

Little People, BIG DREAMS

TEACHERS' GUIDE



Coco Chanel
Little People, BIG DREAMS
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LEARNING OBJECTIVE:

International fashion icon Coco Chanel did more than design some of the world's most exquisite clothing and accessories – she set the bar for excellence. From humble beginnings at an orphanage in France, young Coco learned resilience and fortitude, staying true to her dream of making beautiful designs despite the fact that she was often mocked for being “different.” Her legacy inspires children with the understanding that staying true to your dreams, no matter what, can lead you to amazing places!

ESSENTIAL QUESTIONS IN THIS UNIT

1. Why is Coco Chanel famous?
2. What is Coco's given name?
3. As a child, what was Coco's favorite thing to do?
4. How and when did Coco get her nickname?
5. What was it about Coco's hat designs that got her noticed by customers?
6. What did Coco want to change about women's clothes so that they would be more comfortable?

CLASSROOM DISCUSSION TOPICS

1. Young Coco, called Gabrielle, grew up in an orphanage. Looking at the pictures in the book of her time at school for clues, ask the students what they think her experience there might have been like.

2. In the book, Coco is shown writing the following statement on the school chalkboard: "To be irreplaceable one must always be different." Ask the students to discuss what she might have meant by that. Do they believe her sentiment? What does it mean to be "different?" Is it always an easy thing to do? Why or why not?

3. The book describes a very bad reaction from some people to Coco's designs at her first fashion show. Ask the students what qualities about Coco may have helped her stay true to her wildly different designs until they finally became accepted—and loved! Do they think those qualities helped her at other times in her life?

4. While they became popular more than one hundred years ago, the designs of Coco Chanel are still incredibly desirable today, and her fashion house creates styles considered to be the very definition of luxury. Ask the class to discuss what about her designs makes them endure over so many years. How do the students think Chanel designs stay modern?

STUDENT ACTIVITIES

1. Try out your sewing skills! With a thick, round-ended (not too pointy!) needle and yarn, have the students stitch on a piece of paper. Can they make a straight line, or interesting pattern? Ask them to imagine making an entire garment by hand – what would that be like?

2. Help your class tap into their inner sense of style. Have each student create an outfit or accessory by drawing or painting on paper. Hang up everyone's project for all to see!

3. Dream clouds: In the book Coco is described as dreaming "in shapes and patterns," and shown with a cloud filled with her designs. On plain paper, have students draw a large cloud, and fill it with various shapes, patterns, colors, and textures with pens, markers, cut out colored paper, etc. Ask them to use their imaginations!

4. Inclusion project: As a child, both the nuns and her schoolmates thought Coco was odd. Ask the class what those people could have done to make her feel more included. Write the ideas on a board, and add to it as more ideas strike.

