**Classroom Application: The Art of Dress in the Martial Arts**

Whether a black belt in karate, a fencing champion, or a capoeira master, people who practice martial arts have worn distinctive clothing for hundreds of years. Distinctive clothing marks one as a practitioner to the broader world and within the world of that sport identifies levels of expertise. Many young people today practice a wide variety of martial arts, which provides another lens for investigating dress, practicing inquiry skills, and learning to interview and summarize findings.

Prepare students for researching martial arts clothing by telling them that the martial arts have ancient histories in Europe, Asia, and Africa. Some are associated with combat, some with health or spiritual development, and some with all these elements. Examples include karate, tai chi, fencing, boxing, wrestling, archery, and capoeira. Read “Marks of Distinction in an Afro-Brazilian Martial Art” as an introduction to researching martial arts clothing. Depending upon your students, assign them to read it as well or summarize and discuss the article in class.

To find practitioners to interview, begin by asking students if they take a form of martial arts. Who has a friend or family member who practices a martial art? After identifying people to interview in teams or individually, students should research the interviewee’s art form and prepare questions and our interview Release Form\(^1\). The worksheet offers a variety of questions to launch student research into local martial arts practices. Not all questions will pertain to each interview. During interviews, students should take notes and sketch or photograph the martial arts clothing. If working in teams, they may divide tasks: interviewing, note taking, sketch artist, photographer, audio or video recorder.

In a class discussion of students’ research, ask students to share sketches or photographs as well as to summarize their findings. It can be just as interesting to discuss some questions that the interviewees were unable to answer as the ones that they do answer. For example, they could talk about why gender differences might be downplayed in martial arts whereas in folk dance, for example, there are distinct differences in dress and roles.

**Footnote:**
1. Find our Release Form here: [http://locallearningnetwork.org/local-learning-tools](http://locallearningnetwork.org/local-learning-tools)
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This series of questions will help in planning an interview with someone who practices a martial art about the sport's special clothing. Be sure to sketch or photograph the uniform.

Interviewer ________________________________________________

Interviewee ________________________________________________

Date ___________  Place of Interview __________________________

__Yes, the Interviewee completed a release form giving permission to share this interview.

What form of martial arts do you practice?

Where and how often do you practice?

What do you wear for this sport?

How many pieces does the uniform include?

What do you wear on your head?

What do you wear on your hands?

What do you wear on your feet?

Do you use any equipment besides your clothing? If so, what?

How many colors are in the uniform? Which are most important? What do the colors symbolize, if anything?

Are there differences in the clothing for boys and girls? If so, what are they?

Where did you get your uniform?

Who taught you how to wear it?

Where do you keep it?

Do you wear it anywhere other than the training academy? Why or why not?

Does it need special care or cleaning?

What do you like best about the uniform?