

COSTUMES

Nothing brings authenticity to a skit like costumes and props. As I mentioned, our collection was fruitful and multiplied over the years, thanks to garage sales and thrift stores. It currently resides in my attic, which is literally wall-to-wall costumes. A rod was installed from the north wall to the south wall that holds doctors and prisoners, cavemen and genies, Santas and Star Trek crew, and many, many more.

I'll buy any disguise if the price is right but tend to focus mainly on career related costumes, i.e., scrubs for a surgeon skit. My collection includes a fair share of historical ones as well, such as medieval gowns and knight paraphernalia.

Though I haunt thrift stores year round, I increase frequency four to six weeks before Halloween. Every week they display more costumes and props at low prices.

Early fall is also a good time to advertise for costumes. Many pubs and other facilities that host Halloween parties will allow you to post a notice seeking costume donations from patrons who attend their event. As a public service, radio stations may make an announcement to that effect as well. I made some Comedy Club letterhead and whenever a costume donation came in, I typed a thank-you letter that all of the kids signed.

Even before launching Comedy Club, I enjoyed making costumes from time to time, but with the advent of CC, that became a regular pastime. Half the fun of CC for me was the challenge of whipping up an outfit in time for the next meeting with

whatever I had on hand.

I needed a grade-schooler sized wedding dress once but didn't have time for a trip to town so I used a white sheet and an old pair of lace curtains. I half considered having the "bride" wear the curtain rod, too, like I saw in a Carol Burnett skit once.

I had fun making an elaborate 3



Musketeers outfit from an old tablecloth. But you don't need sewing experience to create clothing articles for skits. You don't even need to buy a pattern.

Depending on the color of the fabric used, a basic tunic can clothe any number of characters, including Romeo, Santa Claus, a prisoner, a caveman, etc. To make a tunic, have the actor lay on top of a large piece of paper, his chin in line with the top of the paper. Instruct him to stick his arms out to the sides. Then draw an outline of his upper body, allowing an extra 2" all the way around.

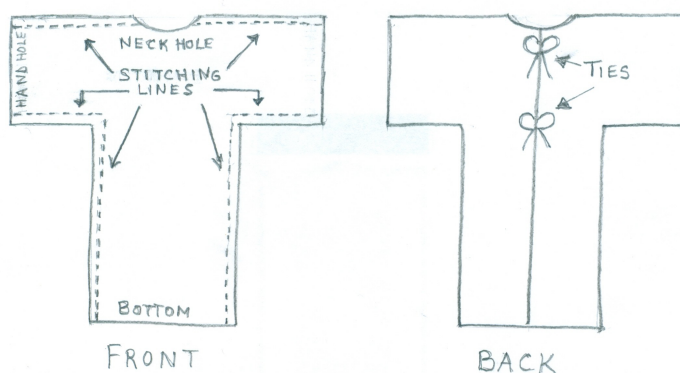
Draw a curved line for the neck. Or cut a V-neck if you're making a surgeon's scrubs. Let the type of character you're dressing determine the shape of the neck hole.

Finally, draw a line at the bottom where you want the tunic to end, allowing an extra inch if you plan to hem it. You can make the tunic thigh-length like for Robin Hood. Or end it at the ankles for a king's robe. Or anywhere in between.

Once you have a pattern, fold your fabric in half so that two pieces can be cut out simultaneously. Lay the pattern down, pin it to the fabric, and cut it out. For one piece only, cut right down the middle from top to bottom. (See illustration.) This is so that the garment can open either in front or in back, depending on the type of costume you're making.

Next, sew the arms and sides of your fabric together, leaving the neck hole, hand holes and bottom open. Turn costume right side out. Sew strings on the right and left sides at neck and waist so that costume can be tied shut. (See illustration.) Hem the sleeves and tunic bottom, if desired and time allows.

For more how-to's and ideas for costume making, check out these websites:



http://www.ehow.com/info_10017860_easy-historical-costumes.html

<http://crazylittleprojects.com/2014/09/easy-olaf-costume.html>

<https://www.pinterest.com/worlds/halloween-costume-ideas/>

<http://www.learningliftoff.com/15-diy-halloween-costumes-for-kids-with-an-educational-twist/#.Vl13zq8Yqdg>

Costumes will normally be worn over the actor's clothing, and it goes without saying that you should never require a student to wear a costume he or she is uncomfortable with. You also might consider cutting ready-made costumes down the back and sewing strings on each side of the neck and waist to tie them in place, like those hospital

gowns patients wear. That way anyone can fit into it regardless of his or her size, and you will avoid embarrassing anyone.

PROPS

Large rubber bins are ideal for storing props. These keep the dust off and protect them from getting crushed. Mine house a variety of cowboy hats, berets, bonnets, sombreros, hardhats, doo-rags,



derbies, etc. Most of these were obtained cheap, cheap, cheap from thrift stores and garage sales. Check out their toy section for swords, guns, and other weapons for your “arsenal”.

Though most of my props were purchased, a fair share were created by Yours Truly. Making props is a fun pastime in its own right. Using paper, glue, and objects you find around the house, one can whip up a multitude of props.

When a skit called for binoculars, I linked two empty toilet paper tubes together for a comical version. A single roll covered with white paper and labeled with large black letters became a can of “mace” for a modern knight. Perhaps the funniest prop I’ve seen from TP rolls was when someone joined them with string and painted them white to resemble a “powdered wig” like old-fashioned judges wore.

A plastic headband, paper and pipe cleaners can become a hilarious headpiece for Medusa. Don’t be afraid to think outside the box. The visuals that your imaginative props produce will make your skits even funnier.

Remember that the prop merely needs to resemble an item, not actually *be* it. When I had no ball for a “ball and chain,” I scoured my attic and found a small black plastic cauldron that was used for a trick-or-treat pail. I also had an oversized plastic “chain” with links that came apart. So I hooked it through the cauldron handle and voila! It looked so impressive that the little boy who used it said, “That was a good idea for the ball and chain. It was the best time ever!”