When Adam and Eve were expelled from the Garden of Eden in the book of Genesis, the first thing they did was clothe themselves. The biblical text marks the transformation from the state of nature to the dawn of civilized society with the act of putting on clothing.

When people in 18th-century France demanded a new form of government, men showed their revolt against aristocratic privilege by rejecting the knee-breeches (culottes) worn by noblemen and instead wearing long pants. The revolutionaries were known thereafter as the sans-culottes.

When Clark Kent and Peter Parker become superheroes, we can tell because they have changed their outfits.

In this two-unit Humanities course, we will delve into the cultural significance of fashion in Europe and America, from the high heels Louis XIV donned as part of his campaign to dominate his unruly court to Dante de Blasio’s afro that helped catapult his father, Bill de Blasio, into the New York City mayor’s office. We will study fashion icons (Marie Antoinette, Jackie O, Madonna, Lady Gaga) as well as the role fashion plays in social movements and identity formation. In short readings and slide lectures we will explore a wide range of approaches to better understand the role fashion plays in our world and our everyday lives. Approaches will include anthropology; sociology; literary reading; semiotics; psychoanalysis; and economic, historical and art historical analysis.