

# RUPPAUL

Teaches Self-Expression  
and Authenticity

Meet

# RUPAUL

**R**uPaul Charles's chameleonic qualities have made him a television icon, spiritual guide, and the most commercially successful drag queen in United States history. Over a nearly three-decade career, he's ushered in a new era of visibility for drag, upended gender norms, and highlighted queer talent from across the world—all while dressed as a fierce glamazon.

**“Be willing to become the shape-shifter that you absolutely are.”**

Born in San Diego, California, RuPaul first experienced mainstream success when a dance track he wrote called “Supermodel (You Better Work)” became an unexpected MTV hit (Ru stars in the music video). The song led to a modeling contract with MAC Cosmetics and a talk show on VHI, which saw RuPaul interviewing everyone from Nirvana to the Backstreet Boys and Diana Ross to Bea Arthur. He has since appeared in more than three dozen films and TV shows, including *Broad City*, *The Simpsons*, *But I'm a Cheerleader!*, and *To Wong Foo, Thanks for Everything! Julie Newmar*.

*RuPaul's Drag Race*, Ru's decade-old, Emmy-winning reality drag competition, has gone international, with spin-offs set in the U.K. and Thailand. He's also published three books:

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1995's *Lettin' It All Hang Out*, 2010's *Workin' It!*, and 2018's *GuRu*, which features a foreword from Jane Fonda. Recently, he became the first drag queen to land the cover of *Vanity Fair*. His Netflix debut, *AJ and the Queen*, premiered on the streaming service in January 2020.

RuPaul saw drag as a tool that would guide his punk rock, anti-establishment ethos. For his first drag look, he dressed in combat boots, smeared lipstick, and a ratty wig with the goal of shocking a polite society in the Reagan era. These days, he's also using drag as a kind of Trojan Horse to spread self-love and challenge notions about gender and identity.

In this course, you'll discover how drag offers a unique vantage for thinking about the self and your relation to others, you'll learn more about how to embrace your own fierceness while discarding what no longer serves you, and you'll gain practical advice for putting together a gag-worthy drag look—makeup, hair, dresses, and all.

RuPaul sees drag as a conduit to becoming a more vibrant, fully fleshed-out human being—a mystical exercise as much as an aesthetic one. He's embraced it as a life practice. After taking this class, you'll understand why. Now grab those heels, and get to the runway!

WELCOME TO RUPAUL'S MASTERCLASS.

*Connect With Other Queens*

Want to kiki with RuPaul's other students? Then head to **community.masterclass.com** to talk about handling haters, finding your frequency, and (of course) all things *Drag Race*.



*Drag*

# BY THE NUMBERS

**50,000**

Number of people who showed up to Los Angeles's DragCon in 2018

**600%**

REPORTED BOOST IN BOOKING FEES FROM APPEARING ON DRAG RACE

**2 to 3**  
*hours*

THE AVERAGE LENGTH OF TIME IT TAKES DRAG QUEENS TO DO THEIR MAKEUP

**55%**

PERCENTAGE OF DRAGCON VISITORS WHO IDENTIFIED AS FEMALE

**\$10,000**

Maximum amount that RuPaul says he's willing to spend on a gown

**18**

Number of students who first enrolled in the New School's semester-long course on *Drag Race*

**\$60**

COST OF A SINGLE HIGH-END LACE FRONT WIG

**124**

Number of *Drag Race* episodes that have aired domestically since the show premiered in 2009

**\$1**

*Million+*

ALLEGED ANNUAL SALARY OF TOP U.S. DRAG QUEENS

**15**

Number of *Drag Race* stars who've recorded Billboard hits

FINDING  
YOUR  
Frequency

## *Finding Your*

# FREQUENCY

**I**f you're trying to be somebody else, you won't be happy with the results you get. But when you find your own frequency, there's an ease to life: It feels like a warm jacket, a well-worn boot, or the home you've always wanted to live in. And if you're paying attention to your emotional landscape, you'll recognize it when you find it.

**“There’s a frequency that is unique to you, and your job is to locate it.”**

It took RuPaul decades to realize elemental things about his personality, like the fact that he loved the way the color orange made him feel and that he didn't have to like everybody (also, not everybody had to like him).

These were seismic revelations. Even when he was immersed in the punk rock scene, he still wanted people to like him. He still changed himself so others wouldn't feel threatened. “It was such a waste of time,” he says, because when your own energy shines through, people and like-minded energy sources will naturally gravitate toward you. You don't have to do anything but be true to your own frequency.

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### ASSIGNMENTS

1. If you had five other lives to lead, what would you do in each of them? Is there something you loved as a kid that you've stopped doing? Why? How could you rekindle that passion in adulthood?
2. Schedule a one- to three-hour block of creative time this week. You could spend this time doodling in a notebook, learning to play an instrument, taking an improv class, or turning off the lights and dancing to your favorite song. The point is to get in touch with your own creative energy source and let it begin to guide you.

Like maintaining a garden, staying attuned to your own frequency requires work. You have to continually cultivate and manage your inner self by performing an inventory and discarding that which no longer works for you.

It can be jarring to realize that many of the things we were taught as kids don't align with reality. The tooth fairy didn't put that quarter under your pillow, and the 9-to-5 job your parents hoped you'd take isn't necessarily going to bring you joy and stability. When the rug gets pulled out from under you and you suddenly see the Matrix for what it is, it's easy to find yourself trapped in anger, cynicism, and bitterness. But the next level of recognition is to realize that if life is an illusion, the goal should be to take it all in stride. Don't get stuck in the bitterness. Get to the next level, which is where the joy is.

You want to operate according to what Ru calls your "frequency," or your own natural energy source. You can locate the source through being still, which is as simple as getting silent and listening to your body and breath. The idea here is to clear out all the noise and distractions: the tweets, breaking news updates, and Pavlovian pulls that muddy our days. Through this daily practice, you can create a space for your own ideas and inspirations to flourish.

As you tap into your own energy source, all sorts of revelations may come up. Open yourself up to possibilities and become a vessel for creative discoveries.

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#### **ASSIGNMENT**

Find a quiet place in your home, turn off the lights, and sit on the floor with your eyes closed. Breathe naturally. Focus on your breath and how your body moves with each inhalation and exhalation. If your mind wanders, don't worry—just bring your attention back to the breath. See if you can do this for three minutes.

#### ***Mindfulness:* THERE'S AN APP FOR THAT**

If self-guided stillness isn't your jam, try one of these meditation apps to get you started.

##### **Headspace**

Headspace can help motivate you to meditate on a more constant basis. Offering structured and educational courses, the app has options for beginners and more experienced meditators.

##### **Calm**

Calm offers guided meditation exercises, breathing visualizations, and sleep-stories (which allow you to fall asleep to the sound of a calming voice). The app's library of ambient music and sounds can also help quiet your nerves.

##### **Ten Percent Happier**

Developed by ABC News anchor Dan Harris, Ten Percent Happier offers both courses and meditations taught by well-known teachers. It also features a chat function that allows you to connect with your own meditation coach.

CULTURAL  
LIGHTHOUSES

for

The Soul



## *Cultural Lighthouses*

# FOR THE SOUL

**M**any of us live vicariously through our pop culture icons. When we see Lady Gaga or Beyoncé slaying a performance, we feel that fire, ever so briefly, within ourselves. (It's called mirror neurons, honey!) Your favorite artists unlock something deep inside of you and give you a taste of the creative freedom that you crave.

**“I looked to people in pop culture to help guide me, like northern stars. And I hitched my wagon to these stars to tag along.”**

RuPaul had an intuitive sense growing up that pop stars could guide him, so he hitched his metaphorical wagon to his favorite performers. In effect, he used them to help locate previously hidden parts of his own personality.

You can do the same by starting to think about the artists who inspire you. When's the last time an artist seismically shifted the way you perceive the world? Who makes you feel like the creative possibilities are endless? Think of these artists not as famous people you're copying but as visionaries who are inspiring your craft; no matter whom you emulate, you will surely end up contributing your own flavor and personality.

## *RuPaul*

These influences will likely be as eclectic as your personality. RuPaul was inspired by Monty Python's savage caricatures, David Bowie's otherworldliness, and Diana Ross's overtly evident star power. He loved the aesthetics of Cher and Dolly Parton, whose outfits inspired his glamazon look. (Before, he'd been dressing like a streetwalker, and before that he'd gravitated toward a "genderf\*ck" look.) What Ru's influences all had in common was a desire to break rules and a strong allergy to convention.

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### **ASSIGNMENT**

Who are your pop culture icons? Make a list of their names, along with attributes of theirs that you admire. What's one thing you could do today that would help you channel their essence? Maybe it's signing up for karaoke, learning how to do a dance routine, or even just allowing yourself the pleasure of watching your favorite music videos back-to-back.

# Finding Your Drag Identity

◇ Becoming an all-star queen requires just the right mix of charisma, uniqueness, nerve, and talent. It also requires digging deep and finding a drag identity that fits your personality. Whether you spend your days at Hot Topic searching for great finds, going to galleries, singing at the top of your lungs, or cracking jokes on Twitter, there's a drag career that fits your passions, aesthetic, and social critique.

## PICK A BREAKFAST:

- A) Blood sausage and a black charcoal latte
- B) Special K with berries and a side of low-fat Yoplait
- C) A muffin you found under your bed
- D) Continental breakfast at the same hotel as the touring cast of *Kinky Boots*—what a coincidence, just happened to be here!
- E) A cluster of bananas you will later use for performance art



## PICK A PERFECT NIGHT:

- A) Making friends with all the scare actors at a haunted house
- B) Sob-laughing at a cheesy romance on the Hallmark Channel
- C) “Yes and”-ing your way to comedy gold
- D) Belting out the classics on karaoke night with all your talented frenemies
- E) Getting into an exclusive Art Basel after-party by being charming and weird with the bouncer

## PICK A STATEMENT THAT MATCHES YOUR OUTLOOK:

- A) I feel most at home with the freaks and outcasts of the world.
- B) I am fascinated by traditional markers of femininity.
- C) I love drag because of the freedom it gives people to say whatever they want.
- D) The idea of hitting a perfect vibrato in stilettos excites me.
- E) I just want to come up with some gag-worthy outfits.

## PICK A FABULOUS VACATION:

- A) Exploring the catacombs of Transylvania
- B) Getting a VIP tour of a doll factory
- C) A Monty Python tour of Scotland
- D) A *Mamma Mia* situation on Mykonos
- E) Berlin for a year (or five)

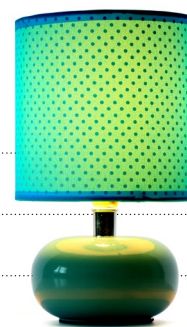


## PICK A QUOTE:

- A) “Being booed off stage is just an applause from ghosts.” —Sharon Needles
- B) “I like my men like I like my coffee: incapable of loving me back.” —Trixie Mattel
- C) “Trinity reminds me of a dear friend of mine from New Orleans...she’s dead.” —Bianca Del Rio
- D) “I didn’t mind being slapped across the face. I was happy for the airtime.” —Jinkx Monsoon
- E) “The only vers I am is Versace.” —Aquaria

## PICK A GAG-WORTHY COSTUME ACCESSORY:

- A) A bucket of blood
- B) Tweety bird feathers
- C) An IKEA lampshade
- D) Collapsible angel wings
- E) A rainbow fish on a silver platter



## PICK A DREAM HOME:

- A) A gothic mansion that was listed under mysterious circumstances
- B) Barbie’s Dreamhouse, but real
- C) A Village loft near that hot dog guy you honestly draw all your inspiration from
- D) Just a pied-à-terre above the Moulin Rouge, NBD
- E) A former auto parts store that’s now a bunch of artists’ lofts

## Mostly A’s

◇ You’re a goth queen! When you’re not watching horror movies or listening to death metal, you’re thinking up new and innovative ways to shock and appall your neighbors. Your spirit queens are Sharon Needles and Alaska.



## Mostly B’s

◇ You’re a pageant queen! You embrace all the traditional markers of femininity and work tirelessly to ensure your drag is flawless and elegant. Your spirit queens are Alyssa Edwards, Asia O’Hara, and Trinity Taylor.



## Mostly C’s

◇ You’re a comedy queen! Whether on stage or among your nearest and dearest, busting everyone’s chops is your favorite feeling in the world. Your spirit queens are Katya Zamolodchikova, Bianca Del Rio, and Jinkx Monsoon.



## Mostly D’s

◇ You’re a musical theater queen! Performing is in your blood—the wig is just icing on an already ultra vibrant cake. You slay the musical challenges and bring tears to the eyes of your audience. Your spirit queens are Peppermint, Courtney Act, and Trixie Mattel.



## Mostly E’s

◇ You’re a high-concept fashion queen! When you’re not sipping champagne at fancy art parties or monitoring the style blogs, you’re performing at edgy downtown venues and cavorting with club kids. Your spirit queens are Sasha Velour, Detox, and Aquaria.



**CULTIVATING**  
*Your Tribe*

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*Cultivating*

# YOUR TRIBE

**R**uPaul first drew inspiration from the cast of Monty Python, a scabrously funny British comedy troupe whose surreal sketches mocked everything from politics to identity. But it wasn't until he found himself at the School of Performing Arts in Atlanta that he actually began meeting other people who shared his sensibility.

**“You’re gonna need to find people who can not only support you but who you can support and bounce ideas off of.”**

At that time, some of the most creative, groundbreaking, and just plain *weird* art was being broadcast live on public access TV—locally run programming that had a low barrier for entry. RuPaul became particularly fond of a program called *The American Music Show*, a haven for avant-garde artists and bohemians. He wrote a letter to the producers and was invited to perform on the show with the punk rock group he fronted at the time, RuPaul and the U-Hauls.

It was crucial for RuPaul to find himself a tribe of people who believed in his creative vision. Creativity, after all, doesn't happen in a vacuum—you need all the love and support you can get, especially when you're starting out. Many people

## *RuPaul*

won't understand your journey; they may ask irrelevant questions or recommend mind-numbing corporate jobs when they see you struggling. But your tribe will see you through—especially people who are able to see outside of the box.

Meeting with others face-to-face is crucial, RuPaul says. Too often, we mistake social media interactions for genuine communication. Better to brainstorm with another human being and open yourself up to their influence.

Older gay mentors also helped RuPaul learn more about the history and culture of the LGBTQ+ community and gave him important frames of reference—from Federico Fellini films to the drag documentary *Paris Is Burning*. Others, like Randy Barbato, inspired him to go further than he ever would have thought possible on his own.

Who inspires you to push yourself further? Who believes in you—perhaps even more than you believe in yourself? Are these the people you talk to every day? Consider making these friends your highest priority. And don't forget to give back and support them in the same way they support you.

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### **ASSIGNMENT**

Make a list of the most supportive people you know. Call them up. Propose a brainstorming session where you discuss creative projects that you can work on together in your free time.

# Drag Around The World

RUPAUL'S DRAG RACE HAS UNDENIABLY IMPACTED INTERNATIONAL DRAG CULTURE, BUT MANY COUNTRIES HAD A RICH HISTORY OF DRAG BEFORE THE SHOW CAME ALONG



**Walk On**  
Demonstrators in front of the Russian Embassy in Berlin

## Germany

◇ In the 1920s, Berlin was home to around 100 LGBT bars and clubs and some of the world's foremost organizations pushing for the decriminalization of homosexuality. At the time, Eldorado, a Jewish-owned nightclub, hosted trans women and drag queen performers (complete with lap dances). The Weimar era would later be immortalized in countless books and films. It also ended brutally as soon as the Nazi party seized control of the country—an estimated 100,000 LGBT individuals were eventually arrested between 1933 and 1945.

Nowadays, Berlin has been restored as a queer mecca, and the drag scene in other major German cities is robust: In 2017, queens in Germany launched their own political party to take on white nationalists, and locals say that *Drag Race* pushed drag further into the mainstream. Among the most famous German drag queens is a performer by the name of Gloria Viagra, who towers over her fans at seven feet, two inches (with heels on).

## Russia

◇ Drag's history in Russia dates to the days of Perestroika and the years after the collapse of the Soviet Union. In the late 1980s, the character actor Vladislav Mamyshev-Monroe performed as Dracula, Elizabeth Taylor, and Marilyn Monroe. In the early 2000s, Birds of Paradise, a four-member drag collective, toured Russia and even scored a contract with a cosmetics company.

These days, however, the drag community has been forced underground because of the country's hostile attitudes toward the queer community. So-called gay propaganda laws have had an outsize effect on gay culture, starkly limiting creative freedom. When a bearded drag queen, Conchita Wurst, won the international Eurovision Song Contest in 2014, many Russian conservatives were outraged. Despite the backlash, drag queens persevere against all odds, performing at parties across Moscow and St. Petersburg.

## India

◇ Traditional Indian folk arts—including theater, dance, and ritualized performances—have long embraced cross-dressing, but donning women's clothes for political performance art is a relatively recent phenomenon. It's also still a politically risky act in India to subvert gender norms. Despite India's gay sex ban being struck down in 2018, homosexuality is still deeply stigmatized within mainstream society, while effeminacy is frowned upon within the queer community.

While there are many forces bearing down upon the art form, India's drag queen scene is resilient: Annual shows like Bombay Ballroom feature nearly a dozen drag performers who weave traditional Indian themes like Bollywood and female saints into their shows.

## South Africa

◇ South Africa has a thriving drag scene in major cities like Cape Town. The oldest and most popular drag queen contest in the country is the annual Miss Gay Western Cape, which was held in secret from the 1950s until 1996—around the time homosexuality was finally legalized in that area.

But that same sense of freedom isn't as present in smaller townships. Even though South Africa's constitution offers the queer community extensive protection against harassment and discrimination, many queens in those areas must suppress their queer identities for safety reasons. #Black-DragMagic is a photo project that's challenging these norms by featuring township queens in drag versions of traditional African clothing.

## Thailand

◇ Through the premodern era, both cross-dressers and trans folks have played large roles in Thai culture. Those who identify as “kathoei”—a term used to describe male-to-female trans people, third sex individuals, and feminine gay men—enjoy greater visibility than in most other Asian countries: Many Thai models, singers, and movie stars are kathoei, and the country's newspapers often print the winners of both female and kathoei modeling competitions side by side.

Drag, however, is a relatively recent import. Once relegated to the red-light district, there are now drag shows across Bangkok run by cabaret performers who ride water buffalo, fire handguns, and rock climb while dressed in drag. Mainstream acceptance is coming along, too. One famous performer named Pan Pan is credited with recently popularizing a dance craze called waacking, which he pulled from '70s-era L.A. disco culture. When *Drag Race* needed another filming location, Thailand was the winner—and it's not hard to see why.

## China

◇ Female impersonation in Chinese culture dates to feudal times, back when women were forbidden from performing on stage. Drag in that era was chiefly concerned with realism, not satire. But during the Cultural Revolution, traditional Chinese opera was banned and replaced by plays that drew on class struggles and other Communist themes. In recent years, the Communist Party of China has intensified its efforts to censor Western influence in Chinese pop culture, blurring out tattoos, earrings on men, and any other queer subtext in films and TV shows. Any televised representation of drag is verboten.

Even so, the Chinese drag scene is still thriving, particularly in Shanghai. What was once an underground phenomenon has taken root in bars and nightclubs across the metropolis. Many queens retain day jobs—drag rarely pays the bills—but with young people flocking to shows, there's hope that the scene will grow and become more established in the near future.

### You Better Work

A drag queen attends Hong Kong's International Day Against Homophobia



SEEING  
YourselF



*Seeing*

# YOURSELF

**R**uPaul's childhood was full of turbulence. He remembers his parents fighting on a near-constant basis. At one point, RuPaul's mother attempted to get his father's attention by dousing the family car in gasoline and taunting him with a book of matches.

**“What do you see? What can you see? What do you allow yourself to see? What are you not seeing?”**

In that moment, RuPaul remembers clamping down his feelings as a self-protective measure. “What happens is that the human body shuts down trauma that might kill you,” he says. He remembers becoming “a camera,” watching the world unfold around him without the ability to feel.

Many of us build identities around our childhood traumas, whether we realize it or not. An absent, alcoholic, or abusive parent can end up influencing the way we think about ourselves. For years, RuPaul was haunted by memories of waiting, fruitlessly, for his father to pick him up from his front porch. He relived that experience in all kinds of relationships. Subconsciously, he says, he was pursuing his career in order to get his father's attention.

## *RuPaul*

But his father wasn't present enough in his *own* life to see the effect he was having on his son's. Instead, he was doing everything he could—whether it was drinking or compulsively gambling—to avoid the present moment.

In order to transcend his feelings of rejection, RuPaul had to first realize that his father's absenteeism had nothing to do with him. A child can't rouse an unconscious parent. What an adult can do, however, is embrace his or her inner child and show them love and kindness. By walking through his childhood pain and emerging on the other side, RuPaul gave himself an opportunity to construct a self that wasn't rooted in victimhood.

The point is not to repress painful childhood memories but to be mindful of how they influence your work and identity. Treat your inner child with the respect and love they might not have received from a parental figure.

### ASSIGNMENT

Close your eyes and conjure up a picture of your eight-year-old self. What would you tell him or her if you could? Write a letter that addresses all the challenges you faced as a kid. What have you learned about the world since then? How would you treat yourself with a bit more kindness?

### *RuPaul's Reading List*

#### **A Return to Love by Marianne Williamson**

In this psycho-spiritual undertaking, Williamson explores how to surrender oneself to the power of love—embracing it as a tool of divine expression and using it as a force for good.

#### **Toxic Parents by Susan Forward**

Drawing on case histories and real-life examples, this book teaches adult children of toxic parents how to heal from childhood abuse.

#### **A New Earth by Eckhart Tolle**

This spiritual self-help book encourages readers to transcend ego-based states of consciousness by undergoing honest self-evaluation.

*HANDLING HATERS:  
NAVIGATING  
THE WORLD  
Around You*

## *Handling Haters:*

# NAVIGATING THE WORLD AROUND YOU

**M**any people live in a permanent state of fear and shame. To these folks, your own freedom and creativity might represent a threat. Your own self-actualization reminds them of how stuck they are, and it makes them angry. They may lash out. Be wary of statements like “Oh, you think you’re better than me?” or subtler comments like “Seems you’ve changed.”

**“The simplest act of human kindness is to acknowledge one another.”**

It’s vital to understand what does and does not belong to you. Someone else’s resentment and self-loathing is not yours to solve; it is *their* struggle to overcome.

We are all driven, to various extents, by the ego. For some, the ego is a devil on their shoulder that needs to put others down in order to feel superior. The only time bullies feel visible is when they’re creating pain or getting a rise out of someone else. You can take solace in the fact that the joke is on them. As a bully tries to satisfy their ego and feel superior, the opposite happens: They dig themselves deeper and deeper into self-loathing and insecurity.

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### ASSIGNMENT

The next time you find yourself thinking about someone who’s mistreated you, schedule time to exercise, meditate, or do something else that creates joy for you. Repeat this any time one of these negative thoughts crosses your mind until you create the habit of choosing joy, not negativity.

When grappling with your bullies, be careful not to dig too deep into their psychology. “You can look at the darkness, but don’t stare; it’ll make you crazy and cross-eyed,” RuPaul says. Focus instead on creating environments where you can find joy.

You can also try extending compassion to them. After all, almost all of us know what it feels like to be stuck and frustrated. Practice letting go of the hurt and pain they’re causing you. It won’t make the abuse stop, but it will help you.

Practice embracing your fierceness. The mask you live in limits your creativity. It constricts you and stunts your growth. Often, we settle for a mask that makes the people around us comfortable, yet doesn’t reflect the truth of who we are.

Questioning everything can help you understand the origins of your mask. “Where did this come from?” is always a good question to ask. Also, “Why am I afraid of being perceived a certain way?”

We often unconsciously conform to expectations of what we should be rather than embark on our own journey of self-discovery. But when you realize that you’re living in a kind of simulation—and that everything and everyone around you is faking it till they make it—you can start to have some fun and play around with the way you present yourself to the world.

Many of us diminish ourselves out of fear—of the judgments of others, of what would happen if we allowed ourselves to embrace our dreams. Instead, we can begin to discard what doesn’t propel us forward while keeping what we love. Remember: Life is not meant to be an endless slog. Your life’s work is to shine.

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#### ASSIGNMENTS

1. Many of us harbor destructive doubts about our own career goals. The more ridiculous your fears, the likelier it is that you never verbalize them. This week, write down all of the worst-case scenarios that keep you from pursuing the kind of work you know would make you happy. The sillier and more outlandish, the better!
2. Keeping a journal can help you come alive. This week, try writing a few pages stream-of-conscious. Maybe something painful or awkward will get dredged up—good! Have compassion for yourself. Get it all out. You can’t get over it unless you confront it. Learning to let your emotions flow through you is a lifelong practice. Why not start now?

OWNING

*the*

Room

*Owning*

# THE ROOM

**R**uPaul believes everyone should try drag and see what emerges. He sees the act as transformative and revealing—not only of who you are but of what lies beneath. “You will be a much bigger, more realized person” once you try it, he says, and it will help you understand your relationship with femininity and your own body.

**“The way to own a room is to walk in with all of your energy. You are an energetic phenomenon. Your soul is made of stars. Stars shine.”**

It does require confidence. Even chutzpah, some might say. If the prospect makes you nervous, it’s worth investigating those fears. Often, people are afraid to let themselves shine—afraid to be illuminated by their own frequency—because of the attention and judgment they think it will bring. Perhaps they’re afraid they’ll be perceived as overly vain or sexual. But, as RuPaul says, it is your life’s work to shine: “You were not born to fit in. You were born to stand out.”

Coming up with a drag persona is a spiritual exercise as much as it is an aesthetic one. You might realize you’re drawn to a look that’s safe rather than one that actually fits you. When RuPaul first wanted to hit the big time, he went out and performed in an androgynous David Bowie look. It took time

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for him to realize that a glamazon aesthetic made him feel most powerful. Once he learned he could present himself to executives and other gatekeepers as the RuPaul we know and love, huge opportunities began to land in his lap.

If fear continues to stand in the way of your pursuits, you may need to give yourself some more TLC. When performing for the first time, RuPaul recommends imagining being surrounded by unconditional love. He plays a trick on himself whenever he's on stage by pretending he's performing in his mother's living room. She loved watching him perform. He felt a powerful kinship with her that gave him confidence.

So, instead of imagining what a crowd may or may not be thinking, imagine yourself basking in the love of a friend or family member. Envision yourself performing for your silly gang of high school friends who made you snort-laugh or a favorite aunt who always made you feel whole. Trying to gauge the pulse of an audience is a fruitless exercise in self-defeat. Treat yourself like you're already a star. And if everyone is gawking at you—good! They should be. You're fabulous. Breathe and tell yourself: I'm fine.

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### **ASSIGNMENT**

There are as many ways to come up with a drag name as there are stars in the sky, but if you're having trouble getting started, here's a quick exercise that will get your gears turning. Write down:

- 5 favorite characters from film or TV
- 4 of the weirdest foods you love
- 2 bizarre video game avatars
- 3 of the funniest nicknames your friends have given you
- 6 of the most inspiring ferocious animals
- 3 pet names that make you laugh

Take a look at your answers and think about what makes you laugh as well as what feels most memorable. Then try to package that word in a way that's surprising to read out loud.

Alternatively, you can try to think of words that make you laugh and feminize them—like Avery Goodlay, Sham Payne, or Lucy Stoole.

The only rules are to have fun and let your imagination run wild.



# THE HERSTORY of Drag

It's not hyperbole to say that for as long as there's been a stage, there's been someone in drag performing on it. The history of cross-dressing stretches all the way back to ancient Greece, when the very idea of theater was first born. Women at the time were barred from participating in productions because of the perception that acting was too dangerous, meaning men acted all of the roles.

Later, in the Middle Ages, the Christian church continued that trend, declaring the stage off-limits to females out of concern for their sexual propriety. In Elizabethan dramas—most famously Shakespeare's tales—it was common for men to play both male and female roles. It wasn't until 1660, when King Charles II lifted gender restrictions on stage, that women were finally allowed to play themselves.

In Japan, this history repeated itself, with theaters banning female actors from the 17th to the 19th century.

Even if you were to travel to 1800s England after the gender ban was overturned, though, you'd probably still run into more than a few men dressed as women. Pantomime blossomed during that era, with masculine-looking performers acting ladylike for laughs. And in the United States, traveling vaudeville shows often included men portraying women in satirical fashion.

But none of this was called drag. That word wasn't coined until 1870, when the *Reynold's Newspaper* (later *Reynolds News*), a tabloid in the U.K., printed what many see as the first mention of drag in a gender-bending context. The article referenced an invitation for men to come to a party dressed in “women's cos-



1

2



**The Early Years**  
1 A 1943 issue of *Reynolds News*  
2 American vaudeville performer Julian Eltinge

tumes,” and the word probably referred to men in the 1800s whose petticoats “dragged” when they performed as women.

By the 1920s, the word was being used as part of a secret language called Polari, a slang born out of the criminalization of homosexuality in England and that drew on the vernacular of the theater. (Words like camp, trade, and butch all come from Polari.) In 1927, Russian American psychiatrist A.J. Rosanoff's *Manual of Psychiatry* defined drag as “an outfit of female dress worn by a homosexual” or as an actual event where men wore female dresses.

The modern drag movement, however, can be traced back to Julian Eltinge, an American vaudeville performer, singer, and actor in the early 20th century who brought a new level

of artistic cachet to the act of female impersonation. His audiences, mainly women, were brought to ecstasy by his performance, according to the comedian W.C. Field. (Men were said to “go into the smoking room.”) Eltinge made his Broadway debut in the 1904 musical comedy *Mr. Wix of Wickham* and soon even performed for England’s King Edward VII. He went on to become the highest-paid actor in the world.

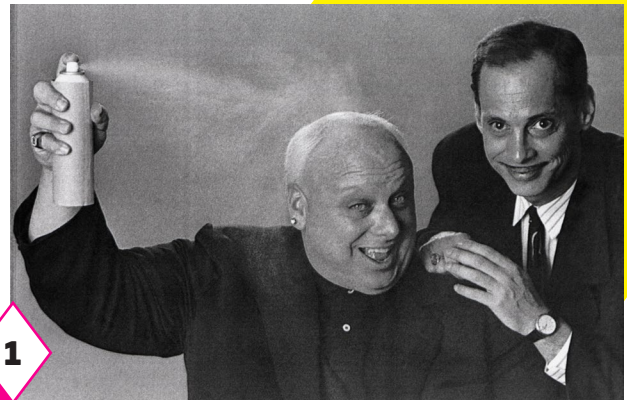
But Eltinge was careful to emphasize his butchness off stage lest anyone get the wrong idea. (Among his favorite extracurricular activities were boxing matches.) Even towards the end of his career, in the late 1920s, the queer community was still largely underground, revolving around bars in big cities like Chicago or New York. Drag was common at these venues, leading to the so-called pansy craze of the 1930s. These drag shows drew on Harlem’s storied masquerade balls, a tradition dating to the 1860s, and by then the phenomenon had gone global. A visitor to Berlin’s gay bars in the 1930s would have found a similarly thriving drag scene (before the Nazis ruined the party, of course).

In the United States, these performers had to contend with a legal system that punished non-normative gender expression. Between 1848 and the lead up to World War I, 45 cities passed laws against cross-dressing. But in spite of all this, the drag tradition continued to flourish, with queens playing a significant role in the Stonewall riots (a catalyst of the gay rights movement) and gay liberation.

Changing ideas about masculinity in the '70s affected drag, but the art form found ways to stay relevant. John Waters’s *Pink Flamingos* (and later *Hairspray*) featured a filthy-mouthed queen named Divine who was so scandalous that he was later named Drag Queen of the Century by *People* magazine. (It’s said that his performance inspired the creation of *The Little Mermaid*’s Ursula.)

By the '80s, drag was all about realism: The idea was to look as much like a woman as possible in high-fashion evening wear. This era saw the birth of Wigstock in Manhattan’s East Village.

In the '90s, *Paris Is Burning* offered a searing



## Making Herstory

1 Drag queen Divine (left) and director John Waters pose in a promo for *Hairspray* 2 Divine attends the 1975 premiere of Waters’s *Female Trouble* 3 Cher was one of RuPaul’s many guests on *The RuPaul Show*



look at what it takes to become a drag queen. The decade also saw the first international Drag King extravaganza—in which women dress as men—and *The Adventures of Priscilla, Queen of the Desert*, which starred two drag queens in lead roles. *The RuPaul Show* came along in 1996 and became the second-ever television series to be greenlit by VH1. Over two seasons and 100 episodes, the show would attract illustrious guests like Cher, Tina Turner, and Diana Ross.

In 2009, *RuPaul’s Drag Race* premiered, and over the course of 10 seasons, the series introduced drag to an entirely new generation. The rest, as they say, is herstory.

*THERE IS*  
*NO SUCH THING*  
*as*  
*Failure*

# *There Is No Such Thing* **AS FAILURE**

**A**t age 28, RuPaul was sleeping on his sister's couch and trying to put his life back together. He'd moved back to Los Angeles after working as a go-go dancer and performance artist in New York during the height of the AIDS crisis. Now, he was penniless and wandering the streets, wondering where he'd gone wrong.

**“Failure allows you to find the places that you had no idea existed.”**

A friend, Larry Tee, jolted him out of his malaise. “What are you doing?” he asked Ru over the phone. Larry bought his friend a plane ticket back to New York so that RuPaul could “remember who he was.”

That was January of '89. By September of that year, RuPaul had been crowned the Queen of Manhattan. He'd changed up his aesthetic, gone full glam, and begun to entrust his professional life to mentors Randy Barbato and Fenton Bailey, who encouraged his solo music career.

“In hindsight,” RuPaul says, “I realized I needed to hit rock bottom to have the energy and the gumption to fight for my position.”

Many of us go out of our way to try to avoid the possibility of failure. And yet it's crucial to our success. Whether it's the loss

## *RuPaul*

of a job, a project that isn't received the way you'd hoped, or just a feeling that you're not fulfilling your dreams, life's hardships can become catalysts for tremendous growth—so long as you don't get mired in self-blame and shame.

Failure represents an opportunity to improve. Seeing it that way can help you grow and learn from your mistakes rather than expecting perfection right off the bat. Pushing yourself and failing is a great way to eventually succeed.

“Many of the worst things that happened to me were gifts because they taught me what worked for me,” RuPaul says. Most things don't work: Out of every five things RuPaul creates, he says that only one works. But there's no such thing as failure because even the things that don't work eventually lead to something that does.

The goal, he says, is to stay in the game—and to be of service to humankind.

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### **ASSIGNMENT**

Without thinking too much, make a list of things you'd try if you weren't afraid to fail. Would you write a book? Start a podcast? Choreograph a dance routine? Bake an upside-down cake? Aim for at least 12 goals.

SERVING BODY:

PROPORTION

and

Presentation

*Serving Body:***PROPORTION AND PRESENTATION**

**S**moke and mirrors are a drag queen's best friends. To shine on stage, in the boardroom, or at a friend's party, it's fine—encouraged, even—to embrace a little bit of illusion.

**“It's time for you to make your move.”**

Ru manipulates, or “corrects,” his silhouette in drag to make himself seem more proportional. “I have very long legs; when I have high heels on, they're even longer,” he says. “So I have to create more head space.” No one is perfectly symmetrical and no one has the perfect proportions. Rather than lamenting your body type, think about your clothing as a way of experimenting with shape-shifting.

Striking a pose can trick a camera, too. When you're in the crosshairs of a lens, try elongating your neck, dipping your chin, expanding your chest, moving your shoulders back, and making sure your hands are doing something other than exploring your pockets (which implies that you're hiding something). Ultimately, fashion is about playing with the expectations of other people and finding new ways to surprise them.

**ASSIGNMENT**

Go to a secondhand store and pick the most outrageous item you can find—the one that's so weird and out-there that it makes you a little bit nervous just holding it. Wear it in public and see how it makes you feel.

**BUILDING  
YOUR DRAG  
Makeup Routine**



## *Building Your*

# DRAG MAKEUP ROUTINE

**R**uPaul believes that decorating your body is an act of appreciation. The kindness that you have for yourself will show up in your makeup. That doesn't mean you need to look perfect—in fact, as RuPaul's makeup artist, the Emmy-winning drag queen Raven, says, embracing your mistakes can help you come up with a truly original look.

**“Every single person within the sound of my voice should get into drag and see what emerges.”**

Playing with makeup is a chance to experiment with all the colors in the crayon box. It's an opportunity for self-discovery, rebellion, and transformation. It's okay to get messy. Just have fun with it!

## PREP WORK

Shaving is important (unless you're a gender-bending queen who wants a five, six, or seven o'clock shadow), so start with a clean face. Next, apply rubbing alcohol to the spots on your face where you'll be applying tape.

## ACHIEVING LIFTOFF

To get a more youthful appearance, try Mark Traynor's Miracle Face and Neck Lift Kit. The kit uses string and invisible tape to lift the eyes while smoothing the jawline and neck areas. Professional makeup artists even use it to create dramatic looks for fashion shoots and runway shows.

## THE TAMING OF THE BROWS

Unruly brows can be tough to tamp down. Raven uses rubbing alcohol to take the oil out of his brow hairs, then covers them with an Elmer's glue stick to achieve maximum adhesiveness. He then uses a comb to flatten the brows against his face and presses a metal spoon to the brows to flatten them out and get rid of excess glue. After applying another layer of glue, Raven swipes more alcohol around his eyes to get rid of any excess sticky stuff. (Fun fact: Beyoncé's makeup artist uses glue sticks to set Bey's eyebrows, too.)

## IT'S FOUNDATIONAL

Mixing and matching different colors can help you contour everything from the cheekbones to your eyes and chin. RuPaul uses five different shades of foundation when putting his face on. To find the right shade, Raven recommends swatching your chest and finding a foundation that matches it. One of his favorite products is the relatively inexpensive Kryolan TV Paint Stick, which has been a favorite of stage performers for decades. (Don't make the mistake of thinking expensive = better.) Raven also loves Kevyn Aucoin's Sensual Skin Enhancer, a full-coverage, buildable, waterproof concealer—helpful when you're padded to high heaven and performing death drops.

## GETTING NOSE-Y

The magical makeup illusion known as contouring can, when used correctly, create an entirely different nose shape. Raven likes to apply a lighter concealer in the shape of an exclamation mark down the bridge of his nose to give it a more sculpted look. He'll use a darker shade of powder on the sides to fine-tune the shape.

## EYES WIDE OPEN

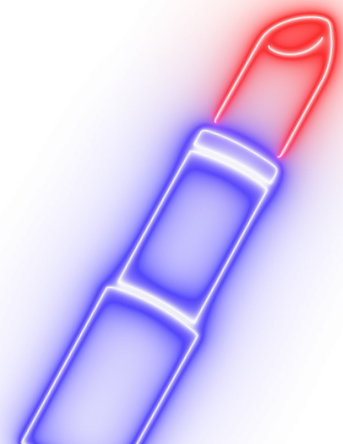
From smoky to festive, sultry to fierce, there are endless ways to frame your eyes. Decorating and reshaping the eye can dramatically change the look of your entire face (if your brow is especially masculine, for example, you can make your eyes look softer by creating a rounder look). Raven starts with potted gel eyeliner to outline the ideal eye shape. Then he applies eye shadow, eye foundation, and eyelashes.

## LIP SERVICE

Raven prefers a lined lip and then uses three different shades of matte lipstick to fill everything in. Before doing his lips, Raven uses a primer by MAC to ensure the look doesn't get "crinkly." He then uses an angled brush to draw the shape of the lip before filling it in with two other shades. To add a little shimmer, he'll use Stila's Glitter & Glow Highlighter, then he'll apply Mally's Face Defender to decrease the appearance of the natural lip crease and reduce shine. He'll also apply additional foundation on the sides of the lip to help define the lip line.

## WEIRD ROUTINE? NO WORRIES.

Don't worry too much about the order in which you make over your face. You can always go back and massage the makeup to soften, elongate, or otherwise change your face's proportions.



## *Get the Look / Makeup Glossary*

### MARK TRAYNOR'S FACE LIFT

Using hidden tapes that slip on easily, this kit can help eliminate the appearance of wrinkles and lift the eyes—like a face-lift without surgery.

### KRYOLAN TV PAINT STICK

As its name would suggest, this creamy stick foundation has long been a favorite among stage, film, and TV performers.

### STILA GLITTER & GLOW HIGHLIGHTER

This highlighter shimmers from a mix of color and glitter, creating a dazzling, illuminating effect when layered over your favorite powder or used around the eyes. Raven likes to use it on his lips.

### MALLY'S FACE DEFENDER

This sheer, lightweight formula provides a finishing touch for makeup while reducing the appearance of fine lines, pores, and shine. You can also use it around the lip line to stop lipstick from smearing.

### KEVYN AUCOIN SENSUAL SKIN ENHANCER

Formulated with jojoba oil, honey, and minerals, this face protector conceals and corrects while also providing moisture and giving your face some much-needed dewiness.

## *More Makeup Products That Drag Queens Swear By*

### COTY AIRSPUN LOOSE FACE POWDER

This translucent powder minimizes fine lines, wrinkles, and acne scars while giving your face a smoother, softer look.

### ANASTASIA BEVERLY HILLS

#### AMREZY HIGHLIGHTER

This illuminating powder can be applied wet or dry.

### BEN NYE FASHION ROUGE PALETTE

This blush palette is ultra vibrant and can also be used for eye shadow.

### MAC STUDIO FIX FLUID FOUNDATION

This oil-controlling foundation photographs beautifully and is easy to find while traveling between gigs. It lasts up to 24 hours and builds and blends easily with other products.

### LIT COSMETICS GLITTER IN "SPARK"

This white glitter can be used anywhere on the face—eyes and lips included—while casting "maximum light reflection."

### THE ORIGINAL BEAUTYBLENDER

This essential tool ensures even foundation coverage and better penetration of primers, eye treatments, moisturizers, or any skincare product.

### MORPHE X JACLYN HILL

#### THE COMPLEXION MASTER COLLECTION

Any queen worth her weight in wigs knows you need a quality brush set to put on your face. These five brushes are a great starter pack.

# DRAG ECON 101

DRAG'S POPULARITY HAS LED TO AN INCREASE IN CASHFLOW—BUT SOME QUEENS JUST CAN'T MAKE IT REIGN

Ask most queens and they'll tell you that they didn't get into this industry for the money. Any monetary reward pales in comparison to realizing your own beauty and power on stage.

But drag's ascendancy around the world *has* made it easier for many performers to make the art form their primary income stream. Some top queens today are reportedly millionaires. Lucrative revenue streams include wig and cosmetic lines, merch like T-shirts and enamel pins, YouTube advertising, and touring deals.

Still, there are no unions, no company-mandated health insurance plans. The hours are long, the prep work intense (two to three hours at minimum to do your dressing and makeup, all unpaid), and the process of finding a trustworthy promoter can be a real headache. Stories abound of fly-by-night companies embezzling appearance fees and tour revenue.

Many queens now rely on word-of-mouth to find the right management, while others have gone into business for themselves. Latrice Royale, a fan fa-

vorite from *Drag Race* season 4, started LRI Talent and Management, which now represents fellow queens Alexis Mateo, Shea Coullée, and Kennedy Davenport.

When starting out in a big city, you can expect to make anywhere from \$50 to \$250 per gig plus tips (which can be plentiful). But expenses can skyrocket into the thousands—sometimes upward of \$10,000—when you factor in costs for makeup, costumes, and travel.

To make more, you've gotta go prime time, honey. The heftiest paychecks are being doled out to stars who made the biggest splash on *Drag Race*. Alyssa Edwards, Trixie Mattel, Bob the Drag Queen, and Katya Zamolodchikova

have all appeared on Netflix shows, while Mattel has two country music EPs and an album that climbed to number one on Billboard's Heatseekers Albums chart. Other queens have written books, landed in ad campaigns, starred in films, and even created their own drag-themed mobile games.

And to think: All it took (at least initially) was a wig, some stilettos, a few pounds of foundation, and a dream.



PUTTING

on the

Final Touches

## *Putting On the*

# FINAL TOUCHES

**R**uPaul's obsession with wigs can be traced back to an early encounter with fake hair. As a kid in San Diego, he remembers gathering his friends to investigate a mysterious wig that had fallen into a canyon near his house. "It was like an alien that had just landed," RuPaul says. The blond mop so fascinated him that it sparked a life-long love affair.

After he was bequeathed two wigs by a friend in Atlanta, RuPaul experimented with stacking one on top of the other, pushing his hair to new heights. He appreciated the way multiple wigs allowed him to tap into multiple personas, which ultimately transformed his look. Today, he's practically a wig evangelist. "Wherever you can put a wig, I say go for it," he says.

Thankfully, it's easier than ever to find a wig that goes over your scalp and emulates your natural hair. Lace front wigs should do the trick. While they once cost as much as \$1,500, you can now find a great lace front wig for less than \$60.

RuPaul still wears two wigs at once to achieve his desired volume and height. Because his legs are long and his torso is on the shorter side, he says he needs to even out the proportions of his figure with sky-high hair. He's not a big fan of human hair; the synthetic kind, he says, holds better. "The apocalypse could happen and the [synthetic] hair would stay in that style."

## *Wig Care Tips From Drag Queens*

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**From storage to styling, these little hacks will help you keep your (fake) hair pristine.**

### STORAGE

Queens who know their way around a wig say you should store them in very large Ziploc bags, and then when you're traveling, place those bags in a part of your suitcase that's been partitioned for the wig. When you're back at home, feel free to stick 'em in a box under your bed or on a mannequin head.

### STYLING

Synthetic wigs react differently to styling than human hair and can be hard to manage on your own. When styling a wig for the first time, make sure it's completely dry. Plop it on a mannequin head so you can get a 360-degree view of your hair art. Then go to town, using a stainless steel brush (for synthetic wigs) or a boar bristle brush (for the human kind). Be sure to only use wig-specific styling products, and lightly mist the wig to start. To add volume, separate the wig fibers using your fingers and direct the spray at the roots. Wait a few minutes after spraying to allow the style to set.

### CLEANING / RESTYLING

You've got to be careful when washing your wigs. If they're synthetic, you'll need to use a wig-specific shampoo and conditioner. First, fill a sink with cool water, then add wig shampoo to the sink. Soak the wig for five minutes or so. After that, snatch that wig and dip it up and down in the water. You can tackle any makeup stains with a small brush (like a toothbrush). Then rinse the wig off in cool water and repeat the process with conditioner. Rinse again, dry with paper towels, and voilà! A squeaky-clean head of hair.

### WHAT TO BUY

Lace front synthetic wigs are better than the human hair kind, both in terms of durability and looks. But if you're anticipating wig damage or you just want to experiment before going all in on a pricier hairpiece, you can find all kinds of wacky wigs at the local dollar store.

**PARTING**  
**WORDS**  
*From Ru*



## *Parting Words*

# FROM RU



“You are the reason why this course was created. I hope that by applying these teachings, you can clear away the baggage that stands in your way and become a more fully realized human being. The world needs you to step up and give the gift of you.

Now that you’ve learned about all the hidden booby traps that exist and how to disarm them, now that you’ve learned how to apply both makeup and a new persona, now that you’ve understood that it’s not your fault but it *is* your responsibility, now that you’ve realized that we’re all insecure but we are *not* separate from each other, it’s up to you to take all of these lessons and apply them to yourself. Don’t miss this opportunity—it has your name written all over it.

Life is hard whether or not you choose to become the person we both know you really are. So why not go for it? Why not choose your own path?

Our secret weapon against all the darkness in the world is our joy, our love, dancing, colors, wig, lip gloss, and chiffon for crying out loud! Live a fabulous life. Can you handle it? I think you can.

You are a sweet, gorgeous, beautiful child. Give your love to the world and allow the world to love you back.”

**CREDITS**

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