Overheard: Dress Sayings and Proverbs

Coded into our everyday speech, sartorial expressions abound. In his study of Rastafarian proverbs, Sw. Anand Prahlad outlines four levels of meaning embedded within this speech act: 1) the grammatical or literal meaning; 2) the social meaning, where meaning is understood within a group context; 3) the situational meaning, which depends on how the proverb is used rhetorically; and 4) the symbolic meaning, or meanings, which emerge from each individual speaker or listener’s experience (2001:2). How might students analyze their own common phrases that include dress-related expressions? By giving them a couple of examples from below, what other phrases may they discover? How do they use these sayings? What meanings do such sayings have to them?

Dress slowly, we're in a hurry.
Let a smile be your umbrella.
A stitch in time saves nine.
That's a feather in your cap.
The emperor wore no clothes.
Don't air your dirty linen in public.
All dressed up and nowhere to go.
It was as comfortable as an old shoe.
Wear your best bib and tucker.
Buckle down and work hard.
It was a cloak-and-dagger operation.
Those two are cut from the same cloth.
They were dressed to kill.
I'll eat my hat.
She would give you the shirt off her back.
He got the boot.
Handle him with kid gloves.
She might have a card up her sleeve.
Try to walk in another's shoes.
Keep your shirt on.
We did it on a shoestring.
Pass the hat.
Pull up your bootstraps.

Works Cited
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The 2015 theme for the Journal of Folklore and Education is Youth in Community. The focus will be on bringing youth voices and visions to the forefront to serve as catalysts in diverse places. It considers “student-driven” pedagogy to be not only an adjective, but also an action verb that encompasses research methods, critical thinking, and production. We welcome ideas for submissions of articles, model projects, multimedia products, classroom applications, and student work.

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