

# SILK

Silk is made from the cocoon of the silkworm, which is not really a worm at all, but a silk moth caterpillar. The silkworm feeds on one thing only, the leaves of the mulberry tree. Once it hatches, it feeds on these leaves for about a month until it is ready to spin a cocoon around itself. Left inside, it would become a moth however it is harvested for silk production before this happens.



*Silkworm and cocoon (Everythingabout.com)*

Silk is one of the oldest fibres known. Legend says that almost 5,000 years ago a young Chinese empress was sitting under a mulberry tree, drinking a cup of tea, when a silk cocoon fell from the tree into the hot tea. As she tried to remove it, she noticed that the cocoon had started to unravel, revealing the long, delicate silk filament.

The process is not so very different today although of course it has become mechanised. The cocoons are placed in a hot water bath and revolving brushes, or skilful hands, find the end of the filament. A number of filaments are drawn up from



*Silk being reeled. (Silkexpert.com)*

the water, twisted together then wound onto reels. These threads will be spun into yarn and formed into skeins which will be washed, ready for the next stages in the process: dyeing and weaving to make fabric.

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## YOUR ASSIGNMENT

### Upon completing this assignment, you will have

- practised your speaking and listening skills
- learned how to plan your writing
- practised your reading and researching skills
- practised your writing skills including punctuation, grammar, spelling and proofreading

### PART ONE

Discuss the manufacture of fabrics

Read the above overview about silk manufacture.

Watch the video about silk making ([video.google.com](http://video.google.com))

### PART TWO – planning and research

Make a plan using your preferred method (diagram, spidergram, post-its, lists ...)

Some ideas:

Explain where silk comes from and how it is made into fabric.

Find out which countries produce silk.

Describe the characteristics of silk, good and bad.

Describe some products made from silk.

The silkworm dies in the normal process, are there alternatives?

Possible places to find information:

Look for books on the subject in the library.

Use the internet: for example [www.bbc.co.uk/schools/gcsebitesize/design/](http://www.bbc.co.uk/schools/gcsebitesize/design/)

[www.silk.org.uk](http://www.silk.org.uk)

### PART THREE - writing

Use your plan and researched information to inform your own piece of writing. This must be in your own words, NO CUTTING AND PASTING, that would be copying and cheating!

Include images that are relevant and which help to explain and add to the information in your writing.

These images can be taken from books, the internet or your own artwork. You must give credit to your sources of information and images.

Remember to proofread your work before handing it in.

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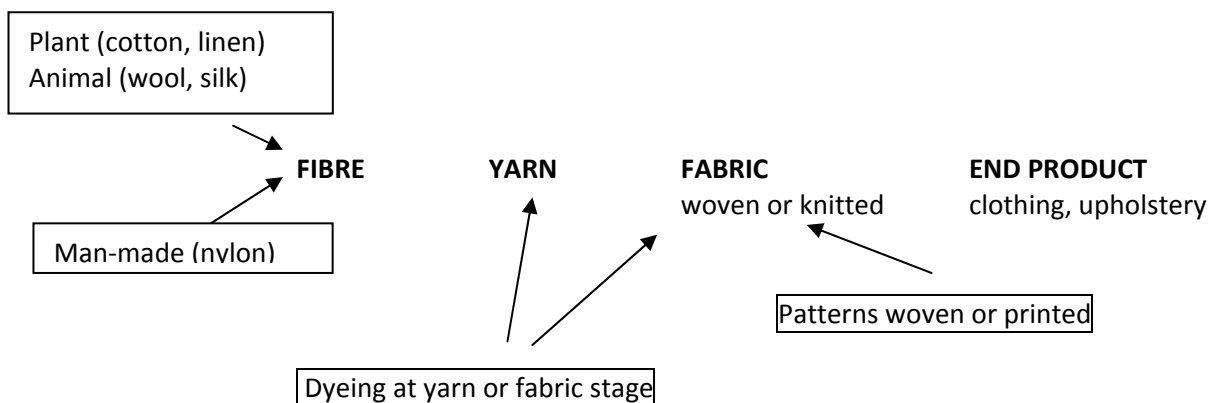
## NOTES TO ACCOMPANY SILK ASSIGNMENT

This was designed as a literacy assignment but also as a model to assist Art and Design students who had to make a portfolio describing various types of fabric. It would be of interest to other learners who enjoy fashion subjects, leading to an extended project on silk in the fashion industry.

1. I started by handing out some pieces of silk fabric.
2. We then discussed an overview of fabric production and made a diagram on the board (see sketch below).  
SPELLING NOTE: dying (being on the point of death) dyeing (colour something by soaking)
3. Learners read the text about silk production.
4. Learners watched the video 'Making Silk in Bangladesh'. Go to Google videos <http://video.google.co.uk/>, put those words into the search and you should find it. You could email the link, or the downloaded video itself, to your learners, or watch it on an interactive whiteboard.
5. The learners then planned their writing, using the fabric overview sketch we produced together, adding ideas of their own. They may add some sketches, being art students! Research notes and suggestions are included in the assignment brief.
6. The learners produce their pieces, proofreading and adding images (referencing them of course) before handing in their work.

EXTENSION ACTIVITY: Look up countries where silk is produced on a globe or world map.

## OVERALL VIEW OF FABRIC PRODUCTION



## CRIB NOTES WHICH MAY PROVE USEFUL

### PLUS

- Warm to wear
- Absorbent
- Soft handle
- Good lustre and drape
- Durable
- Creases drop out

### MINUS

- Usually dry clean
- Expensive
- Weakens if exposed to strong sunlight

Silk-worm friendly silk: there is a type of spun silk which is made from the cocoons after the moth has hatched. This silk is not as lustrous as traditional silk, but is cheaper.

Recommended easy reading: King, Hazel (2008) *Fibre to Fabric 2<sup>nd</sup> Edition* Oxford: Heineman.  
ISBN 978 0 431 99025 5