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>> Do you think that clothes are works of art? We like to show clothing in our art museum because both fashion and artwork can teach us about people, places, and time periods. This dress is from the 1920s. A few years before this dress was made, it was fashionable for women to wear dresses that were longer. They wore tight corsets that compressed their bodies by pulling in their waists and chests. The style emphasized features that were seen as feminine. This dress shows the new style for women that emerged in the 1920s. The style focussed on things that were considered modern. Dress fabrics were lightweight and often featured a pattern and dresses included details like the tie around the collar of this one. Women played around with gender ideas. Dresses and skirts were shorter and had loose, boxy silhouettes with lowered waistlines which allowed for more freedom of movement. Many women also cut and styled their hair shorter. The style was sometimes called the boyish look. We now know that there are multiple gender identities and everyone has their own gender expression, but at this time it was a new and different concept. Shorter hair and shorter clothing on women were revolutionary. This self-portrait by Canadian painter Pegi Nicol MacLeod was painted in the 1920s and shows the short hairstyle that was in fashion. Look at her expression. Doesn't she look confident? The changes in fashion in the 1920s reflected the freedoms and rights that women were gaining in society. A few years earlier, in 1917, women in Ontario gained the right to vote and it was becoming more acceptable for women to get jobs outside the home. This dress was worn by Claire Ellen Penman Bennett. She was known as Penny and was a nurse at Kingston General Hospital. She embodied the idea of the new woman because she continued working even after she got married.

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