



A history of buttons

Buttons have been used as a decorative item of dressing since the 14th century, but their popularity and use is dependent on fashion trends. They were not strongly featured in the first half of the 19th century, even though lots of them were produced, for example out of ceramics or glass. On the other hand, they became integral part of fashion during the second half of the century, when shell, mother of pearl, black glass, stamped steel, and brass were used for buttons. Enamel had been popular in the 18th century and it was revived in the 1880s, and buttons were also made of glass and porcelain, or covered with embroidery. Their popularity dropped during World War I, but then the Art Deco movement of the 1920s brought buttons into fashion focus once more. The interest grew and new buttons were made from wood, cork, plexiglass, and synthetic plastics. Novelty buttons were very fashionable at that time: they were used as strategic parts of clothing design, and resembled baskets of fruit or other objects. New shapes and types were shown: buttons with the shape of open books, flower pots, mermaids, acrobats, or snakes. After they had enjoyed much popularity, they became less decorative and more functional in the second half of the 20th century.

(Adapted from the *Dictionary of Fashion and Fashion designers*)



ACTIVITIES

1 Decide if the following sentences are true or false, then correct the false ones.

- 1 Buttons were introduced in the 14th century.
- 2 Buttons have not always been very popular in times.
- 3 Ceramics buttons became particularly common in the 19th century.
- 4 Enamel buttons spread in the 19th century, but they had been introduced in the previous century.
- 5 New types of buttons were produced during World War I.
- 6 Art Deco introduced the trend of decorative, original buttons.

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2 Name the materials buttons have been made of.

3 Find the shapes and types of buttons that have been produced.