Quilting A Memory

Exploring Quilts as Methods of Documenting Memory

Overview

Our personal histories are filled with important people, events, and stories, and we use many different methods to remember them: scrapbooks, photo albums, written journal entries, etc. In the past, quilts have served as one of the most unique methods to keep personal and community stories and memories alive. In this activity, students will investigate the world of quilt-making, their many uses, and how they serve as a distinctive form of memory-keeping. After exploring the types of quilts and how they serve as a physical reminder of stories and events, students will create their own memory quilt based on the East Family's Memory Quilt at Carbon County Museum.

Age Group

6th – 8th Grade

Duration

1 – 2 class periods

Subject

Language Arts
Social Studies
Fine Arts

Standards of Learning Met

Language Arts

- SL.8.1: Analyzes the purpose of information presented in different media and formats, evaluates motives behind the presentation, and critiques the reasoning and relevance of the speaker's argument and claims

Social Studies

- SS8.2.1: Compare and contrast the ways various groups (e.g., cliques, clubs, ethnic communities, and American Indian tribes) meet human needs and concerns (e.g., self-esteem, friendship, and heritage) and contribute to identity, situations, and events
- SS8.2.2: Examine and evaluate how human expression (e.g., language, literature, arts, architecture, traditions, beliefs, and spirituality) contributes to the development and transmission of culture
- SS8.4.4: Identify historical interactions between and among individuals, groups, and/or institutions (e.g., family, neighborhood, political, economic, religious, social, cultural, and workplace).

- SS8.4.5: Identify relevant primary and secondary sources for research. Compare and contrast treatment of the same topic in several primary and secondary sources
- SS8.6.4: Use accurate, sufficient, and relevant information from primary and secondary sources to support writing

Fine Arts

- FPA 8.2.A.1: Students observe and describe in detail the physical properties of works of art
- FPA 8.2.A.2: Students interpret art, identifying subjects, themes and symbols that communicate their knowledge of context, values and meaning

Objectives

Students will…

- Describe how a quilt is made
- Define some of the many uses for a quilt
- Understand the purposes of the types of quilts
- Create their own classroom memory quilt

Materials

Included

- Lesson Packet
- 3 Quilt Squares
- *About the Object* Information Sheet
- *Quilting A Memory* Information Sheet
- *East Family Memory Quilt* photograph
- *Quilting Booth at the Fair* photograph
- *Story Quilt* photograph

Needed

- Construction paper (or fabric squares) for each student
- Crayons, markers, colored pencils or other creative mediums
- Butcher paper (or old blanket) for quilt backing
- Hole punch
- Yarn

Key Terms

Binding - a strip of fabric used to cover the raw edges of the quilt sandwich
Piecing – the process of sewing two or more pieces of fabric together to form a larger whole
Quilt – a coverlet or blanket made of two layers of fabric with a layer of batting in between, all stitched firmly together, usually in a decorative manner
Quilt Pattern – the pieces of fabric arranged to create a specific quilt design
Quilt Square – a quilted square of fabric. Several squares can be sewn together to form a large quilt.
Tied Quilt – a type of quilt in which yarn or thread ties are used to secure the layers rather than quilting stitches

Sample Lesson Plan

1. Define what a "quilt" is as a class. What is it used for? How is it different from a blanket? Ask students if they have any quilts at home. Who made them? How are they used?
2. Discuss how quilts are made including pattern availability, the materials used, and who the primary quilt-makers are. Discuss how quilts are both objects of everyday use and artistic expression and how art and history can be connected through a quilt. Use the *About the Object* and *Quilting A Memory* information sheets to inform your discussion. Use the quilt squares provided if desired.
3. Introduce the types of quilts and their purposes. Discuss how stories and memories might be portrayed in quilts. Use the *Quilting A Memory* information sheet and photographs provided as needed.
4. Show students the image of the East Family's Memory Quilt and the sample square provided. Discuss the history of the quilt and how it might have been used. Have students brainstorm other ways this memory could have been preserved.
5. Using this discussion as a basis, brainstorm how a current event could be depicted as a memory or story in quilt-form. How could modern technology affect this format?
6. Introduce the Class Quilt activity. Provide students with construction paper or fabric squares and crayons/markers/colored pencils or other artistic medium. Have each student design their own quilt square depicting information about themselves, their school, or their interests in addition to their name.
7. Arrange completed student squares together on top of a large sheet of butcher paper cut to the same size as the combined squares (you can also use an old blanket as backing if fabric squares were used). Punch holes along the edges of the student squares and through the butcher paper. Use yarn strands to tie the sides together. Display the students' memory quilt in the classroom.

Homework

If time necessitates, assign the students' quilt squares as homework and assemble the class quilt the following day.

Suggested Reading

Nebraska State Historical Society, *Quilts A-Z.*
http://www.nebraskahistory.org/sites/mnh/quilts_a_z/index.htm

The Quilt Index. http://www.quiltindex.org/index.php

Smithsonian National Museum of American History, *National Quilt Collection*
http://americanhistory.si.edu/collections/group_detail.cfm?key=1253&gkey=169

Susan Meeske, *Quilt Me A Story.*
http://comminfo.rutgers.edu/professional-development/childlit/books/MEESKE.pdf

About the Object
East Family Memory Quilt
Carbon County Museum

East Family Memory Quilt, Elizabeth East, Rawlins, Wyoming. May 25, 1933

General Information

Quilts have been used to physically represent memories, stories, and events for many years. This quilt contains a quilted flower for each student in the Rawlins High School Senior Class of 1933. It also documents the teachers and school and county administrations of that same year. The quilt consists of numerous fabric pieces as well as a yellow binding.

Who made it?

This quilt was hand-stitched by Elizabeth East. She and her husband, Forrest, presented it to their son, Cleo Orthal East, to commemorate his graduating from Rawlins High School on May 25, 1933.

What inspired it?

This quilt was meant to serve as a reminder of Cleo's accomplishment. The Easts wanted to present their son with an item that both encompassed their love and pride (a handmade quilt) and to document the time and people who helped Cleo graduate (his classmates, teachers, and school administration).

Things to look for…

Quilted Flower – This quilt contains a quilted flower for each student in Cleo East's graduating class. Each flower is made of four different pieces of fabric sewn onto an ivory backing

Blanket Stitch – Most quilt stitches are not meant to be seen, but this quilt has been sewn with a decorative blanket stitch in black thread meant to add to the design of the quilt.

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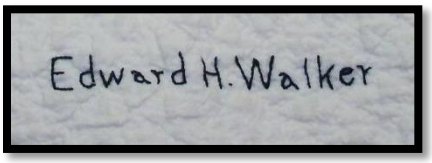

Hand-Embroidered Names – Mrs. East embroidered the names of each of Cleo's graduating classmates as well as his teachers, the superintendent, principals, and even the school secretary.

Quilted Chain Stitch – Although very hard to see, this quilt has a white chain stitch sewn diagonally across the entire quilt to hold all three layers together. This "quilted" stitch keeps the layers from shifting or bunching after the quilt is finished.

Yellow Binding – used to hide the raw edges of the three quilt layers, this yellow binding creates a sharp boarder completely surrounding the quilt.

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Quilting A Memory

What is a quilt?

A quilt is a blanket with a heartbeat.

Quilts are multi-layered blankets or coverlets usually pieced into elaborate artistic designs using scraps or fresh fabric. Often, these re-worked pieces of cloth are tied to fond memories and thus the quilt "holds" the memory of those people or events identified with the fabric. Traditionally, quilts offered women an outlet to communicate their artistic and emotional expressions. Quilts tell stories, commemorate events, solidify friendships, and hold a community's culture.

How is a quilt made?

Quilts consist of three separate layers. Fabric pieces cut into various shapes (triangles, squares, diamonds, circles, etc) are sewn together to create small squares or blocks of a design. These squares are then arranged to create the top layer of the quilt. This top layer is paired with the backing: a large, single piece of fabric cut to the same size and shape as the top quilt layer. Batting is then sandwiched between these two layers to create a padded space. Batting can be a thin layer of cotton or even an old blanket. These tree layers can be sewn together either with a decorative quilting stitch through all three layers, or they can be tied together using yarn knotted periodically across the quilt. The raw edges of fabric are then covered with a colorful binding to finish the quilt.

Who makes quilts?

Traditionally, quilt makers were women and girls who made practical quilts using materials they had on hand. These women would often join with their neighbors to sew a quilt together. These "quilting bees" served as popular social events and produced beautiful quilts that were used as fundraisers for churches and other community organizations.

Today, quilting continues to be a popular pastime. Some cultures, such as the Mennonite and Amish communities, continue to make quilts using traditional means. Other quilters are members of modern quilting circles.

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Types of Quilts

- **Story Quilts** – Put simply, story quilts tell a story. Quilt squares feature chapters, characters, or significant scenes from the story. They can even include a border with a repeated design or symbol that represents a key idea. Quilt squares can incorporate visual as well as written components. Historically, these quilts were mostly used to tell Bible stories.
- **Friendship Quilts** – Friendship quilts were used to capture the story of friendships. They could either consist of individual patchwork squares, each done by a woman's friends, or quilted squares inscribed with handwritten poems or sayings, each dated and signed by the maker. Oftentimes, these quilts were given to a person to commemorate an event, like a wedding or birth, or to an honored woman in the community.
- **Family Quilts** – Family quilts are those quilts that were lovingly created to fill a practical need for a family. While these quilts would often be made according to a known pattern, the colors and arrangement would be individually altered by the maker, illustrating her own artistic tastes. These quilts are passed through generations, becoming valued family heirlooms.
- **Album Quilts** – like Friendship Quilts, an album quilt is assembled from individual blocks, each designed and/or executed by a different person. Album blocks are pieced and frequently stitched into a quilt by a group for presentation to a public figure or to commemorate a special occasion.

Quilt Patterns

There are innumerable patterns available for quilting. Some have been inspired by nature. Others imitate everyday objects, and still others are symbolic of cultural or community beliefs and events. New patterns are created every day, and no two quilts are alike. To see a representative sampling of historic quilt patterns, check out the Smithsonian's National Museum of American History's National Quilt Collection online at http://americanhistory.si.edu/collections/group_detail.cfm?key=1253&gkey=169

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