

WORKING IN THEATRE: Costume Designer



A **costume designer** helps tell the story of a play or musical by creating the look of each character. They design costumes/clothing, accessories, shoes—anything that the actors wear. Costume designers usually have enough drawing or painting skill to help the rest of the creative team understand what the costumes will look like. They also need to learn about sewing, fabric and other materials, color theory, and how to research various time periods. Some learn this on the job, while others get undergraduate or graduate degrees in design. Some designers get hands-on to sew (or “build”) the costumes themselves, while those working at larger theatres usually rely on costume shop assistants to make their designs into reality. Costume designers are almost always hired as contractors on a per-show basis, and usually work at multiple theatres.



UNFAMILIAR TERM: “ARTISAN”

A worker in a skilled trade, especially one that involves making things by hand.

Note to students: You'll get the most out of this video if you watch it twice. Watch it once, and then read the questions below before the second viewing.

REVIEW QUESTIONS:

1 Emilio mentions that on any given day, he might be involved with fitting, shopping, or research. What kinds of things might a designer need to research?

2 Emilio says he works with an assistant, tailors, sewers, and artisans. Describe another job that requires working closely with others. Think about the people you come in contact with as you go to school, shop, or play.

3 What differences do you think there are between a costume worn onstage and one you might wear to a Halloween party?

4 Emilio says a designer needs a knowledge of fabric. Think about the clothes you are wearing right now. What types of material are they made of? Do you think any of the materials would be good for an actor's onstage costume? Why or why not? (Think about how the material moves, the comfort, how strong it is, etc.)

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REFLECTION QUESTIONS:

1 What can you identify with or what speaks strongly to you in the video?

2 Do you prefer working alone or working with others? What might that tell you about careers you might pursue?

3 Emilio uses the phrase “cool under pressure.” Would you describe yourself that way? What do you do to deal with the pressures in your life (school, family, deadlines, etc.)?

4 Emilio says a costume designer is responsible for characters’ hair, shoes, make-up, and clothing. Explain how any one of those elements might affect someone’s opinion about someone else. (Think about the phrase “dress for success.”)

FURTHER ACTIVITIES:

1 Using the career path quiz, answer the questions for yourself and then as you think a costume designer might answer them. What conclusions can you draw about your interests.

2 Use IMDB.com (the Internet Movie Database) to look up the costume designer for your favorite movie. What else have they designed?

3 Professional costume designers are often members of the Costume Designers Guild, a union. Think of a job that interests you and research whether it may require membership in a guild or union. Examples: Actors Equity Association, Stage Directors and Choreographers Union.

Visit CTGLA.org/WorkingInTheatre and select “Costume Designer.”

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