

Piece by Piece

Background

In the early years of our country people had to be frugal. Most people had to make their own clothing or hire someone else to do it. Even finding cloth with which to make clothing was difficult. People who had money could order cloth from Europe. But most people made their own homespun, a kind of cloth made from linen or wool grown right on the farm. Linen was made from a plant called flax, and wool was taken from sheep. Both had to be spun on a spinning wheel and woven into cloth on a loom.

If you were the youngest child in the family, you didn't very often get new clothes. Clothing was passed from one child to the next until it was no longer wearable. Even then, its service to the family was not complete. Clothing remnants, small bits of cotton, wool, linen, flax and even silk, went into a pile as scraps and came out as beautiful designs, transformed by the care and imagination of the quilter. Back then, quilters were doing what was necessary to keep their families warm. Today their creations are considered a form of American folk art.

Wool was the most common material used in the New England area, where the winds were bitter in the wintertime. Cotton and flax were favored in the South, where it was not so cold.

A quilt has three layers—the quilt top, the batting or filler, and the backing. The filler could be made of wool that had been combed to remove sticks and other debris and to make it fluffy. Quilts filled with wool were a luxury, though. Most people used dried grasses, wood shavings and corn husks. During the American Depression in the 1930s, some people filled their quilts with used newspaper. Later cotton batting became the preferred filling, especially in the South, where cotton was an important crop. Cotton batting is cotton fiber from the cotton plant which has been wadded into rolls or sheets.

If the seamstress was making the quilt for someone else, to earn extra money, she would be very careful to remove all the seeds, twigs and leaves from the batting. She did that to make sure there were no lumps in the quilt. If she was making it for her family, she would sometimes leave a few leaves and seeds inside. In some quilts that are very old you can still feel the seeds and twigs between the quilt layers.

Quilts were usually made from cotton because it was easy to hand-stitch and held its shape well. Cotton absorbs moisture and allows it to evaporate. It is also easy to wash and springs back into its original shape after washing.

Quilting bees were popular gatherings for women and young girls. They were the best place for young girls to learn to quilt and visit with their

P.A.S.S.

GRADE 3

Reading—2.1,4; 3.1,2;
4.1,2,3

Writing—1.1,2,3,4,5;
2.2,3,7; 3.1,2,3,4,5,6

Oral Language—1.1,2;
2.1,2,5,6

Math Process—1.1,2,3;
2.3; 3.2; 4.4; 5.2

Math Content—4.1

Visual Arts—1.1,2,3,4;
2.1; 3.2,3,4; 4.2,3

Social Studies—3.2; 5.2,4

GRADE 4

Reading—1.1,4; 2.1,2;
3.1,2

Writing—1.1,2,3,4,5,6;
2.1,2,3,4,5; 3.1,2,3,4,5,6

Oral Language—1.1,2,3;
2.1,2,5; 3.1,2,3

Math Content—3.3,4; 4.1

Visual Arts—1.1,2,3,4;
2.2; 3.1,2,3; 4.1,2,3

Materials
quilting magazines or
books

construction paper in sev-
eral colors

scraps of cloth

friends at the same time. Friends would come together in someone's home and work together to complete a quilt. Many times the women in a community would get together and make a quilt to celebrate a milestone in someone's life. They would make quilts to celebrate the marriage of young couple, the birth of a baby, a prosperous harvest or even a death in the family.

Quilts were created to commemorate many occasions. The "Freedom Quilt" marked the time when a young man no longer needed the quilts of his mothers or sisters to keep him warm at night. Given to him when he turned 21, the quilt meant he could start his own household and begin looking for a wife.

A girl would begin working on her "Baker's Dozen" quilts as soon as she could sew. The first of these 12 quilts would be simple. Those that followed would grow more elaborate as the girl grew more skillful. The 13th quilt, the "Bridal Quilt" would be the most carefully planned and beautiful quilt of all. It would be white, with hearts incorporated into the design. Close friends and relatives of the bride would do the stitching.

It was a common practice to punish young girls for making uneven stitches. Quilts were so important to the everyday household that a verse was made and taught to young women to take special care in their sewing abilities:

At your quilting, maids don't dally,
A maid who is quiltless at twenty-one,
Never shall greet her bridal sun!

Today quilting is no longer just a woman's art. Artists, some of whom are men, experiment with shades, shapes and texture to create beautiful works of art. Today quilts are as likely to be used to decorate a wall as to provide warmth. Numerous U.S. museums own quilts and display them as historical works of art.

Social Studies

1. Read and discuss background. Ask students to define the words "thrifty" and "frugal."
2. Research and discuss "women's work" versus "men's work" in history and today. Compare with other cultures—Native American, African, etc.

Visual Arts/Math

1. Review some common geometric figures with the students.
 - Draw on the chalkboard or duplicate a quilt block pattern for students to view.
 - Have students locate all the geometric shapes featured in the pattern.
2. Hand out copies of the page of geometric shapes included with this lesson.
 - Have each student create an original quilt block to fit a 12-inch square, using construction paper and the shapes provided.
 - Have students glue the quilt pattern to a heavier piece of paper, tag-board or cardboard.

—Make a paper quilt by taping all the class quilt blocks together. Display for others to enjoy.

3. Provide scraps of fabric, or ask students to bring them from home. Some sewing stores and clubs will donate scrap material when asked by a representative of the school.
 - Have students collect the fabric pieces they desire to create individual blocks.
 - Have students cut and piece the block together.
 - Have students sew their own blocks, or have a school volunteer sew them.
 - If sewing is not an option in your classroom, you may use fabric paint to join the pieces or have students cut the pieces of the block and glue them to heavy cardboard.
 - Use the finished products in a class display. If you have made a real quilt, auction it off the quilt at the end of the school year to raise money for future projects.
4. Using sidewalk chalk, have students plan and create a chalk quilt somewhere on a school walkway or concrete play area. In advance have the students plot out the quilt block designs on paper. They should consider such things as color and flow of the individual designs. When the design is complete, have students write a message to the other students at school or all sign their names.
5. Invite members of a local quilting group to visit your classroom and show some of their creations. Ask the visitors to bring a small quilting frame, if possible, and to talk about how they go about planning a quilt.

Language Arts

1. Have students design a quilt on paper and then write a story about the quilt.

Extra Reading

Denenberg, Barry, *So Far From Home: The Diary of Mary Driscoll, An Irish Mill Girl*, Lowell Massachusetts, 1847, Scholastic, 2003.

Gunderson, Jessica, and Jerry Acern, *Eli Whitney and the Cotton Gin*, Capstone, 2007.

Nelson, Robin, *From Cotton to T-Shirt*, Lerner, 2003.

Paterson, Katherine, *Lyddie*, Puffin, 2004.

Paulsen, Gary, *The Quilt*, Random House, 2005.

Woodson, Jacqueline, and Hudson Talbott, *Show Way*, Putnam, 2005.

Vocabulary

batting—cotton fiber from the cotton plant which has been wadded into rolls or sheets

cotton—a soft usually white fluffy material that is made up of the hairs around the seeds of a tall plant related to the mallows and that is spun into yarn

flax—a slender plant with blue flowers that is grown for its fiber from which linen is made and for its seed from which oil and livestock feed are obtained

frugal—careful, thrifty management of resources, such as money, materials, or labor

homespun—spun or woven at home or in the home

linen—thread made from fibers of the flax plant

loom—a machine or device used from which cloth is produced by interweaving thread or yarn at right angles

quilt—a bed cover made of two layers of cloth with a filling of wool, cotton, or down held together by patterned stitching

remnant—something left over

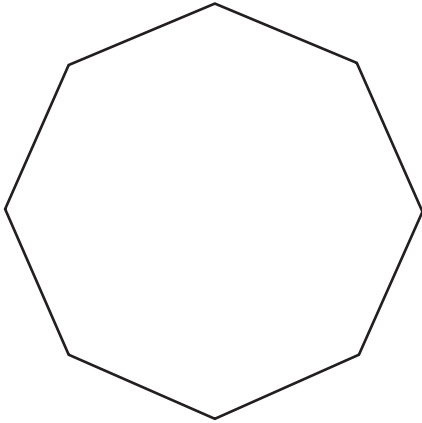
spinning wheel—an apparatus for making yarn and thread consisting of a foot or hand driving wheel and a single spindle

wool—a dense soft hair from the coat of sheep and other mammals valued as textile fabric

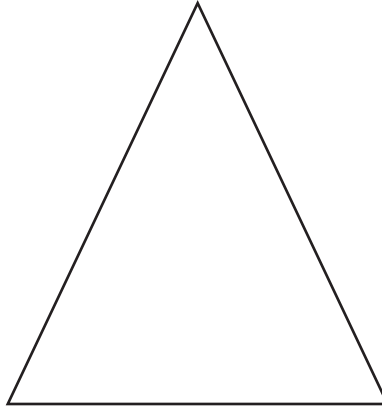
Name _____

Piece by Piece

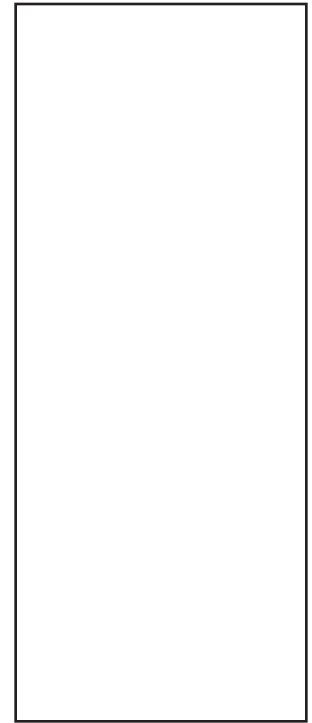
Quilt-making is considered a form of American folk art. Use the geometric figures below to create a quilt pattern. Use construction paper to add color. Then place your pattern on a 12-inch square quilt block. Write a short history about your quilt block.



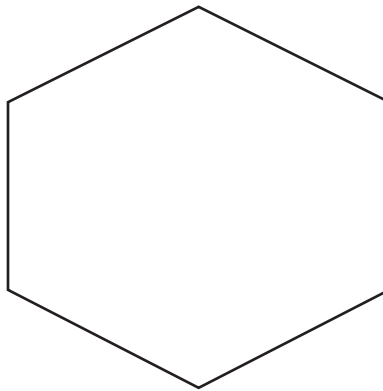
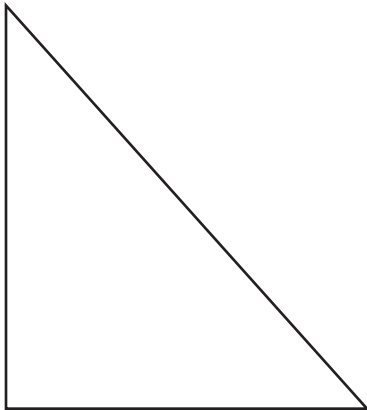
octagon



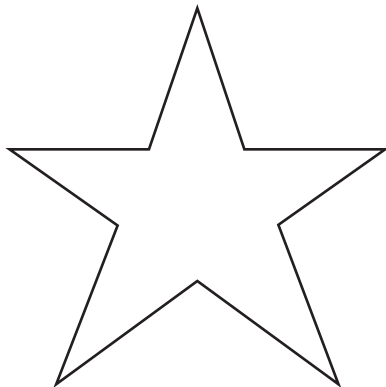
isosceles triangle



rectangle



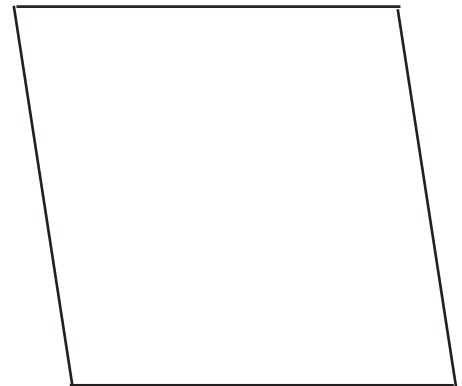
hexagon



decagon



Traditionally quilting was considered a woman's job. However, two American presidents, Calvin Coolidge and Dwight D. Eisenhower, helped their mothers quilt when they were boys.



rhombus