

Parent Guide



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We're excited to share this activity with you. If you are interested in finding more exciting, fun and interesting activities for you and your children, then check out these links to different areas of the [Twinkl Parents](#) website.

games



crafts



puzzles



experiments



word searches



What is this resource and how do I use it?

Read about fashion designer Coco Chanel and how she was influenced to create her iconic garments.

What skills does this practise?

Key Vocabulary

Problem Solving

Communication

Reading Comprehension

Further Activity Ideas and Suggestions

Why not make a scrapbook or collage of Chanel's iconic designs and use it to design your own Chanel-inspired garment?

Parents Blog



Twinkl Kids' TV



Homework Help



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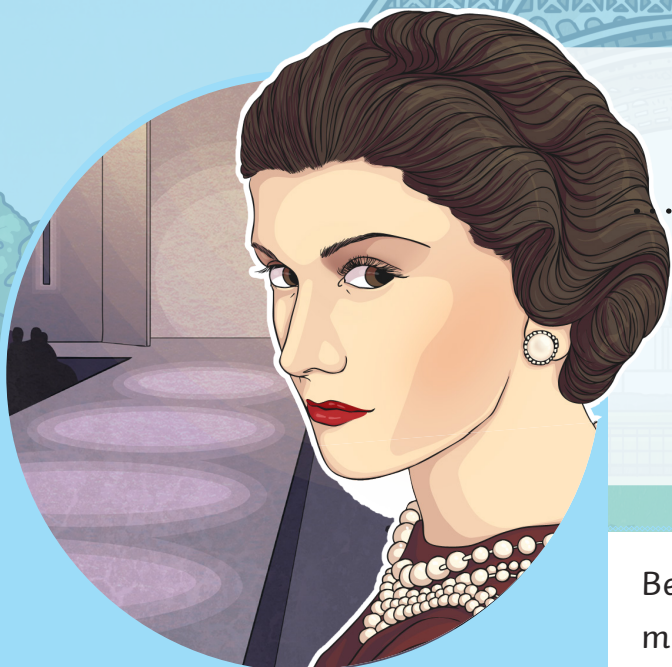
Parents
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Coco Chanel

Birth name: Gabrielle Bonheur Chanel

Born: 19th August 1883 in Saumur, France

Died: 10th January 1971 (87 years of age) in Paris, France

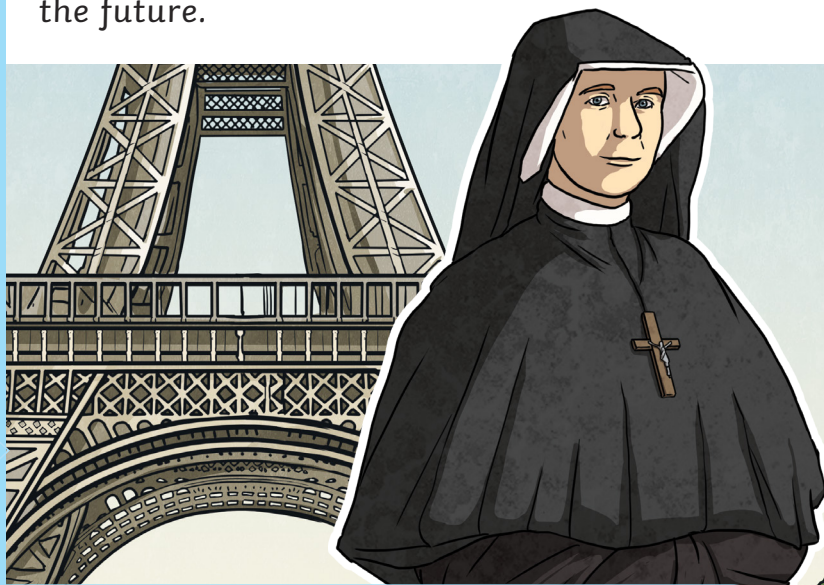


Gabrielle Bonheur Chanel was born into dire poverty in Saumur, France, about 320km south-west of **Paris**.

Her mother worked in the **laundry department** at a poorhouse for families with nowhere else to live. Her father was a **peddler**, travelling across the country selling clothes in market towns.

She had one older sister and four younger siblings, one of which died when he was just six months old.

Before Chanel reached her teenage years, her mother died. With her father living quite a nomadic life, he sent his two sons to work on a farm as labourers and his daughters to an orphanage. Although she did not attend school, she did learn many things while at the orphanage. It was run by nuns and had a very Catholic ethos. One of the skills she learnt was how to sew; something that, although she didn't realise at the time, would prove very useful in the future.



Chanel often retold her childhood history by stretching the truth with a more glamorous upbringing. Stories range from living with her aunt, to her father travelling to America to seek his fortune.

To earn money, one of Chanel's first jobs was as a singer in cabaret style clubs. She sang in between the main acts of the evening. It was during this time she got the nickname 'Coco'. It is not certain where she got this name from. Some have said it was a pet name her father gave her, while others say it was from a song she frequently sang in the clubs with the word 'Coco' in it. Another suggestion is the term for kept woman in French is 'cocotte' and some believe this is also an option as to the name we know her by today.

Her boutique was called **Chanel Modes** and the hats quickly became favourites of famous French actresses. It wasn't long before her hats were being worn all over Paris.



After meeting an ex-military officer, who was also a wealthy textile heir, Chanel began to design hats. Shortly afterwards, she went on to meet an industrialist called Arthur Capel, who gave her an apartment in Paris and funding to open her first store in 1910.

Opening another store in Deauville, Chanel introduced a selection of sportswear made from the loose jersey material traditionally used to manufacture men's underwear. Choosing this material was the first of many innovative ideas she would introduce to the fashion world.

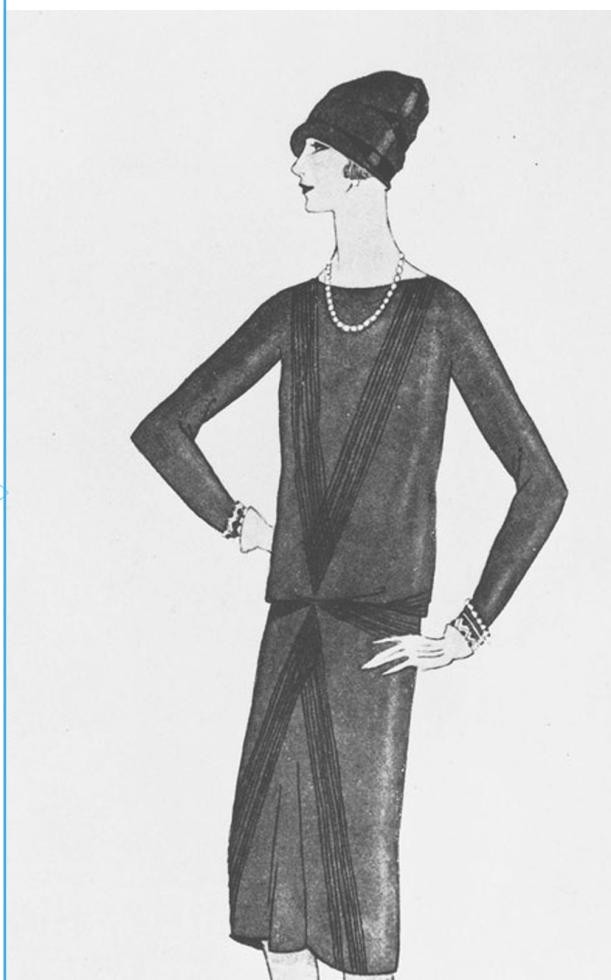
It was in this sportswear collection that she pushed the fashion boundaries and launched the now iconic Breton striped shirt and boating trousers combination.

With the boutiques performing so well in the fashion industry, Chanel began to put her name to perfumes and make up too. She wanted to put together an entire package to help people feel empowered, well-presented and (most of all) comfortably chic.

In 1925, the first Chanel suit made its appearance. Women were wearing corsets and long skirts for quite some time and these items were not only uncomfortable but incredibly restrictive and not at all practical for the roles women were now beginning to have.

Chanel was inspired by sportswear and the much more comfortable range of men's tailored garments. It became apparent that menswear was made for comfort and practicality, yet at the time, women's clothing was all about structure and status. These influences inspired her to design the collarless tweed jacket and fitted skirt. She loved how "unconventionally comfortable" tweed could be. Traditionally, tweed was worn by Scottish and Irish farmers due to its durability and protection against harsh weather conditions. It was then worn by men when hunting and shooting as a warm alternative to cotton or felt.

The suit became known as 'Chanel's uniform' after a number of famous actresses and other influential women chose to wear it.



Following the success of the suit, Chanel went on to launch another first for the fashion industry; the 'little black dress'.

The impact of this statement garment can still be found in fashion houses today. The simple and wearable dress was designed to show that black was not just a colour to wear when mourning a loss. Chanel wanted to demonstrate that women could wear black garments, look and feel chic and be sophisticated at any event.

By the mid-1930s, Chanel employed over 4000 people and owned five boutiques in the heart of Paris alone.

With the outbreak of the Second World War, German occupation of France and a time of uncertainty, Chanel decided to close all but one of her boutiques. She left one open to sell jewellery and perfumes, which had become very popular with American soldiers.

Post-war, Chanel waited until the 1950s to re-open her stores and make a return to fashion. She decided to extend her fashion range to include bell-bottom trousers as well as reintroduce her classic tweed suit. This time, the suit became more popular than it had ever been before. With more competitors on the horizon during this time, Chanel was always looking to stay one step ahead.



In February 1955, Chanel introduced her first bag. The Chanel 2.55 - a simple handbag with a shoulder strap - has become another iconic product of her range. The shoulder strap was made using rows of flat metal links to allow freedom of movement and the aim of the bag was to let high society ladies hold their champagne and theatre flyer at the same time, without having to juggle a clutch bag too.

Following the success of the handbag, Chanel went into more accessories with a new shoe style: the slingback. Another classic and inspirational design made for comfort, style and once again, practicality. Her two-tone slingback shoes helped to give the illusion of a more petite foot length while making the wearers' legs look longer. Chanel wanted her shoes to be able to be worn at any occasion but give the feeling of luxury, comfort and style.



By the 1960s, the Chanel brand was favoured by many celebrities and public figures. Actress Bridgette Bardot and former First Lady, Jackie Kennedy, were both admirers of Chanel.

Chanel died at the age of 87 in January 1971. Her designs redefined fashion for women at the time and continue to do so today. Her ability to introduce timeless classics is to be admired. In a world of fast fashion, Chanel has made sure her pieces are still desired to this day.

Quotes:

“I don’t do fashion. I am fashion.”

“Simplicity is the keynote of all time elegance.”

“Be two things: classy and fabulous.”