

The Quilting Connection
Renee D. McCary, Iowa Maple
Grade level: 4th
Summer 2003
Title: The Quilting Connection
Author/School: Renee D. McCary, Iowa Maple
Course:
Grade Level: Fourth Grade
Standard met:

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THE QUILTING CONNECTING

TOPIC: This is a visual arts lesson featuring the construction of a quilt square that becomes a part of a whole that is constructed using cut pieces of cloth.

RATIONALE: Quilts have been used as a visual communication of ideas since before the time of slavery. Through this lesson students will be afforded the opportunity to experience recognition and construction of patterns with shapes and color to make quilts based upon, *Sweet Clara and the Freedom Quilt* By Deborah Hopkins. Additionally, students will use symbols to further communicate their ideas.

GOALS, OBJECTIVES and STANDARDS:

Artistic Perception: Students will identify the elements of shape and color in various quilts. (CMSD 3 4:V7.1).

(CMSD 3 4:V7.1 Students will perceive and describe repetition, pattern and balance in various African American quilts.

Creative Expression: Each student will create 2 unique quilt squares using cloth in shapes with a limited color palette. Students will be able to make their own quilt block, handle fabric for a border design, and contribute

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their stories for all to share.

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(CMSD VISUAL ARTS 2 4:V4.1; 2 4:V5.1)

Historical and Cultural Context: In a whole group discussion students will look at a reproduction of various African American Quilts and share their responses. Students will define what a quilt is and define some of its historical purposes. The students will also understand how quilts can be functional and a form of visual expression. Responses will be recorded on chart paper and key vocabulary words will be highlighted. Students will be able to identify African American quilt artists. Students will be able to make links and connections between cultures through the use of textiles as communication **(CMSD 1 4:V1.1)**

Aesthetic Valuing: Students compare ideas expressed through their own artwork with the ideas expressed in the work of others using set criteria. **(CMSD 9 4:V9.1)**

STRATEGY: A combination of direct instruction, whole group discussion, and guided discovery will be used.

VOCABULARY: design, shape, colors, pattern, repetition, symbol, and quilt, slave

Design: The way the pieces are arranged on the page.

Shape: The form the objects look like.

Repetition: to repeat an object or color

Pattern: repetition of line colors and shapes

Symbol: Something that stands for or suggests something else

MATERIALS: Crayons, Graph Paper, wooden color geometric blocks, Manila paper, fabric in colors, scissors, batting, needles and thread and light adhesive.

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Resources: Copies of quilts of Harriet Powers, Margaret O'Brien Seabrook, Faith Ringgold, Benin and Ashanti tribes of Africa. American and Other quilts representing the underground railroad.

PROCEDURES:

Day 1 & 2

Introduction: The origin of African American quilting can be traced back to textiles made from animal hides of 980 B.C. That was discovered in ancient Kement, (Egypt). (African American Museum Quilt Exhibit, 1988). Further evidence also supports that muslin strips wrapped around Egyptian mummies have some of the some symbols and geometric designs that are sewn by African American quilters today.

The traditional histories of the Senegal, Nigeria and Zaire as well as its religious and spiritual belief were recorded on textiles. The supremacy of African kings, events and the record of major battles were documented on representational appliquéd cloth. The symbolic appliquéd cloth was transported to America with the African slave. The African culture was interwoven into European American designs and patterns to form the patterns of today.

Additionally, in Africa, Benin and Ashanti tribes, the men were the makers of textiles. This was not true in America. In most cases quitters were limited to women of Southern plantations. Women made quilts primarily for their masters. They used the scraps to make quilts for themselves. Since slaves were not allowed to learn to read or

write they used the quilt as a pictorial record of their histories, to tell stories and as maps and messengers. Slaves were permitted to make quilts collaboratively. Little did the owners know that they were making plans to escape right under their noses.

Quilts were used as directions and instructions for the Underground Railroad. *Hidden in Plain View* written by Jacqueline Tobin and Dr. Raymond Dobard, described some of the codes that were used in one family's quilt. Ozell McDaniel Williams shared her history as her mother had with her and her grandmother before that. Not only did the symbols have special meaning but the colors as well. Blue and white were protective colors a blessing for a long trip. The knots were said to measure distances. (Handouts for the symbols are attached.)

There is much controversy as to the truth of Williams claims.

African American quilters still use the patterns and techniques of their ancestors. Large shapes, strong colors, improvisation and multiple patterns can be seen in most quilts.

Explain to students that they will be learning about a visual form of communication, the quilt. Students will also learn about the Underground Railroad and Harriet Tubman and its importance to African Americans during the time of slavery.

Before the history of the quilt is discussed I suggest reading the book, *Sweet Clara and the Freedom Quilt* by Deborah Hopkins to the children. This is a story of a young slave girl's life and how she made a quilt to escape to freedom. And reunited with

her brother. The slavery should be discussed both the economics and the type of life that was led and why slaves wanted to escape. Students can also do internet research concerning slavery and African American quilt.

Harriet Powers's appliqué quilts are some of the few that are available today from slave times. Her appliqué quilts use the symbols of the Benin tribe of Africa. And tell a story of the life and times and biblical histories. Margaret O'Brien Seabrook of South Carolina has adopted her style and is using it quite effectively.

Give hand out for discussion of story and have students write a short summary. Review hand out. Be sure to give ample time to discuss the story and slavery. Start discussion of the quilt and why it was important. Using the following:

- What is a quilt?
- What elements make up a quilt?
- How are art and history connected through quilts?

What are some of the purposes and uses that quilts have served in different places and cultures in the past?

- What function do quilts have today?
- (While viewing quilts ask?
- Do you see anything that looks familiar? Describe it. (Encourage all responses and have children point to any familiar item)
- What colors do you see?
- What color stands out the most? Explain why you think this is so?

- Do you see any shapes?
- Do you see any symbols what do you think they represent.

Record all responses and observations on a large piece of chart pad paper. Post the paper alongside the visuals. Use a highlighter to note key vocabulary words. Add vocabulary words to be introduced in this lesson and define those terms for students.

1. Ask students if they can explain what a pattern is.
2. Explain to students that patterns are found in art, nature, and our environment.
3. Show examples in art, nature and from the environment of patterns.
4. Show children examples of patterns in quilts.
5. Tell them that today they are going to have the opportunity to make their own quilt patterns.
6. Discuss a limited palette and give students choices of colors.
7. Give students wood blocks and demonstrate making a pattern. Start small groups on the computer to make a quilt square at the following web site.

<http://www.licm.com/noFr.f/quiltNF.html>

8. Once students have made a wooden quilt block and made a quilt on the computer; give graph paper sheets and symbol sheets to begin making their own quilt.
9. Quilt must communicate a message.



Teaching Tip: For this part of lesson show only quilts with symbols no story quilts.

Try to have an actual quilt for children to examine. Conclude this session with review of meaning of quilt symbols

Day 2-3



Teaching Tip: You may consider playing music during this time to enforce the idea of rhythm in patterns.

1. Review quilt symbols and gives wooden blocks that are squares rectangles and triangles.
2. Students will work in groups to prepare a quilt block that sends a visual message.
3. Once they have worked out a block in the wood blocks they should color the graph paper with crayons to match the wood blocks.
4. Select fabric colors and begin to arrange on muslin or white cotton.
5. Students should practice stitches before they arrange fabric pieces.
6. Once complete arrange pieces on muslin and lightly spray the fabric with adhesive spray to hold in place.
7. Begin to stitch pattern.

Day 4-5

Demonstrate stitching batting to quilt block and backing. Quilt blocks will be stitched together and writing the code explanation will be added as the border.

CLOSURE: Think-Pair-Share-Square. Have students pair up with someone who has the opposite color scheme. Direct the students to look at each others work and discuss the similarities and differences. Have them describe each other's patterns. Have them group up in fours and do the same. Use journals in the class; make sure they include their findings in their journals

If not start the following:

This may take students two class periods depending upon how fast they work.

1. Introduce Story quilts. Show story quilts of Faith Ringold and Margaret O'Brien-Seabrook and Harriet Powers.
2. Ask students to look at the quilts and discuss what they see that is similar of different.
3. Discuss in great deal the quilts of Harriet Powers and her use of African symbols.
4. Have students make a list of symbols that they see.
5. Have student's brainstorm about an event in their life or their family that they would like to remember. Discuss reducing that event to symbols to send a visual message

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6. Students will draw their symbols to represent their event.
7. Students will color on the back of their drawing with a dark color. Turn over and trace onto oak tag.
8. Lay the oak tag on select fabric and spray with light adhesive and cut it out.
9. Stitch symbols to muslin and then to back sheet and muslin. The quilt will be stitched together and the story for each block will be the border.

CLOSURE: Think-Pair-Share-Square. Have students pair up with someone who has the opposite color scheme. Direct the students to look at each others work and discuss the similarities and differences. Have them describe each other's patterns. Have them group up in fours and do the same. If you use journals in your class, make sure they include their findings in their journals.

ASSESSMENT: The teacher will listen for appropriate connections and solicit ideas from students during the discussion of their work. Teacher will listen to each group during their think-pair-share for appropriate use of key vocabulary words (cool, warm, pattern, design, shape, repetition, balance) and ideas about how the painting makes the student feel, what the designs look like to them, recognition of patterns. The teacher will also listen for students' comments on how other students' quilt blocks are similar or different from their own. The teacher will review the chart paper record for students' comments and responses. The teacher will look at each completed quilt block for symbols. All class work shall be graded by a rubric.

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