

LESSON 10

TOPIC

The Emotional Meaning of Quilts

TIME

45 minutes

MATERIALS FROM TRUNK

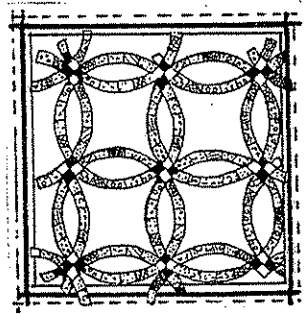
Photograph #8

Story - "From the Heart"

Book - *The Bedspread* (Grades K-4)

Book - *The Canada Geese Quilt* (Grades 4-8)

Book - *The Patchwork Quilt* (Grades 4-8)



EXTENDED ACTIVITIES

Video - "Quilt Diaries"

Video - "Quilts in Women's Lives"

OBJECTIVES

1. Students will be able to identify the value of quilts.
2. Students will be able to describe family quilts in terms of their meaning to the family.
3. Students will be able to compare quilts with other family keepsakes.

HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

Quilts hold special meanings well beyond their functions. A quilt is often a tangible reminder of personal emotions. In 1884, John Turner decided to leave Weldon, Illinois, for a new home in Kansas. The prospect undoubtedly evoked mixed emotions for his wife Sarah, since she would be leaving family and friends. Before their departure, Sarah was presented with a stack of quilt blocks, each with the signature of its maker, by her family and friends. Once Sarah reached her Kansas home she completed the quilt which for years to come would represent memories of friends and family back home.

Although many quilts are made for special occasions and therefore are reminders of past experiences and feelings, any quilt can hold special meaning. Many quilts are valuable to their owners because they have been passed down through the family and they come to represent an emotional attachment. Often quilts come to symbolize our relationships with past relatives or friends. Some quilts are made from sewing scraps of old clothing, and simply looking at them can trigger memories of other activities and times.

Quilts have functioned as bedcovers, luggage, shelter, decoration, and probably many other uses too numerous to mention here. However, throughout the history of Kansas, blankets have been fairly easy to obtain and the cost has been fairly low. Today, it is certainly cheaper to buy a blanket than to make a quilt. Yet women continue to make quilts and families continue to cherish them. This is evidence that their meaning goes far beyond their function.

PREPARATION

It is unlikely that any one class would want to read the enclosed story and all three books. A variety has been included here so the teacher can pick which story works best for his/her classroom.

"From the Heart"



This short story can be read aloud or copied for each student to read individually. It is the story of an experienced quiltmaker who meets an older quiltmaker and admires her quilts. These quilts are not technically perfect but they have heart. The younger woman learns the true value of quilts.

The Bedspread

This book is aimed at Grades K-4. It is the story of two sisters who decide to decorate their bedspread with memories of the house in which they grew up. The house made by one sister shows off fine needlework skills, and the house made by the other sister shows off happy memories.

The Canada Geese Quilt

This book is a longer story aimed at Grades 4-8. It is about a ten-year-old girl and her relationship with her grandmother. The grandmother makes beautiful quilts. When the girl learns her mother is going to have a baby she feels strange, but she and her grandmother plan a quilt for the new baby. The grandmother suffers a stroke and it is up to the young girl to finish the quilt. In the end, the girl receives a special quilt as a gift from her grandmother.

The Patchwork Quilt

This book is aimed at grades 3-6. It is about a young girl and her relationships with a family quilt and her grandmother. One day her grandmother begins to make a quilt out of fabric pieces taken from old clothes worn by family members. The quilt becomes a quilt of memories. The young girl's mother also works on the quilt, and when the grandmother becomes sick the young girl decides to finish the quilt herself. Even her brothers pitch in by cutting pieces of cloth for the quilt. The quilt becomes a gift to the young girl.

VOCABULARY

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|------------------|---|
| Keepsake | Something kept or given as a memento. A keepsake has emotional meaning making it valuable beyond its functional purpose. |
| Symbolic | Patterns, pictures, designs, etc. that stand for or suggest something because of a relationship, association, convention, or accidental resemblance. Symbols are arbitrary. |
| "From the Heart" | |
| Clapboard | A board created for use in siding a house or building. |
| Embroidery | Using needlework to form decorative designs on cloth. |
| Gingham | A cotton fabric in a plain weave. |
| In-the-ditch | A quilting stitch placed directly in the seams. |
| Precise | To be exacting or done technically well. |

The Bedspread

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| Bodkin | A sharp slender instrument like a needle for making holes in cloth to draw ribbon through. |
| Crochet | Lace made by interlocking stitches with a hook. |
| Embroidery | Using needlework to form decorative designs on cloth. |

Symmetrical A figure that can be divided by a line into two identical and matching halves.

Thimble A guard worn on the finger to protect the finger from the prick of a needle.

The Canada Geese Quilt

Bloodroot A plant of the poppy family.

Chaff The seed coverings and other debris separated from the seed in threshing grain.

Chicory An herb grown for its root and as a salad plant.

Constellation A configuration of stars.

Curried To flavor or cook with curry powder which consists of several ground (hot) spices.

Grouse A bird with a plump body, in particular, game birds.

Knoll A small round hill.

Migrate To move from one locality to another.

Mythology A body of myths. A myth deals with the gods, demigods, and legendary heroes of a particular people.

Shard A small piece, a fragment.

Tendrils Something that curls.

The Patchwork Quilt

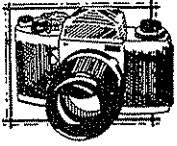
Masterpiece A work done with extraordinary skill.

Patchwork The result of sewing together small pieces or patches of fabric. The quilt top is often referred to as patchwork.

Stuffing The same thing as batting. A layer of soft, fluffy filler used between the top and the backing of a quilt. The batting provides warmth.

ACTIVITIES

1) Begin by asking the students if they have ever had pictures taken of their families. If so, have they included any objects in the picture with the family members? If so, why?



2) Show the students *photograph #8*. In this picture the family has included a quilt as part of the picture. Ask the students why the quilt would have been included in the photograph. Discuss that the quilt may be a family keepsake and that the family might be proud of it. Is this a fancy quilt? Do things have to be fancy to be keepsakes?

3) Ask the students to give examples of keepsakes they or their families may have. Are some of them, like baby blankets and stuffed animals, worn out? If so, why are they still valuable? Discuss that some things have symbolic meanings.

4) Pick either the story or one of the books to read. The following discussion questions may apply.

"From the Heart"

- Josephine thought that quilts had to have "heart." What did she mean?
- At the beginning of the story, Molly had never won a ribbon. How did she achieve her ribbon in the end?
- Josephine's quilts were not as neat as Molly's; however, Josephine's were more beautiful because they had heart. Some people like quilts that are very neat, whereas others like those with "heart." Which do you like?
- If you had a collection of quilts with "heart," would you feel comfortable selling them? What would you like to have happen to them?

EXTENDED ACTIVITY: Have the students draw two pictures; one of a quilt with "heart" and one of a precise, neat quilt. Ask them to tell or write a story about the two quilts.



The Bedspread

- Why did the sisters decide to stitch something from memory onto the bedspread?
- Do both sisters have the same memory of the house? Does the house symbolize something to at least one of the sisters?
- Which side of the bedspread would you like better, the neat house or the happy house? Why?
- If you were going to put your house on a bedspread, what memories would you include?

EXTENDED ACTIVITY: Have the students draw pictures of their houses and discuss why they drew the things they did. Are some of their drawings symbolic?

The Canada Geese Quilt



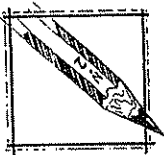
- Why did Ariel want to have a gift of her own for the baby? How did the quilt for the baby satisfy this need?
- Ariel hated to sew but she finished the quilt because Grandmother could not. Why did she finish the quilt? Have you ever done something you did not want to do to help out someone else?
- Ariel was afraid Grandma would die and leave her but Grandma said she would always be with her. What did she mean?
- What do you think Ariel's special quilt meant to her? Do you have something special someone made for you? Why does it mean so much to you?

EXTENDED ACTIVITY: Have the students write a story about something that is important to them. It can be something someone made for them or something that is simply associated with another person. What does this thing symbolize to them?

The Patchwork Quilt



- Grandma says "A quilt never forgets -- It can tell you stories." What does she mean by this statement?
- Tanya says "grandma isn't lonely, she and the quilt are telling each other stories." What does Tanya mean? How can making a quilt keep you from being lonely?
- Why does Tanya's mother's feeling change towards the quilt? How does she show her change of heart?
- How do you think Tanya feels about her gift of the quilt? Do you think she will keep the quilt? What will she do with it?



EXTENDED ACTIVITY: Have the students imagine they are making a patchwork quilt. Have them write stories about what fabric they would include in the quilt and why that fabric is special. What events, occasions, or people are they thinking of while they make the quilt?

5) Have the students make a list of the practical ways quilts are used. Then have them make a list of some of the symbolic or emotional ways quilts function. Have the students compare the lists. If they have quilts, how do they function in their lives? This activity can be done individually or in groups.

ASSESSMENT

Levels of Achievement

For Objective 1

- a) Students recognize one utilitarian or one symbolic value of quilts.
- b) Students recognize one utilitarian and one symbolic value of quilts.
- c) Students identify a whole range of reasons for the value of quilts (including both utilitarian and symbolic.)

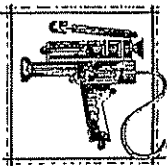
For Objective 2

- a) Students recognize the meaning of quilts to the family in a simple way.
- b) Students demonstrate a fuller awareness of the meaning of quilts to the family.

For Objective 3

- a) Students recognize a similarity or a difference between quilts and other family keepsakes.
- b) Students recognize a similarity and a difference between quilts and other family keepsakes.
- c) Students recognize more than one similarity and difference between quilts and other family keepsakes.

EXTENDED ACTIVITIES



1) VIDEO -- "QUILT DIARIES" (10 minutes):

This video is aimed at an adult audience but would be suitable for some classrooms. The video explores the issue of making quilts to mark special occasions. It makes the connection between quilts and diaries.

2) VIDEO -- "QUILTS IN WOMEN'S LIVES" (30 minutes):

This video, which is divided into six portraits, is intended for an adult audience. However, the video can be used with a student audience with careful planning. The final segment plays best with a younger (grades 4, 5, and 6) audience. The video explores the question of why women quilt and looks at the important role quilting plays in the lives of these women.