

PAIRED TEXTS
texts that share a
theme or topic

OFF WITH HER HAIR! (AND HER HEAD)

Pigeon-dung dye, lice-infested wigs, beheaded queens: The history of hair is anything but pretty.

BY KRISTIN LEWIS

According to one story, when Marie Antoinette heard the people of France were starving, she said, "Let them eat cake!" Um, really, Marie?



The year was 1793, and Queen Marie Antoinette was waiting in a cold dungeon cell. All alone, she listened to the roar of the bloodthirsty crowd outside.

Soon, she would be put to death. But first, her executioner would arrive with a pair of scissors to cut off her famous hair.

Marie Antoinette was the queen of France. She was known for her **lavish** lifestyle and expensive taste—and in particular, for her elaborate hairstyles. Her daring stylist **affixed** to Marie's hair powdered wigs adorned with feathers, jewels, fresh flowers, waxen figures—even sailing ships (replicas, of course—but still!). Marie's hairdos sometimes towered four feet high. That's as tall as a first-grader!

The noblewomen of France were quick to imitate the queen's newfangled look. Soon, they too were **gallivanting** through town with birds, butterflies, and even urns containing the ashes of loved ones atop their heads. One reporter wrote that women's hair had become so tall that their heads appeared to be in the middle of their bodies. Unfortunately, these creations were rarely washed, and all sorts of vermin tended to live in them.

But creepy crawlies weren't the only problem. Marie Antoinette's hairstyles were extremely costly, and many ladies went into enormous debt trying to copy them.

That didn't sit well with people—especially because much of France was starving at the time. Years of famine and war had thrown the country into poverty. Watching the queen spend small fortunes on ridiculous hairstyles fueled people's resentment.

Finally, in 1789, the public had had enough. A band of revolutionaries stormed the palace, and the French Revolution began. They executed the king in 1793. A few months later, Marie was condemned to the **guillotine**.

But before she was beheaded, she was paraded through the streets of Paris without her hair. The crowd cheered when they saw her **deprived** of that famous 'do, which had come to represent, for many, everything that was unjust in their country.

Who would have thought that a hairstyle could mean so much?

Wigs were all the rage in 18th-century France. Washing them? Not so much. Wigs were home to all kinds of critters.

STATUS SYMBOLS

Whether long or short, curly or straight, our hair speaks volumes about us. It can express our individuality, our **allegiances**, our social status, and our values. To be sure, human hair is unique. No other animal on planet Earth has hair like we do. By the time you are 75, you may have grown as much as 4 million feet of it. And you will have washed it, dried it, combed it, cut it, maybe even dyed it, thousands of times. Primping is part of a long tradition that



PAGE 14: WILLIAM HELBURN/CORBIS (WOMAN); SHUTTERSTOCK (FLY); PAGE 15 FROM LEFT TO RIGHT: MARK DAVIS/GETTY IMAGES; HULTON ARCHIVE/GETTY IMAGES; STOCK MONTAGE/GETTY IMAGES; VETTA/GETTY IMAGES.

Greatest Hair Hits

10,000 B.C.

Early humans styled their hair with combs made of animal teeth. Eek.



1100 A.D.

The Samurai were knights in medieval Japan. They wore ponytails sometimes tied with pins that could double as weapons, making the Samurai easy to spot and also pretty fierce.



1790s

George Washington refused to wear wigs like those snobby Europeans. Instead, he powdered his natural hair. This look was standard among America's Founding Fathers.



1812

In the 19th century, long hair was prized. In a famous fairy tale, Rapunzel uses her hair as a rope so her prince can climb up the tower where she lived.

began when the first caveman tied back his hair to go hunting.

Thousands of years ago, many cultures believed part of our spirit resided in our hair, and rituals offering up human hair to the gods were common. But like today, many hairstyles in the ancient world were chosen not for their spiritual significance but for the **status** they conveyed. In ancient Egypt, for example, Queen Nefertiti started a fashion craze when she began wearing wigs made from real human hair. Those who couldn't afford to copy her wore wigs of straw and sheep's wool.

Meanwhile, over in Greece and Rome, everyone wanted to be blond—no matter how many poisons they had to pour on their heads to do so. One dye was a toxic brew of pigeon dung, acid, and arsenic.

As the centuries unfolded, hairstyles came and went—though for the most part, only the rich and powerful could afford to follow fads. By the time Marie Antoinette came along, “perukes,” or wigs, had become the standard for upperclass men and women of Europe. One reason was that wigs covered up baldness. Another reason was more practical: At the time, head lice were everywhere, and picking nits off one's scalp was painful and time-consuming. Wigs helped. Lice relocated from people's hair to their wigs.

But above all, perukes were a way to **flaunt** wealth—

they were like the sports cars of the day. The bigger the wig, the more expensive. In fact, the word “bigwig” was coined to describe the snobs who could afford them.

A SYMBOL OF OPPRESSION

During the French Revolution, everything changed. Wigs and outrageous hairstyles had become symbols of oppression. In fact, stepping out in a peruke could get you beaten up or killed. Not surprisingly, nobles quickly learned to leave their wigs at home. Across the ocean in America, some of our Founding Fathers, including George Washington, refused to wear wigs because they saw them as undemocratic—part of the corrupt old world they had left behind. By the 19th century, a simple, natural look was the style for men and women of all classes both in the U.S. and in Europe.

Today, you can do pretty much anything you want with your hair. Yet we still use hairstyles to define ourselves and evaluate others. Think about the hairstyles you see every day. Hipsters have shaggy hair and beards. Lawyers have neat, conservative **coifs**. And you'll probably never see a President of the United States sporting Justin Bieber's side-swept 'do.

In a thousand years, when future anthropologists look back at us, they will probably study our hairstyles as a way to understand our culture.

What will they think? ●



1920s

Modern women of the 1920s chopped off their long locks and adopted “bobs.” The style was scandalous. Some men divorced their wives for getting bobs!



1940-Present

With his untamed hair, genius Albert Einstein set the standard for what a “mad scientist” should look like.



1960s

African-Americans began wearing “afros” as a statement of pride and a symbol of the fight for equality.



1970s

The mohawk became popular among fans of punk-rock music in the 1970s.



1960s-Present

For many African-Americans, wearing dreadlocks is a way to connect to their African heritage.



2013

Thousands of tweets have been written on Justin Bieber's “flip and switch” hairstyle. Seriously!

Hey Kids, Get a Haircut!

When having the wrong hairstyle could get you suspended **BY JUSTIN O'NEILL**

Principal Luther A. Howard was on a hunt for a menace.

What had him worried?

Long hair.

January 29, 1968, was the deadline for the boys of Brien McMahon High School in Norwalk, Connecticut, to get a haircut. Principal Howard had said that boys who came to school with long hair would be punished. Turns out he wasn't kidding: He suspended more than 50 students that day.

You might be surprised that kids could get suspended for something as minor as long hair, but in the late 1960s, long hair was a powerful symbol of rebellion. During this era, young people were leading a wave of change. Across the country, they were making their opinions known through protests, calling for an end to the war in Vietnam, expanded rights for women, and equality for African-Americans.

It was also a time of colorful personal expression, as young people broke away from the traditional styles of their parents. Musical icons like the Beatles had inspired new looks. The big trend was "hippie" fashion: bell-bottomed jeans, tie-dye, headbands, sandals, and, yes, long hair.

Some adults saw long hair as a rejection of their values. To them, short hair was a sign of respect. It reflected good grooming and good manners. Long



hair, on the other hand, seemed messy and rude.

"Hair must be away from the eyes, and away from the collar line," Principal Howard explained to the parents of the boys he suspended. "Hair must be neat (not bushy) around the ears."



In the mid-1960s, many boys copied the Beatles' shaggy mop-top hairstyle—to the horror of parents everywhere.

At Brien McMahon High, the suspensions sparked a fierce debate. A number of parents supported the boys by showing up to school with signs saying "It's not the hair on top but the mind beneath." In the end, most boys gave in and got trims. Others refused, and a few

took the issue to court, though they eventually lost.

Norwalk wasn't the only town to fight a hair battle. More than 100 hair-related cases were filed during this era. Nine went all the way to the U.S. Supreme Court (which refused to hear the cases). ●

WRITING CONTEST

How can hairstyles express an idea or a value? Why would people be threatened by a hairstyle? Answer both questions in two to three paragraphs. Use text evidence. Send your response to **HAIR CONTEST**. Five winners will each get *Big Wig* by Kathleen Krull.

**GET THIS
ACTIVITY
ONLINE**

