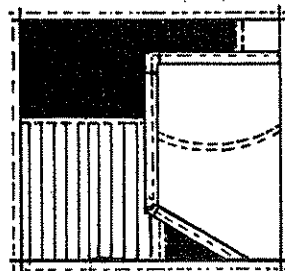


# LESSON 9

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## *TOPIC*

Quilts as Recycling



## *TIME*

30 minutes

## *MATERIALS FROM TRUNK*

Denim Comforter  
Feed Sacks  
Feed Sack Clothing  
Feed Sack Quilt  
What's in the Middle?

## *OBJECTIVES*

- 1) Students will compare and contrast the recycling efforts of the 1930s and 1940s with the present day.
- 2) Students will be able to identify reasons why a cloth sack is wise packaging.
- 3) Students will be able to identify ways in which a quilt can be part of a recycling effort.

## *HISTORICAL BACKGROUND*

Over time, quiltmaking has been a way to recycle dress and shirting scraps and used clothing. Although many quiltmakers today buy fabric off the bolt for their quilts, quiltmaking is still thought of as an art form that incorporates recycling.

The period that stands out in many people's minds as the greatest recycling era is the 1930s and 1940s, the period of the Great Depression and World War II. Many people have used the phrase "Use it up, wear it out, make it do, or do without" to refer to these times in American history. Of course, many people were out of work during the Depression and no longer had access to new goods. Feed and flour sacks were recycled into clothing and household items. During World War II, supplies on the home front were rationed and civilians encouraged to be part of the war effort through recycling. At this time fabric mills, the factories that made the cloth, devoted their time to producing parachutes and army uniforms, so there was little fabric to buy. People continued to make clothes for their children and themselves out of feed sacks. They also made quilts out of feed sacks.

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Cotton fabric bags can be found in quilts dated as early as the mid- to late- nineteenth century. These bags, which were plain and usually contained the printed name of the company, were typically used on the backs of quilts. However, it was in the 1930s that printed or patterned fabric bags came into use by the manufacturers of animal feed and flour.

The 1930s brought renewed interest in quilting. Magazines and newspapers published more and more quilting features. Although it is impossible to pick a precise date when quilting styles changed from the dark calicoes to a more modern pastel look, new styles in fabrics were available in the mid-1920s. This lighter pastel look is often incorrectly attributed only to the 1930s and the use of feed sacks in quilts.

In the 1940s, people were encouraged to use feed sacks for clothing, curtains, and quilts. Many women remember going to the feed store with their fathers or husbands to pick out the fabric bags they would later turn into clothing or quilts.

Printed or patterned feed and flour sacks were generally made from a coarse cotton weave. The sacks were held together with coarse thread. The chain-stitch was removed so that the fabric could lie flat. The printed paper label could be easily ripped off. For some projects it was important to buy several sacks with the same printed fabric.

With the shortage of paper during World War II, pattern companies folded and many newspapers and magazines dropped their features on quilting. Also with more women in the work force, and with less access to needed supplies, the quilting revival that began in the 1930s ended.

Source: Barbara Brackman. *Clues in the Calico: A Guide to Identifying and Dating Antique Quilts*. McLean, Va.: EPM Publications, 1989.

## VOCABULARY

Batting	A layer of soft, fluffy filler used between the top and the backing of a quilt. The batting provides warmth.
Blanket	A large woven fabric used as a bedcovering.
Comforter	A three-layered bed covering, like a quilt, but the layers are joined by tying them together using yarn or heavy thread.
Crazy Quilt	A quilt top design made of odd-shaped pieces of fabric. Crazy quilts were usually made of silk or velvet.

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Great Depression	A period in U.S. history, the 1930s, when great numbers of people were out of work due to a poor economy.
Disposable	Something that is designed to be used once and thrown away.
Feed Sack	A fabric bag used by grain companies to feed.
Flour Sack	A fabric bag used by flour mills to hold flour.
Patchwork	The results of sewing together small pieces or patches of fabric. The quilt top is often referred to as patchwork.
Recycle	To reuse materials.

### *ACTIVITIES*

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- 1) Ask the students to discuss their understanding of recycling. Make a list of the types of things that we recycle today? Why is recycling important?
  - 2) Explain that at one time in our history, during the Great Depression, many people recycled, not so much for environmental purposes, but because many people were out of work and had no money. The Depression was immediately followed by World War II, and many people had to continue recycling because supplies in the United States were scarce. Many things had to go to the war effort.
  - 3) Ask the students what types of things they could recycle within their families if they were unable to buy new things. Can clothes and toys be handed down from one child to another? Can other things be made from worn-out clothes?
  - 4) Show the students the *denim comforter*. Can they guess what it is made from (old jeans)? Explain that this is a way to recycle cloth.
  - 5) Share with the students the plain *feed sack* (with printed label). Explain to them that in the past such things as animal feed, flour, and sugar came in cloth sacks. Ask the students what kind of uses the sacks could have if they were recycled.
  - 6) Show the students the *feed sack apron* and the *feed sack bloomers*. Let them try on the clothing. How would they feel about wearing this kind of clothing? Although many clothing items were made from this type of feed sack, the labels on the sacks did not always show. Undergarments were often made from this type of feed sack.
  - 7) Show the students the printed or patterned *feed sack*. Explain that in the 1930s and 1940s, when recycling was important, manufacturers began printing these types of sacks for such things
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as feed, flour, and sugar. Are these prettier than the plain feed sacks? What could you make out of these feed sacks?

8) Show the students the *feed sack quilt*. Explain that this quilt is made out of recycled feed sacks. Is it pretty? Is it useable (if it were full-size)?

9) Discuss what part of a quilt might be made with recycled materials. The tops of quilts can be made from such things as feed sacks, as can the back of a quilt. Old clothes and fabric scraps can also be recycled into quilts. Can the batting be recycled? Show the students the *what's in the middle?* book. Two types of batting are recycled: 1) old blankets were often used as batting, and; 2) old quilts could also be recycled as batting.

10) What type of packaging do flour and sugar come in today? What do we do with the packaging today? Is the packaging disposable? Would it be better for the environment if flour and sugar still came in fabric sacks? (Actually one can still buy large quantities of rice and flour in cotton sacks but most families do not buy fifty pounds of flour at a time.) Why was the fabric package a good idea?

## *ASSESSMENT*

### Levels of Achievement

#### For Objective 1

- a) Students recognize either similarities or differences between the recycling efforts of the 1930s and 1940s and the recycling efforts of today.
- b) Students recognize both similarities and differences between the recycling efforts of the 1930s and 1940s and the recycling efforts of today.

#### For Objective 2

- a) Students give one good reason why a cloth sack is wise packaging.
- b) Students go into greater depth and give two or more reasons why a cloth sack is wise packaging.

#### For Objective 3

- a) Students demonstrate a simple understanding of how a quilt can be part of a recycling effort.
- b) Students demonstrate a fuller awareness by giving correct examples (e.g., feed sacks used for top and back; old clothes and fabric scraps recycled into quilts; old blankets and old quilts recycled as batting).

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## *EXTENDED ACTIVITIES*

### 1) LIST OF DISPOSABLE ITEMS:

Have the students generate a list of disposable items that we use today. Ask them to consider how we can redesign our lifestyles to produce less trash by having fewer disposable items.