

History: Popular Culture

Madame Tussauds Sydney — Schools Resource

NSW Syllabus: History/History Elective 7–10 | **Stage:** Stage 5

Note for teachers: Please cross-check exact outcome codes against your school's current syllabus documentation.

About this resource

Madame Tussauds Sydney's collection spans musicians, actors, athletes and cultural icons — making it a ready-made case study for exploring how popular culture is shaped by, and shapes, its historical moment.

Curriculum outcomes addressed

- Explains different contexts, perspectives and interpretations of the past
- Identifies and evaluates the usefulness of sources in the historical inquiry process
- Applies a range of relevant historical terms and concepts when communicating an understanding of the past
- Selects and uses appropriate forms to communicate effectively about the past for different audiences

Key inquiry question

How does popular culture reflect and influence the values of the era that produces it?

Exercise 1: Decades of Icons (Classroom — Pre-Visit)

Format: Classroom-based | 25 minutes

1. In small groups, choose a decade (e.g. 1960s, 1980s, 2000s) and list cultural icons — musicians, actors, sports stars — associated with it.
2. Identify what values, anxieties or trends of that decade these figures represented.
3. Share back: How did popular culture in your decade respond to bigger historical events happening at the time?

Exercise 2: Reading the Icon (Excursion — In-Venue)

Format: Excursion-based | Individual worksheet

Choose two pop culture figures from different eras.

1. For each, note the era they rose to fame, and one historical or social event that shaped that era.
2. What does their styling, pose or setting in the exhibit suggest about how they were seen by the public at the height of their fame?
3. Compare the two: has the relationship between fame and history changed between their eras? How?

Exercise 3: Pop Culture as Primary Source (Classroom — Post-Visit)

Format: Classroom-based | Extended task

Popular culture can act as a historical source in its own right. Choose one figure investigated on your

visit and write an analytical response (350–450 words) explaining what their career and public image reveal about the historical period they belong to. Use specific evidence and historical terminology.

Teacher note: This pairs well with a media studies cross-curricular link, or can be adapted into a source-analysis exam-style question.

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Exercise 1: Decades of Icons (Classroom Worksheet)

Format: Classroom-based | 25 minutes

Popular culture can reflect the values and concerns of its time. In this activity, choose a decade and analyse the cultural figures that helped define it.

Choose a decade

Choose a decade (for example, the 1960s, 1980s, or 2000s) and write it here:

Decade: _____

List cultural icons from your decade

List 6–10 cultural icons from your decade. These might include musicians, actors, sports stars, TV personalities, or other well-known figures.

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____
4. _____
5. _____
6. _____
7. _____
8. _____
9. _____
10. _____

What did these figures represent?

Identify the key values, anxieties, or trends of the decade that these figures represented.

Reflection

How did popular culture in your decade respond to bigger historical events happening at the time?
Name at least one event and explain a connection.

Historical event: _____

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Exercise 2: Reading the Icon (Individual Worksheet)

Format: Excursion-based | Individual worksheet

Historians study icons for clues about the time they lived in — what was celebrated, what was controversial, and how fame was created and controlled. Use the exhibit details and what you know about the era to make careful observations and reasonable inferences. Choose two pop culture figures from different eras.

Figure 1

Name of figure: _____

Era they rose to fame (approx. decade/years): _____

One historical or social event that shaped that era: _____

Exhibit observations (styling/pose/setting) and what these details suggest:

Figure 2

Name of figure: _____

Era they rose to fame (approx. decade/years): _____

One historical or social event that shaped that era: _____

Exhibit observations (styling/pose/setting) and what these details suggest:

Comparison

Has the relationship between fame and history changed between these eras? How? Consider media, technology, global events, public expectations, and who controls the story.

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Exercise 3: Pop Culture as Primary Source (Extended Response Worksheet)

Format: Classroom-based | Extended task

Popular culture can act as a historical source in its own right. Choose one figure investigated on your visit and write an analytical response about what their career and public image reveal about the historical period they belong to.

Chosen figure

Chosen figure: _____

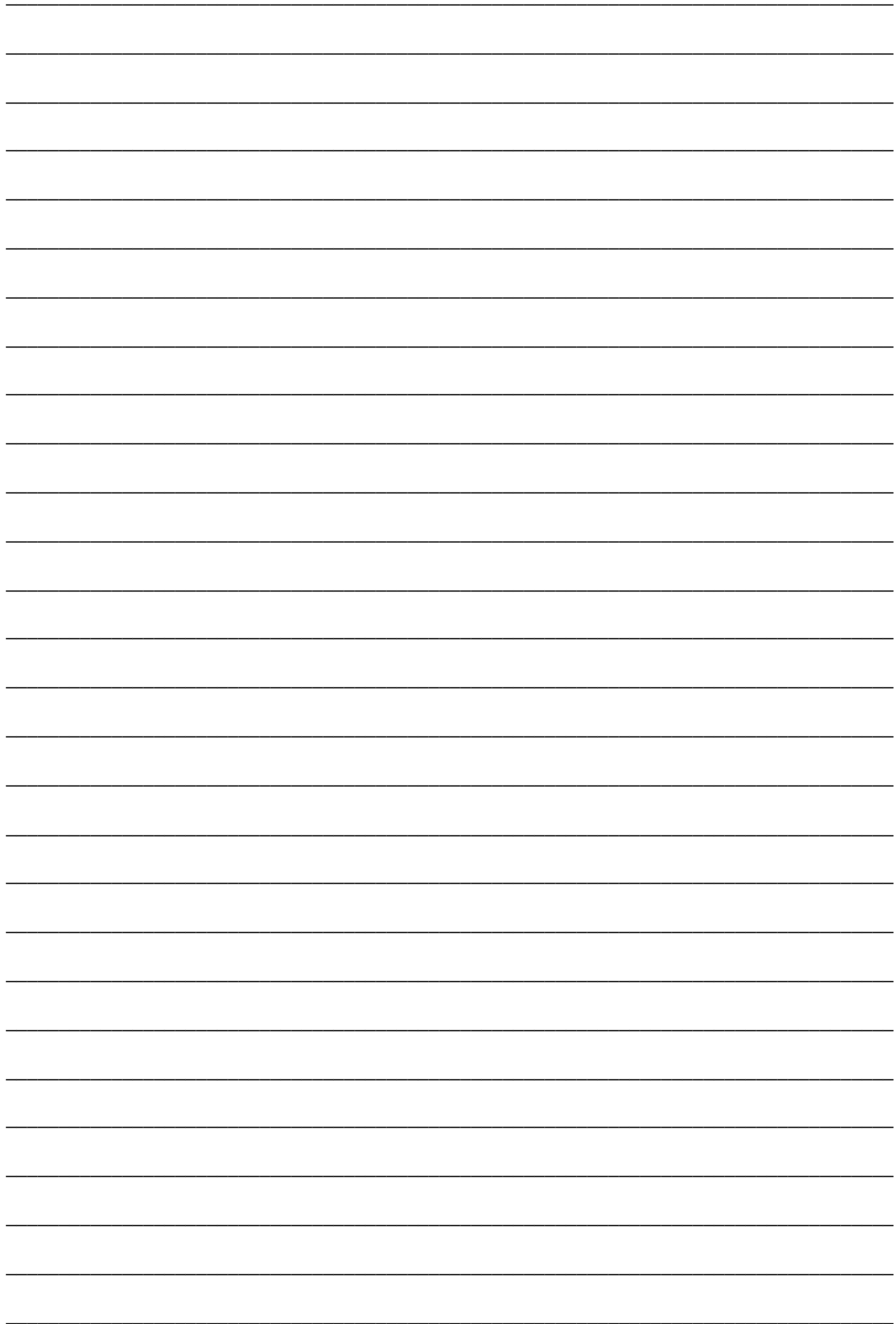
Historical period / era (approx. years): _____

Planning your response

Before you write, jot down key evidence from the exhibit, public image, style, pose, setting, or media coverage that helps show what your chosen figure reveals about their era.

Prompt 4: Extended response

Write a 350–450 word analytical response explaining what your chosen figure reveals about the historical period they belong to. Make a clear argument, support it with specific evidence, and use historical terminology such as context, perspective, significance, continuity and change, cause and effect, contestability, and representation.



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