

Knowledge and Indigenous Societies: Cultural Ownership

Lesson 3: Listening Task

Focus: *How do indigenous designers challenge cultural appropriation?*

Objectives	Analyze how cultural appropriation in fashion interacts with power, ownership, and representation. Evaluate how Indigenous designers use fashion to transmit cultural knowledge and resist commodification. Reflect on how ethical engagement with Indigenous knowledge challenges mainstream practices.
Steps	<ol style="list-style-type: none">1. Introduction (5 mins)<ul style="list-style-type: none">Guiding Question: Can Indigenous fashion maintain its cultural authenticity in the global market?2. Pre-listening Activity (5 mins)<ul style="list-style-type: none">Brief recap of key concepts:<ul style="list-style-type: none">Cultural appropriation: The use of cultural knowledge, symbols, or traditions by outsiders without consent, often for profit or trend.Cultural appreciation: Respectful engagement that includes consent, benefit-sharing, and context.Indigenous knowledge systems: Ways of knowing rooted in community, land, history, and language.Ask students:<ul style="list-style-type: none">Who has the right to use cultural symbols in fashion?Can a global industry like fashion engage with Indigenous cultures ethically?What happens when cultural expression becomes commodified?3. Listening: Video: Sage Paul – Your Clothes Are the Most Political Choice You Make Every Day (TEDx Talk)<ul style="list-style-type: none">Students should actively map Sage Paul's key arguments, counterarguments, and ethical claims.Key Points to Listen For:<ul style="list-style-type: none">How does Sage Paul describe her upbringing and values?What critiques does she make about the fashion industry?How are Indigenous designers reclaiming narrative and space?What are the ethical problems with brands like Urban Outfitters?How does she propose we reimagine the fashion economy?Note-Taking Framework:<ul style="list-style-type: none">Main Arguments<ul style="list-style-type: none">What is Sage Paul's central message about fashion and politics?How does she define the ethical problems in the fashion industry?What does she say about cultural appropriation vs. appreciation?Supporting examples:

- What personal stories does she share from her childhood and family?
- Which specific incidents or brands (e.g., Urban Outfitters, Disney) does she reference?
- What examples does she give of Indigenous resistance or creativity?
- Counterarguments:
 - What might a mainstream fashion brand argue in defence of “borrowing”?
 - Does Sage Paul address these views, directly or indirectly?
 - Can fashion ever be truly “global” without borrowing?

4. Kialo Discussion (30 mins):

- In small groups, students create a **new** Kialo discussion around the guiding question.
- Alternatively, if students require more structure, clone and share [this ready-made discussion](#), based on the thesis below, and use the suggested claims as prompts for students.
- Students should use their analysis to ensure they select the strongest arguments from the listening task.
- They should add these to the Kialo discussion as arguments, counterarguments, examples, and evaluations.
- Encourage students to refer to the concepts of power, culture, and ethics in their arguments.

Example Claims:

NAME: Can Indigenous fashion maintain its cultural authenticity in the global market?

THESIS: Indigenous fashion can maintain its cultural authenticity in the global market.

Starter claim: Indigenous garments serve as living archives of culture, helping maintain authenticity across generations.

- PRO: Clothing can tell stories using colors, patterns, or symbols that show a group’s history, struggles, or beliefs.
 - Example: For example, the Ajrak from Sindh is a powerful symbol of culture and resistance, made using a traditional block-printing method.
- CON: Traditional clothing can lose its meaning even within Indigenous communities if younger people are not taught what it stands for.
 - Example: For example, some youth may have beaded clothing or woven sashes but don’t know their purpose or the stories behind them.

Starter claim: Global recognition of Indigenous fashion can create solidarity and awareness around shared struggles, reinforcing authenticity through political connection.

- PRO: When Indigenous garments are worn in solidarity or protest, they can raise awareness of ongoing resistance movements.
 - Example: For example, Sage Paul believes that wearing Indigenous fashion is inherently political, asserting sovereignty and resilience.
- CON: Political symbols in fashion can be misused or adopted without genuine understanding, weakening their original meaning.

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Example: For example, the keffiyeh has been used in fashion magazines without reference to Palestine, erasing its political significance. <p>Starter claim: Without proper context, Indigenous fashion risks being misunderstood in global markets.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● PRO: If garments are not accompanied by education, their deeper cultural meaning often remains inaccessible or misunderstood. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Example: For example, Maasai designs are often used in fashion without credit, stripping them of their ceremonial and cultural importance. ● CON: Fashion can spark curiosity and conversations that lead to deeper engagement with cultural knowledge. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Example: For example, Sage Paul's own designs and runway shows often include narratives or artist statements that invite the public to learn more. <p>Starter claim: Global fashion systems favor scalability and uniformity, which are incompatible with the local, handcrafted nature of authentic Indigenous fashion.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● PRO: The slow, small-batch production central to many Indigenous traditions cannot meet global demand without sacrificing authenticity. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Example: For example, Ajrak producers in Sindh face pressure to mechanize or simplify designs for export, risking dilution of their complex cultural patterns. ● CON: Global markets can be reimaged to support ethical, small-scale production. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Example: For example, initiatives like the Indigenous Fashion Arts festival in Canada create space for authenticity by promoting slow fashion and artisan-led practices.
Reflection	<p>Whole-class discussion (10 mins): How does Indigenous fashion challenge the dominant values of the global fashion industry? What ethical responsibilities do consumers and companies hold?</p> <p>Example reflection questions:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Should fashion companies have to get consent before using cultural motifs? ● Can buying Indigenous-made fashion help reverse historical harms? ● What are the consequences of commodifying sacred or symbolic knowledge? ● How does reclaiming fashion help preserve Indigenous knowledge systems? ● Should governments create stronger legal protections for Indigenous cultural expression? ● What surprised you about Sage Paul's talk?
Resources	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Lesson Slides ● Kialo Discussion: Can Indigenous fashion maintain its cultural authenticity in the global market? ● Debate video: Sage Paul – Your Clothes Are the Most Political Choice You Make Every Day (TEDx Talk) 14mins
TOK Concepts	<p>Power: Should fashion companies have the right to use cultural designs without asking permission?</p>

	<p>Ethics: Is it right to turn sacred cultural symbols into fashion items for profit?</p> <p>Culture: How can Indigenous fashion help protect and share cultural knowledge?</p>
Critical Thinking Concepts	<p>Confronting Biases and Assumptions</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Identifying Perspective Bias: Students explore how mainstream fashion often centers Western aesthetics and values while sidelining Indigenous knowledge and traditions. • Questioning Objectivity: Students analyze whether fashion can ever be neutral, or if all design choices are influenced by cultural, historical, and political perspectives. • Challenging Authority Bias: Students reflect on how corporate power (e.g., major brands) dictates trends and controls whose voices and designs get visibility, often ignoring or erasing Indigenous creators. <p>Exploring Contexts and Expert Opinions</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Power and Cultural Voice: Students examine how cultural and economic power shapes which communities' designs are marketed and monetized — and which are dismissed or stolen. • Case Study Evaluation: Students evaluate real examples like Urban Outfitters' misuse of Navajo designs and contrast that with ethical Indigenous-led fashion practices (e.g., Indigenous Fashion Week Toronto). • Assessing Credibility: Students analyze whose voices are often excluded from mainstream conversations and whose perspectives are legitimized. <p>Responsiveness and Flexibility of Thought</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Adapting Arguments: Students refine their positions on cultural appropriation as they encounter new evidence from Indigenous perspectives, fashion economics, and ethics. • Weighing Contradictory Perspectives: Students compare mainstream claims of artistic freedom with Indigenous demands for consent, recognition, and compensation. • Recognizing the Role of Context: Students reflect on how history, colonization, and marginalization shape whether cultural borrowing is viewed as theft or sharing. <p>Extrapolation and Reapplication of Principles</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Applying Concepts to Current Events: Students draw parallels between the fashion case and other examples of cultural appropriation in music, food, or festivals. • Transferable Skills: Students practice evaluating bias, ownership, and consent in real-world scenarios like advertising, media, and education. • Ethical Reflection: Students consider who benefits and who is harmed by cultural appropriation in fashion, and reflect on the ethical responsibilities that designers, brands, and consumers have when engaging with Indigenous cultural knowledge.