# Adrian: Hollywood and Beyond Lesson Plan

**Abstract:** This lesson invites students to learn about the design techniques employed by the legendary Hollywood costume and fashion designer Adrian.

By discussing and observing garments featured in the online exhibition *Adrian: Hollywood and Beyond,* students will learn about Adrian's unique approach to designing for on and off screen, explore garment construction and textile design, and sketch their own original film costume and red carpet look for an actor of their choosing.

**Grade/Level:** General high school, grades 9–12

**Subject:** Visual Arts, Fashion History, Textile Design

**Time Required:** Approximately 1 hour

**Materials Required:**
Access to online exhibition: *Adrian: Hollywood and Beyond*
(https://exhibitions.fitnyc.edu/adrian-hollywood-and-beyond/)
Bristol paper
Markers
Watercolor paint
Paint brushes
Pencils
Erasers

**Educational Standards:** New York State Learning Standards for Arts Education, grades 9–12
(see revised standards Summer 2017)

- Standard 1: Creating, performing, and participating in the arts
  Students will actively engage in the processes that constitute creation and performance in the arts (dance, music, theater, and visual arts) and participate in various roles in the arts.

- Standard 3: Responding to and analyzing works of arts
  Students will respond critically to a variety of works in the arts, connecting the individual work to other works and to other aspects of human endeavor and thought.

- Standard 4: Understanding the cultural dimensions and contributions of the arts
  Students will develop an understanding of the personal and cultural forces that shape artistic communication and how the arts in turn shape the diverse cultures of past and present society.

**Lesson Overview:** This lesson introduces students to Adrian's work as a fashion and costume designer, and encourages them to think critically about textile design, garment construction, and the correlation between fine artists and fashion designers.

Exploring the online exhibition will allow students to experience Adrian's multifaceted designs firsthand. This will provide foundation and inspiration for students to create two original designs: a costume for a film and a red carpet look for a celebrity client.

**Lesson Objectives:**

- Critical thinking and learning about the similarities and differences between the fashion industry during the 1940s and 1950s versus the fashion industry in present day.

- Understanding materials and techniques involved in the production of textiles and garments.

- Experimenting with texture and the placement of pattern and print on garments.

- Reinterpreting existing costume design to create a unique yet informed ensemble.

**Online Exhibition Discussion Steps:**

**Locate:**  Ocean Theme Print Dress



Adrian, two-piece evening ensemble, circa 1944, United States, gift of Lola Walker, 70.40.2

**Focus on Textile Design:** Textile design is any image, color, texture, or design that appears on the surface of a textile. Designs can be printed or incorporated into the weaving process, such as stripes, plaid, or ikat. Surface design can be applied to the finished fabric through many techniques, including dyeing, printing, beading, embroidery, or appliqué.

- Discuss the experimentation with scale/lack of repetition on this ensemble. The surface treatment of the fabric allows the wearer to become a walking mural or painting.

- Point out details, such as unusual seams and darts around the fish and the self-belt that passes behind the print—all techniques Adrian used to leave the pattern uninterrupted.

**Locate:** [Salvador Dali Print Dress](#)



Adrian, evening dress, 1947, United States, textile by Salvador Dalí/Wesley Simpson, gift of Lola Walker, P90.69.1

This gown showcases Adrian's design acumen while allowing the textile to be the highlight. He built on Dalí's Surrealist motif by using drapery and appliqué to create a shadow effect on the wearer's shoulder. A harmonious blend of print and construction, the gown demonstrates Adrian's ability to expand a fabric's surface beyond print.

Adrian took advantage of the cinematic impact of textile prints and patterns, as graphic stripes and plaids stand out among the mass of grey in black-and-white films. His understanding of textiles continued to inform his couture and ready-to-wear creations when he began designing his own line. He employed imaginative prints by textile firms such as Wesley Simpson and Bianchini-Férier and often took a playful approach to fashion design.

Adrian expressed what his publicist Eleanor Lambert called his "droll humor" through trompe-l'oeil, asymmetrical effects, and amusing prints. Early in his creative process, he would envision his garments fully realized, from fabric to silhouette. As a result, pattern scale and placement were carefully calibrated.

- Ask students if/when/where they have experienced other works of Dalí.

- Point out how construction of the gown echoes the subject of the print.

- Briefly discuss silkscreen process (see vocabulary list at end)

- Teacher can ask students: Does anyone here think that they're wearing something that has been silkscreened?

**Locate:** [Lovely to Look At](#)



Adrian, costume, 1952, United States, from the film *Lovely to Look At*, 70.8.18

Adrian manipulated silk jersey to accentuate the body in this costume design from his final film, Lovely to Look At. He created the hood by pleating the textile on the bodice, allowing it to expand as it draped the wearer's head and contract around the wrist to form the semblance of a sleeve.

Garments are typically created through draping, flat patterning, or tailoring. Draping, which is sometimes referred to as "soft construction", involves working with plain material directly on a dress form or model, using pins to fold and shape the garment. Once the desired silhouette is complete, the fabric is removed to make a paper pattern.

**Locate:** [Adrian Suit Jacket](#)



Suit Jacket, British Samek wool, c. 1950, 73.66.1a, gift of Mrs. G. R. Lawson.

Adept at both draping and tailoring, Adrian understood how best to use the inherent qualities of textiles, such as the flow of knit jersey and the strength of woven wool. He built architectural suits by manipulating stripes and checks through mitering, the joining of fabric at different angles in order to create subtle patterns. From a distance, his construction draws focus to the triangular silhouette with wide shoulders and narrow hips. Up close, asymmetrical tabs, buttons, pockets, and panels add visual interest "above the table"—a movie-making term that refers to the look from the waist up, where the camera is often focused.

The construction of this jacket is surprisingly complex. The hip panel and pocket alone are comprised of six separate pieces of fabric. Adrian used details such as inset strips of bias-cut fabric to add interest to otherwise conservative garments. He strove for a balance that he called "controlled excitement."

- Compare and contrast differences between clothes designed for film and those designed for off-screen use. What techniques did Adrian employ to create visual interest both on and off screen?

**Activity/Projects:**

Students will draw from the innovative construction of suits and dresses presented in the online exhibition to design two dynamic ensembles:

- One will be a costume for a character to wear on screen for a film of their choosing.

- The other will be a look for the same actress to wear of to the premiere event for the film.

- These designs should incorporate rendering of patterned textiles, and will be presented to the class as "flat sketches."

**Activity Steps:**

**Objectives:** Students will have the opportunity to engage in the creative practice of costume design through the process of creating an ensemble for a film while learning to work with the limitations of a well-known character's appearance. In contrast, designing an ensemble for the actor to wear on the red carpet will allow students to practice rendering formal garments with fewer limitations on design. The students will be able to experiment with color, scale, repeat, and texture through the use of pattern designs.

Step 1. Recount highlights from the exhibition.

Step 2. Brainstorm potential film characters/actresses to design for. Write down why you chose the character/actress you did as the subjects for this assignment.

Step 3. Sketch out and color patterned and printed textiles that will constitute each ensemble.

Step 4. Draw character ensemble, making sure that while the character has a unique look, she is still recognizable.

**Step 5.** Draw a formal ensemble for the actress to wear to the film premiere.

**Step 6.** Students will share out work and be prepared to discuss.

**Assessment:** Assessment should focus on amount of personalization students were able to creatively achieve within refined criteria.

Relevant Vocabulary

- **Appliqué:** A cutout design that is sewn onto or otherwise attached to a piece of material

- **Bias:** Fabric used at a diagonal (45 degrees) to the weave direction

- **Miter:** To join two edges of fabric at a corner by various methods of folding, cutting, and stitching

- **Rayon:** A semi-synthetic material made from cotton, wood chips, or other plant fibers, which are broken down and transformed into a smooth material that mimics some of the qualities of silk when woven

- **Silkscreen:** A printmaking technique in which a mesh cloth is stretched over a heavy wooden frame and the design, painted on the screen or affixed by stencil, is printed by using a squeegee to force color through the pores of the material in areas not blocked out by a glue sizing

**NOTES:**

*** This lesson was adopted  for online use from the in gallery lesson plan created for the exhibition* Adrian: Hollywood and Beyond*, designed for students with an interest in fashion design.*