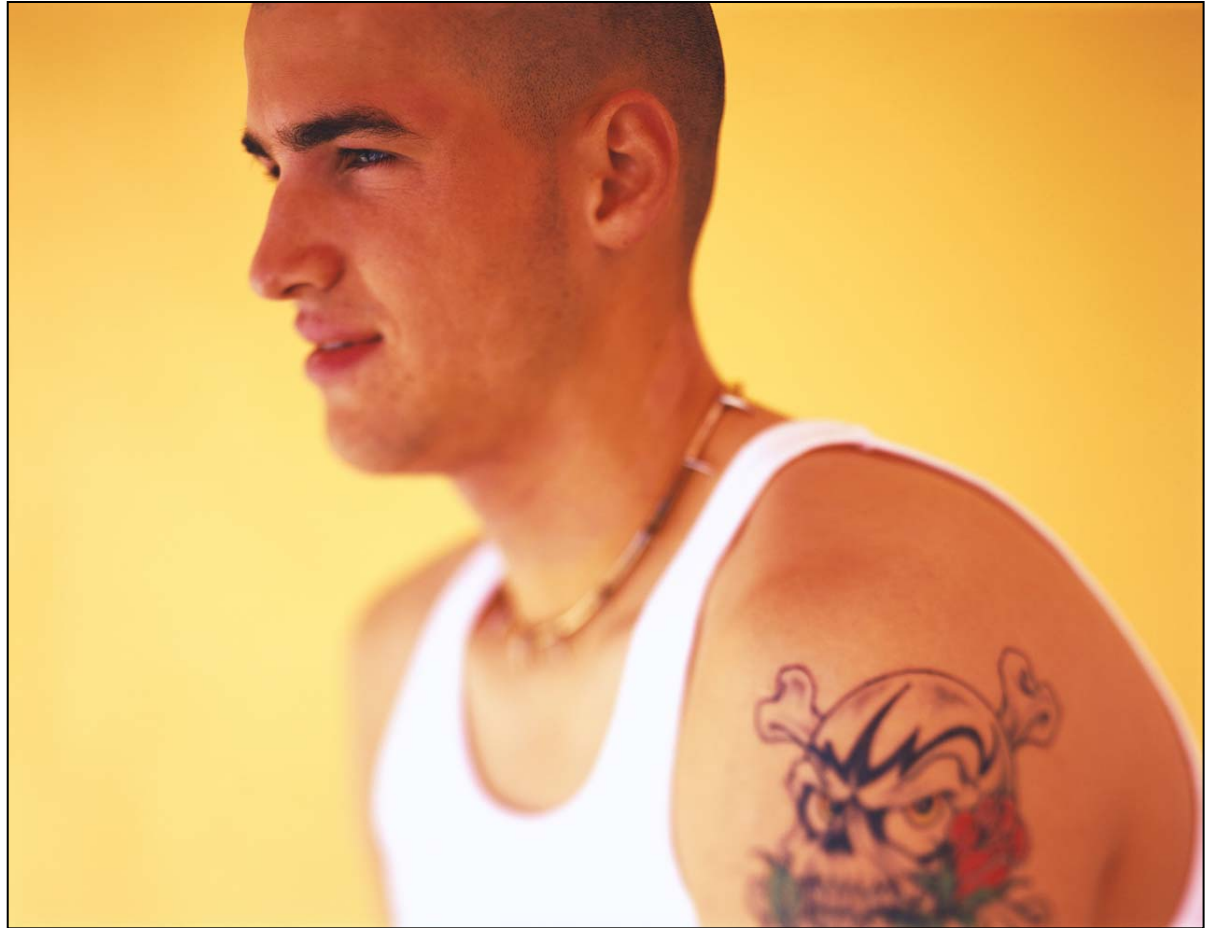












Appearances Count

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