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Comprehension

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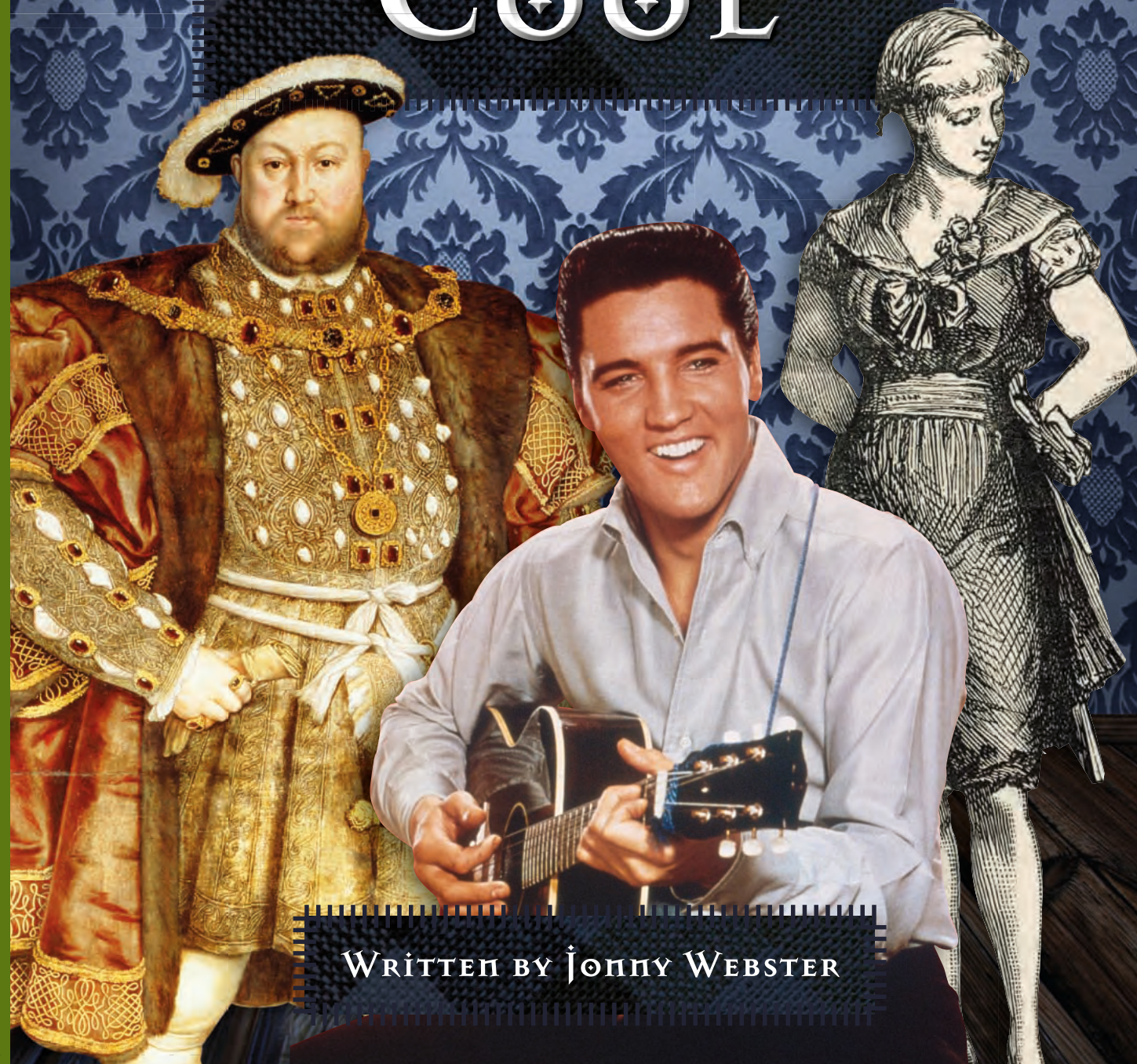
Smythe's Department Store

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Information Report

The History of LOOKING COOL



WRITTEN BY JONNY WEBSTER

The History of **LOOKING COOL**



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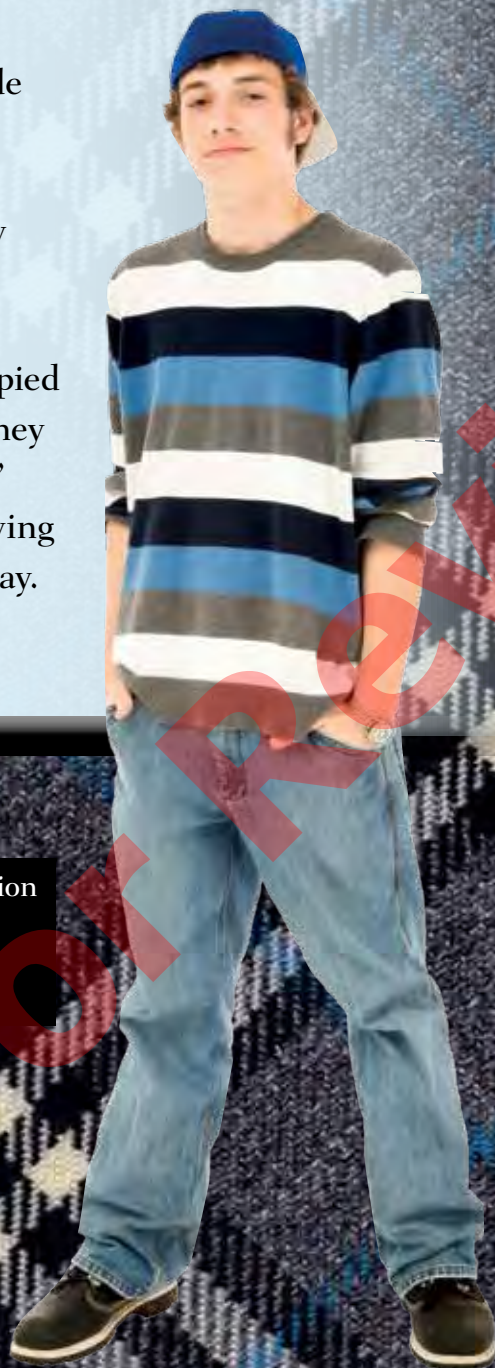
THE RULE OF COOL

What does it mean to be cool? We all recognize cool when we see it, but how can we explain what is cool – and what is definitely uncool? Is cool a look, a feeling, a style, or an idea?

Clothing is the most obvious demonstration of cool. From very early times, people have made choices about what they wear. Their choices were often connected with status – if you were a king or queen, you wanted to dress differently from a peasant, to show off how powerful you were.

Alternatively, people copied the style of someone they admired. This “status” dressing, and the copying of it, still happens today.

Clothes can give information about the peer group the wearer belongs to or the music he or she listens to.



For thousands of years, rich people have dressed differently from poor people. About 500 years ago, however, people began to dress in ways that sent stronger messages about who they were and what they believed in. In a changing world, what you wore marked you as someone who celebrated tradition or rebelled against the old ways. The quicker society changed, the faster the most popular styles, or fashions, passed by. After centuries of slow development, the fashions of the twentieth century were changing every decade. As the new millennium approached, they were changing almost every year.



In the past, wealthy young people dressed very differently from today's more casual styles.

FASHION FACT

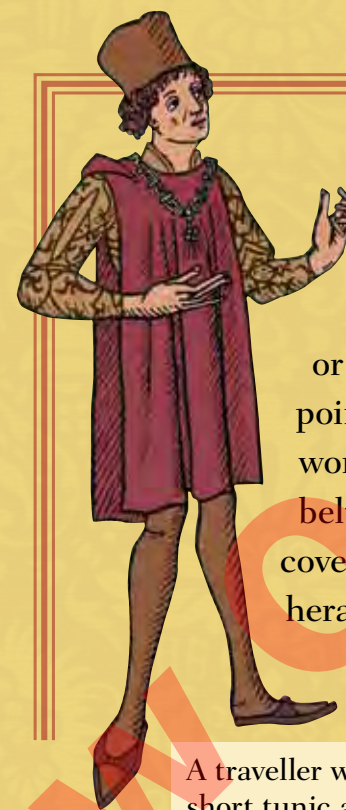
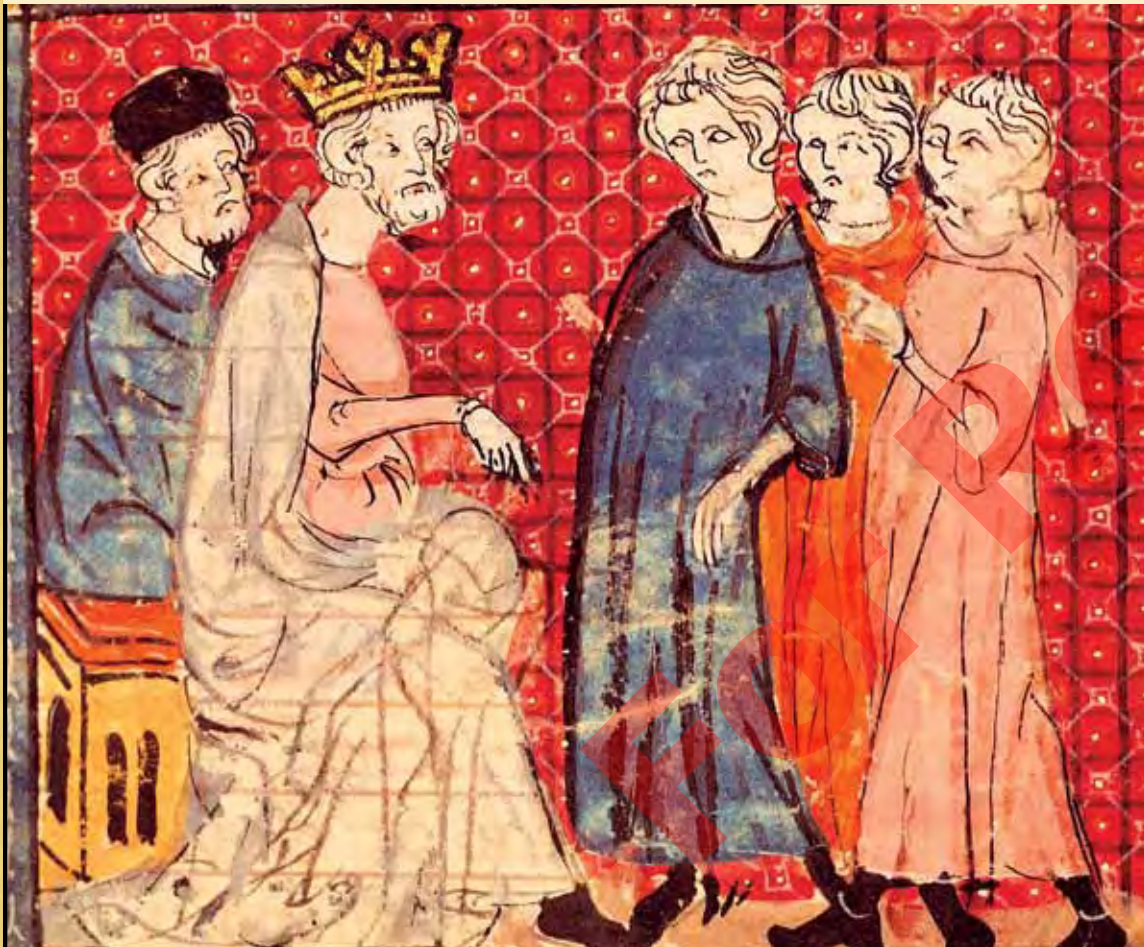
Fashion is full of paradoxes (when two opposites are true at the same time).

For example, the “hot” new style can be really “cool!”

OUT OF THE DARK AGES

The rate that fashion changes has a lot to do with how quickly a whole society is changing. For example, the twentieth century was a time of major changes in science, technology, and lifestyles, so it is no surprise that fashions changed just as fast. On the other hand, after the Roman Empire collapsed in the 400s, European society trundled on with very little change or innovation for quite some time. In many ways, the clothes of the 1200s were not all that different from those worn by the citizens of the Roman Empire almost a thousand years before.

A painting from the 1000s showing a French king and his subjects in simple clothes



A traveller wearing a short tunic and hose

Then, in the 1500s, something interesting happened. The people at the royal palaces, called **courts**, began to change what they wore. The people at the courts of the French and Italian kings and queens experimented. They wanted to be different. Slowly but surely, the cut and style of everyone else's clothes began to change as they tried to imitate these new "fashions." The courts were cool. They were setting the trend. The idea of fashion grew much stronger in this era, and the world would never be the same again.

Fast forward to the 1300s and 1400s, and things were slowly changing. Men often wore belted tunics and hose, like modern stockings or tights, to cover their legs. They also wore pointed leather shoes called *poulaines*. Women wore floor-length tunics or gowns, sometimes belted or more fitted at the waist, and often covered their hair with a veil. The 1300s also heralded the birth of the button, which was all the rage in Europe in the 1400s.



Buttons were cool from the 1400s.



A painting of a scene from the King Arthur legend, showing typical pre-1500s clothing

FASHION FACT

In the 1500s, buttons were still popular. Wealthy people wore buttons made of silver or gold and set with gems.

THE KINGS OF COOL

The race to be cool was on, and the main pacesetters were royalty. One of the great rivalries in the early 1500s was between King Henry VIII of England and King Francis I of France. Both men spent a fortune on lavish clothes to demonstrate their power and influence. They wore fur-trimmed and jewel-encrusted jackets, and thigh- or knee-length pants called breeches. Women at court wore wide skirts with big hoops sewn into them, called farthingales. As time went on, the hoops, made of whalebone or willow wood, got bigger and bigger, and so did the skirts. The same thing happened with a circular collar called a ruff. Over time, the ruff grew into a small wheel shape supported by wires.

FASHION FACT

Queen Elizabeth I of England wore face powder made of white lead. Over a long period of time, this poison caused scarring and hair loss, and rotted teeth.



Henry VIII wearing an impressive jacket and hat trimmed with fur



Elizabeth I wearing a luxurious dress supported by a farthingale

In the 1500s and 1600s, there were laws that banned some people from wearing gold trimming, silk, lace, and other luxury cloths. Such laws were called **sumptuary laws**. Queen Elizabeth I wrote one sumptuary law in 1574 to avoid “the wasting and undoing of a great number of young gentlemen...” She claimed these fashion “victims” were spending their inheritances on expensive clothes they could not afford. Sumptuary laws stopped people dressing “above their station.” It was literally against the law to dress like a noble, even if you could afford it.

In the late 1600s, long curly wigs were all the rage. King Louis XIV of France went bald at a young age and took to wearing long wigs with a lot of elaborate curls. Men with hair grew it long to match their king, and those who couldn't bought flashy wigs.

Some rich, fashionable women and men also powdered their faces, and applied rouge, lipstick, and “beauty patches.” These patches were tiny fragments of gummed fabric called *mouches*, or *flies*. They came in various shapes, such as hearts, stars, and even tiny animals. Their placement on the face could convey special meanings.



Louis XIV of France wearing a wig, robes, breeches, and hose