

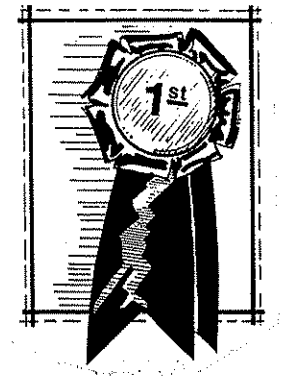
LESSON 11

TOPIC

Cooperative Quiltmaking and Aesthetics

TIME

45 minutes



MATERIALS FROM THE TRUNK

Quilt (full-size)
Quilted square (whole-cloth)
Photographs #4, #6, #7, and #9
Book - *Sam Johnson and the Blue Ribbon Quilt*
Quilt Posters with Ribbons

OBJECTIVES

- 1) Students will be able to identify the rewards of cooperative projects.
- 2) Students will be able to compare and contrast activities that have been identified as gender specific and identify the limitations of such stereotyping.
- 3) Students will be able to understand that quilts can be called "pretty" or "ugly" depending on individual taste and will be able to articulate at least a few reasons why a quilt is beautiful to them.

HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

Quiltmaking is often a cooperative effort. A group can piece together a quilt top or complete a quilt by providing the quilting. This latter example is probably more common. Many churches have historically had quilting groups that will finish quilt tops for individuals. The quilting bee is the result of this type of activity. The reasons why these quilting groups exist fall into two basic categories. Some groups meet for humanitarian reasons, usually raising money for a special cause. Other groups are primarily motivated by the social and entertaining aspects of quilting. However, most women will give "fellowship" as one of the primary reasons for participating in either type of group. Women enjoy the companionship and the accomplishment of completing a group project.

One of the challenges of cooperative quiltmaking is the mediation of varying aesthetics. Aesthetics are based on taste. Many factors come together to create an individual's taste. In

other words, what makes something pleasing to the eye and what makes it ugly? Although communities may share certain standards in aesthetic principles, most individuals do not agree entirely on what is pretty or beautiful. No one set of aesthetic principles is better than another. To use a common phrase "beauty is in the eye of the beholder."

To use another common phrase "most people know what they like." However, encouraging people to talk about why something is beautiful (or ugly) can be difficult. Unfortunately, such things as contests based on aesthetics have convinced most people that there is one correct set of aesthetic principles. Therefore, individuals are slow to articulate their own tastes. However, we all make daily aesthetic judgments in the way we dress or the way we decorate our homes.

Quilt competitions date back to the nineteenth century. These early contests were usually part of local or regional fairs. The concept of a national quilt contest is basically a twentieth-century idea. The first national contests were quilt block contests. The first national quilt contest was the 1932 Eastern States Exposition in Springfield, Massachusetts. In the last two decades, national quilt competitions have flourished while local and regional fairs have continued to give prizes to the "best" quilts. The difficulty in judging quilts is that the judges' decision is basically a subjective one, based on personal taste. Many quiltmakers believe that "there are no ugly quilts."

VOCABULARY

Aesthetics	A theory or conception of art or beauty.
Quilting	The process of stitching through three layers (top, batting, and back) of a quilt to hold them together.
Quilting Bee	The meeting of a group of quilters who gather to work on a quilt together; usually quilting the top.
Soogan	The term used by a cowboy to refer to a quilt or comforter.
Taste	Individual preference.

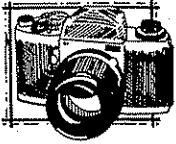
ACTIVITIES

1) Using the full-size *quilt*, explain to the students that a quilt is not a quilt until it is quilted, and a comforter is not a comforter until it is tied. Point out the quilting in the *quilt*. Does the quilting create any special design?

2) Show the students the whole-cloth *quilted square*. Explain that sometimes the quilting produces a special design of its own. Have the students discuss which quilting they like best.

Why would a quilter choose one type of quilting over another for a specific quilt?

3) Share *photograph #4* with the students. Explain that this is a quilting bee. What are the women doing? Can the students think of how children would have participated in the bee? (Traditionally, young girls kept the needles threaded for the women, but some children would have quilted with the women -- note that the children often played under the quilting frame.)

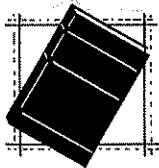


4) Share *photograph #7* with the students. Is there anything unusual about this photograph? Some students may point out that they are tying a comforter, rather than quilting a quilt. Other students might point out that there is a man at the quilting bee. Ask the students if there is any reason a man should not participate in a quilting bee. (Although quiltmaking was primarily done by women, it is not unusual for men to participate; some men enjoy quiltmaking as much as women do.)

5) Ask the students if men use quilts. Share *photograph #9* with the students. Explain that even if men have not made quilts themselves they use quilts as much as women do. This photograph shows a cowboy with his quilt. Some cowboys call their quilts soogans.

6) Share *photograph #6* with the students. Ask the students if they can tell what this picture represents. Ask the students if they have ever been to or participated in a fair. Explain that this is a local fair in which groups and individuals could enter quilts to be judged.

7) Read aloud the book *Sam Johnson and the Blue Ribbon Quilt*. The discussion might emphasize the errors of gender stereotyping and the pleasures of cooperative work such as a quilting bee.



a) Questions for gender stereotyping.

- Why was Sam Johnson mad at the women's quilting group?
- What types of recreational activities besides quiltmaking do some people say are only for women or for men?
- Why is it a problem to limit certain activities to one gender or another?
- Have you ever been told you cannot do something because you are a girl or a boy? How did it feel to be told no?
- Do you think it was right for Sam Johnson to start a men's quilting group? Why?
- Do you think it is good for men and women to compete against each other? Why?

b) Questions for the pleasures of cooperative work.

- Why did the two quilting groups in the story decide to cooperate? What happened when they cooperated?
- If sewing and quiltmaking are work, how can they also be enjoyable? Are there chores you must do that you also get pleasure from?
- Why was the Rosedale Quilting Club happy that they won a prize at the fair?

-
- Have you ever entered a fair or a contest? How did it feel to win? to lose? Even if you lost, did you sometimes feel that what you did was better than the person who won? Have you ever judged something? Was it hard?
 - If you were to judge quilts at a fair, how would you decide which one was the best?

8) Bring out the *quilt posters* and the *ribbons*. Tell the students that they are to be the judges at a fair. As a group they must decide which quilt to give first place and which quilt to award second. Encourage them to talk about the reasons for their choices. Remember that there is no right answer. People have different tastes and it is all right to disagree.

ASSESSMENT

Levels of Achievement

For Objective 1

- a) Students recognize the rewards of cooperative projects.
- b) Students demonstrate this through their own actions in future projects.

For Objective 2

- a) Students recognize one or two perceived gender specific activities. Not able to identify limitations.
- b) Students recognize examples of two or more perceived gender specific activities. Also, show some awareness of such stereotyping.
- c) Students fully comprehend perceived gender specific activities, making good comparisons and contrasts. Also, able to explain the disadvantages of such stereotyping.

For Objective 3

- a) Students recognize that a quilt may be beautiful to one person, but not to another.
- b) Students give one reason why a quilt is beautiful to them.
- c) Students produce a summary of reasons why a quilt may be beautiful.
- d) Students structure information so that they offer reasons for their choices, but also offer reasons for not choosing one of the other quilts.



EXTENDED ACTIVITIES

1) LANGUAGE EXPERIENCE NOTEBOOK:

Using the quilt posters, have the children write an essay comparing the aesthetics of the quilts. Encourage them to articulate why they think one quilt is better than another.