

Lecture Pitch: The Victorian Era and Women's Corsets:

FASHION, FEMINISM, AND THE FIGHT FOR FREEDOM

by Susana Aikin



Overview: Step back in time to the Victorian era, a fascinating period marked by striking fashion and significant societal change. In this one-hour lecture, we will explore the intricate relationship between women's corsets and the burgeoning feminist movement of the late 19th century.

Level: B22 First Certificate to C2 Proficiency

What You Will Learn:

- **The Corset's Evolution:** Discover how the corset, a staple of women's fashion since the 16th century, reached its peak during the Victorian era, transforming the female silhouette into an exaggerated hourglass figure.
- **Health and Morality Concerns:** Delve into the controversies surrounding corsetry, from health risks associated with tightlacing to criticisms from dress reformists who argued that corsets promoted a superficial view of femininity and compromised women's well-being.
- **The Feminist Response:** Understand how the dress reform movement emerged as part of the first wave of feminism, advocating for women's rights to comfortable and practical clothing that would enhance their mobility and independence.

- **Societal Acceptance vs. Reform:** Analyze the tension between societal norms that upheld corsets as symbols of beauty and morality and the voices calling for change, including doctors, journalists, and reformists.
- **The Shift in Fashion:** Trace the decline of the corset in the early 20th century, influenced by World War I and the rise of more liberating undergarments like brassieres and girdles.
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Why Attend? This lecture is not just about fashion; it's about understanding how clothing reflects and shapes societal values, particularly regarding women's rights and self-expression. Whether you are interested in history, fashion, feminism, or cultural studies, this talk will provide valuable insights into how the choices women made in their attire were deeply intertwined with their fight for autonomy and respect.

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Susana Aikin is a writer and a filmmaker who started her independent film production company in NYC in 1984, *Starfish Productions*, for the production of documentary films which multiple awards, including a Rockefeller Fellowship and an Emmy Award in 1997. She started writing fiction full time in 2010. Her novels include: *Digging up the Salt Mines*, Ishtar Press, NYC 2013; *We Shall See the Sky Sparkling*, Kensington Books, NYC 2019 (Winner of the 2019 American Fiction Award for Best Historical fiction); *Nadine*, Libros de Seda, Barcelona 2019; and *The Weight of the Heart*, Kensington Books, NYC 2020.