

Quilt Me a Story

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Quilting is a craft that has roots deeply sown into the heart of America. Surviving quilts that date back to the early and mid-1800s are reminders that quilts are an important part of our heritage. Quilts originally were of a utilitarian nature. They protected people from the cold. They were used as door and window coverings. New babies were wrapped in quilts when they were born and many young babies were wrapped in a special quilt when they died. Quilts provided warmth and comfort to the sick and disabled. They could be folded and used as cushions in a wagon or slung over a clothesline and used as a play tent for children.

Quilt making was a skill that men or women could enjoy singularly or collectively. It was a means to escape from the isolation of their lifestyle and it allowed them the artistic freedom to express themselves. The quilts produced by our ancestors told stories about their lifestyles that could not be captured by pen and paper. Every quilt we see today, regardless of when the quilt was made, relates a story. The types of fabrics, the design of the quilt, the signature of the quilter, all reveal a intimate story of the woman or man who made the quilt.

This discussion is about the use of quilting as a medium for storytelling by our ancestors and how contemporary story quilts can be integrated into a Whole Language curriculum in the classroom. First, there is an explanation of quilting as a means of expression and storytelling by women in American history, plus illustrations of how different cultures have influenced American quilting. Second, there are two examples of

story-web quilting. The story-web quilting process blends storytelling through quilting with the writing skills taught using Whole Language exercises in a classroom.

QUILTS AND PATTERNS

A quilt is comprised of three layers. The top is either pieces of fabric stitched together to form a pattern or it is a solid piece of fabric. The center of a quilt contains batting or filler. It is this layer of batting that provides the warmth of a quilt. Over the years, a wide variety of materials used for batting has appeared inside quilts. Some examples of fillers are carded cotton scraps; worn blankets or quilts; lint from dryers; cotton, wool, or silk batting. The final layer of a quilt is the backing. This is usually a solid piece of fabric, but some quilts do have pieced backings.

A quilting pattern is the design of the quilt and the pattern can either be pieced or appliquéd. Pieced quilts entail sections of fabric that are cut into precise shapes and sewn back together to form a design. Quilt patterns were frequently influenced by the quilter's environment. Nature influenced patterns such as *Grandmother's Flower Garden*, *Rose of Sharon*, *Ocean Waves*, or *Turkey Tracks*. Everyday objects such as bowties, a schoolhouse, baskets, and cake stands were also popular patterns for quilts.

Appliqué involves stitching designs that have been cut out of fabric onto a contrasting piece of material. Frequently, an appliquéd quilt has flowers, animals, birds, or other designs. The pattern selected by the quilter can be indicative of a quilter's lifestyle, artistic talents, political views, and even his or her emotions.

Prior to a woman's ability to vote, some women used their artistic talents and expressed their political views through a quilt. The issue of slavery in the United States in the mid-1800s led to quilt patterns called *Slave Chain* or *Underground Railroad*. *The American Quilt: A History of Cloth and Comfort 1750–1950*, by Roderick Kiracofe, tells how, during the Civil War, the Sanitary Commission collected approximately 250,000 quilts that were distributed among soldiers in the Union Army. One can think about the tremendous sacrifice that some of these women made in order to contribute to

the war effort. Money, food, and fabrics were scarce, and frequently women were in charge of the household and farms while their sons and husbands were participating in the war. Yet almost one-quarter of a million quilts were made by these women.

Friendship quilts were extremely popular throughout the United States from the mid- to late 1870s. Friendship quilts were used to capture the story of friendships and they contained either individual patchwork squares, each done by a woman's friends, or muslin squares inscribed with hand-written poems or sayings on them, each dated and signed by the maker. Friendship quilts captured the history of the women who made them and the kinship that bound them together. Because of the lack of standing that women had in society, a friendship quilt was frequently the only record that substantiated a woman's existence.

MULTICULTURALISM AND QUILTING

Quilts are usually thought of as being a type of American folk art, when in fact, quilting is a multi-cultural artistry that dates back to the time of the Crusades, the eleventh to thirteenth centuries A.D., in Asia and Europe. While the Europeans probably had the greatest influence on quilting in America, the Japanese also contributed greatly to this craft with the availability and affordability of silk fabrics.

Japanese peasants who could not afford the luxury of fine fabrics, used cotton for their clothing. To protect themselves from the harsh cold of Japanese winters, they stitched together layers of fabrics for their cloths. The stitches originally were for utilitarian purposes, but over many years developed into a style of quilting called *Sashiko*.

Other Asian influences came from the mountain areas of Laos, Thailand, and Vietnam. This style of quilting is called *Hmong*, which is a reverse appliqué of fabric. Only two or three colors are used in the geometric design of *Hmong* quilting and it typically does not include batting in the center of the quilted piece.

There are several different styles of quilting in the United States that are unique to their region, yet have had a tremendous influence on contemporary quilting today. *Semi-*

nole Strip Piecing dates back to the early 1900s. This style of quilting is done by the Seminole Indians of Florida, who use brightly colored solid strips of fabrics in their geometric designs. The commercial products produced today by the Seminole Indians include skirts and jackets stitched using what is now referred to as Seminole Strip Piecing.

Amish quilters were influenced by their religious beliefs. The dark, solid colors represented in their quilts were those that were approved by the bishop in the community. Stripes and calicos were considered worldly and deemed unacceptable for use in a quilt. Even though Amish women were limited in their use of colors, their quilts are stunning in their use of contrasting colors and simple patterns.

Missionaries brought cotton fabrics and European styles of needlework with them to the islands of Hawaii in the mid-nineteenth century. However, their European influence is barely recognizable in the beauty of a Hawaiian quilt. There is a distinct uniqueness in every Hawaiian quilt. A Hawaiian quilt top is made of one large piece of fabric that is appliquéd to another solid piece of fabric. The top design is made in a similar fashion to the way schoolchildren make snowflakes out of folded paper. The fabric is folded until you have eight layers. The design is cut out and it usually has fruits, flowers, or leaves. Traditionally only two colors are used in a Hawaiian quilt.

A recent children's picture book titled *Luka's Quilt*, by Georgia Guback, tells a story of a Hawaiian quilt. Luka's grandmother Tutu announces that she will make Luka a special quilt with lots of flowers, just like a flower garden. Luka loves flowers and beautiful colors, yet when she and her grandmother go to select the fabric for her quilt, Tutu tells Luka that she can only select one color for her quilt. Luka cannot understand how her grandmother can possibly make a quilt with lots of flowers using just one color, but her grandmother confidently assures her that she can.

Luka helps Tutu cut and baste the pattern made only with the green fabric. She can't wait to see the flowers on the quilt. Tutu quilts and quilts and soon Luka's quilt is finished. But when Luka sees her quilt she is extremely disappointed. There are no flowers, only a green and white quilt! Feelings of hurt arise between Luka and Tutu and for several days they are quiet with each other. Then one day they go to the

Lei Day celebration in town and Luka makes a beautiful lei with lots of brightly colored flowers. Tutu sees how happy Luka is with her lei and comes up with a perfect solution for Luka's Hawaiian quilt. Tutu stitches a fabric lei of flowers to place on Luka's quilt. Now Luka has a traditional Hawaiian quilt and the beautiful colorful flowers she loves.

AMERICAN SLAVERY AND QUILT MAKING

Quilting also played an important role in the lives of African Americans who were slaves in the early and mid-1800s. *Stitched from the Soul: Slave Quilts from the Ante-Bellum South*, by Gladys-Marie Fry, relates not only the autonomy and artistry that was inspired by quilting, but also the hardship that was encountered on a daily basis by the slaves.

Young slave children were often present when the women were quilting. Children were expected to be silent. They were responsible for threading the needles, filling the quilts, fetching items, and holding the light.

Quilting bees were important social gatherings for the slaves. It was one of the few times when they had the freedom to go about their business without being under the watchful eyes of their mistresses and masters. They spoke in coded languages. For example, "Bugs in de wheat" meant "look out for patrollers" (Fry 64).

The colors in quilts were used to send messages for slaves traveling on the Underground Railroad. Quilts with the color black in them indicated a safe house. Triangles in a quilt indicated prayers.

Slaves also considered it "bad luck to make a perfect quilt." (Fry 67) They believed that "an imperfect quilt would distract the devil in the night" (Fry 67).

STORYTELLING AND QUILTS

Quilts also played an important function in storytelling and frequently religion and one's environment played a major role in the quilt design.

The Quilt Encyclopedia Illustrated, by Carter Houck, defines a story quilt as "any quilt that tells a story or depicts a

portion of one's life" (160). One of the most famous story quilts was done by a woman named Harriet Powers. Powers was a woman born as a slave in 1837 in the state of Georgia. It was noted in the Georgia census of 1870 that Powers could neither read or write, yet she made two dramatic and powerful story quilts in the late 1800s that impacted the world of women and quilting.

Stitching Stars: The Story Quilts of Harriet Powers, by Mary E. Lyons, narrates the story of Harriet Powers and her two famous story quilts that are now part of a collection at the Smithsonian Institution and the Museum of Fine Arts in Boston. Harriet's first quilt was based on her favorite Bible stories. It was an appliqué quilt with eleven squares that depicted events from the Old and New Testament. It is believed that Powers was a deeply religious woman and was greatly influenced by powerful sermons preached by the local ministers and hymns that were sung from the souls of fellow slaves and believers. Among the squares are "The Last Supper" and "Adam and Eve."

Powers displayed her quilt at a Cotton States Exposition in 1886. A woman named Jennie Smith saw the quilt and was captivated by the design of the quilt. Smith offered to purchase the quilt from Powers, but Powers refused to sell it at that time. However, several years later, Powers and her husband were experiencing financial problems and she offered the quilt to Jennie Smith. Although Powers' asking price was ten dollars, Smith was only able to offer five dollars. Powers reluctantly sold the quilt.

Before departing from the home of Smith, Powers gave Smith a full description of each square. After the sale of the quilt to Smith, Powers visited Smith several times to see her Bible quilt. When Smith died, a complete narrative was found detailing her acquisition of the quilt and the stories that Powers related to her.

Stitched from the Soul: Slave Quilts from the Ante-Bellum South, by Gladys-Marie Fry, further relates the story of Harriet Powers and her story quilts. Powers' second quilt was one that was commissioned by the faculty ladies of Atlanta University. It was to be a gift for the Reverend Charles Cuthbert Hall, who was the president of the Union Theological Seminary at Atlanta University. Powers' quilt contained fifteen squares and combined stories from the Bible with

folklore tales about the weather. One square illustrated Black Friday, May 19, 1780. It was a day that was so dark in New England, that by twelve noon, it was as dark as night. The darkness was due to air pollution from forest fires in the northeastern United States. The "Cold Thursday of February 1895" was related by Harriet Powers, as being so cold that "a woman froze while at prayer . . . icicles formed from the breath of a mule" (90).

Another example of a story quilt is presented in *Sweet Clara and the Freedom Quilt*, by Deborah Hopkinson. This picture book is based on the true story of a young slave girl who is taken away from her mother to work on another plantation. Clara's greatest wish is to be reunited with her mother and to become a free slave.

Clara had excellent sewing skills and earned the job as a seamstress for the plantation owners. She was privy to conversations that took place in the plantation house between her master and visitors, and other slaves on the plantation. Through these conversations, Clara realized how close they were to the Ohio River and decided to quilt a map that would lead the slaves to the Underground Railroad on the banks of the Ohio River. She appliquéd the landmarks, the swamps, rivers, fields of crops, and a bright star that signified freedom. After her quilt was finished, Clara went to her mother at the other plantation and they followed her map to freedom.

Another example of a story quilt is one that preserves the memories of a family through salvaged family fabric. *The Keeping Quilt*, by Patricia Polacco, is a story of a quilt that was made to preserve the memories of an immigrant Russian family's remembrance of their country. The fabric for the quilt is from Great-Gramma Anna's babushka and her dresses, Uncle Vladimir's shirt, Aunt Havalah's nightdress, and Aunt Natasha's apron. The women in the neighborhood piece and stitch the quilt and memories of Russia are captured on the cloth.

The quilt is not only a link to their memories of Russia, but it also provides a passage for future memories of the family in America. Over the years, Great-Gramma Anna's quilt is used as a tablecloth for the Sabbath, as a huppa for family weddings, and as a blanket to welcome newborn babies into the family. As the quilt is passed from one generation to the next, so too are family stories.

QUILTING AND CHILDREN

Quilts have played an important role in the lives of children throughout history, especially girls. "By four years of age, many had learned to sew, and some made their first quilts by age five." (47) Young girls were expected to master sewing skills so that they could provide clothing and linens for their families when they married. They learned sewing as a trade. This skill was a means of supplementing their families with income or as a respectable profession were they to remain unmarried.

In the 1800s, girls were expected to have pieced one dozen quilt tops by the time they were ready to marry and a thirteenth to be used as a wedding quilt. This quilt would be finished by the neighbors. Boys were also part of the quilting tradition in this time period. A young man's twenty-first birthday was his mark of independence. It became a tradition for relatives and friends to honor the young man with a Freedom Quilt.

Quilting bees are unique to America and they became important social gatherings for women. Quilting bees enabled women to meet and discuss politics, religion, and health, and it empowered them to socialize and express themselves without the influence of men. *Huskings, Quilting, and Barn Raisings: Work-Play Parties in Early America*, by Victoria Sherrow, details the events of the quilting bees. Sherrow notes that most quilting bees started early in the morning and usually occurred in the winter. Sometimes seven or eight quilts would be completed during the bee. While the mothers quilted and exchanged gossip with their neighbors, older children were called upon to thread needles and trim threads, or they tore strips of rags for rug making. The women spent the majority of the day quilting, but by nightfall, the men and boys would arrive. Supper would be served and fiddle music, dancing, and games followed shortly thereafter.

A young woman's first quilt was usually a nine patch, similar to a tic-tac-toe grid. Girls were expected to master tiny stitches; the goal was usually twenty stitches per inch, ten stitches on the top and ten on the bottom of the quilt. If the quilting was crooked or sloppy, the girls were required to tear out their stitching and start again. "Practice makes perfect" was a popular adage.

LITERARY INFLUENCES

Small Endearments: 19th-Century Quilts for Children, by Sandi Fox, relates the influence that literature had on the quilt patterns that were selected for children in the 1800s. The Bible was one of the most influential books in this time period. Jacob's Ladder was one of the most popular patterns for children's quilts. However, the Bible also influenced the quilter in another, more discreet manner. The quilt maker would include a small mistake somewhere in the quilt to attest to man's imperfection versus God's perfection. Many quilters today still include a small error in their quilts to emphasize that no one is perfect.

The quilt pattern *Lady of the Lake* was inspired by Sir Walter Scott's poem and *Delectable Mountains* was based on *Pilgrim's Progress*, by John Bunyan. Both patterns are geometric patterns of small triangles and squares.

A Storybook Quilt, made mainly of silks and velvets, was made by a woman named Eudotia Sturgis Wilcox in 1890 for her granddaughter. Her quilt shows storybook characters that were popular in that time period: Uncle Tom and Little Eva, Heidi and Grandfather, as well as Uncle Remus. Throughout the quilt are other small details such as a velvet chair, a wheelbarrow, and butterflies.

QUILTING AND WHOLE LANGUAGE

There are countless parallels between quilting and writing. Today, quilting and writing can assume a joint partnership in a classroom. Quilting and writing allow an individual the freedom to express themselves in an artistic manner. Viewpoints and emotions of the artisan can be expressed through the design of a quilt or the words of the writer. Quilting and writing can be either an individual endeavor or a joint partnership. What is probably the most wonderful parallel between these two mediums is that the creator's imagination is unrestrained. Although the quilter and the writer open themselves up to criticism from others, they have had the confidence and courage to create a product that is uniquely their own.

There is also a parallel in the process one goes through

when designing a quilt or writing a story using Whole Language methodology. The following is a broad overview of the two processes.

First, comes the selection of a central idea. The quilter selects the design or pattern for the quilt and the writer chooses the nucleus or key word for a story.

Second, is clustering. The quilter needs to decide what shapes, colors, and fabrics should be used and what technique they will use, appliqué or patchwork. The writer sets up a cluster or web. Clustering involves the collection of information for the story that branches off of the key word and shows how those pieces of information relate to each other.

Third, is organization. The quilter has to decide the layout of the quilt, what square goes where, what type of impact they want the quilt to have on the viewer. The writer needs to organize the layout of their story: Where does the story take place? What personalities will the characters have? Should their story be a mystery, humorous, or address a serious issue? Should the story be past or present tense?

Fourth, is the selection that involves the collection and coordination of the fabrics and templates for the quilt. In writing, this entails the selection of key words and ideas from the cluster and the development of an outline of the story and its characters.

Fifth, is the cutting and the piecing. The quilter needs to cut the fabric according to the draft of the quilt and if necessary make changes to the pattern or layout of the quilt. The writer needs to “cut and piece” his or her outline, enhance the characters, and make necessary changes to the plot.

Sixth, is the wrap-up. The quilter can now stitch the fabric pieces together for the finished quilt top. The author writes the rough draft, edits, and makes corrections.

Seventh, is the finished product. A quilt for the quilt maker and a story for the author.

STORY-WEBBED QUILTS

I decided to try and incorporate my quilting talent with the writing skills taught in a Whole Language writing program. The result would be a story-webbed quilt. The first book that

I selected to use in this process was *The Rag Coat*, by Lauren Mills. The story allowed me to creatively illustrate both concrete objects and intangible emotions in the quilt.

The story is about a young girl named Minna, who lived with her family in the Appalachian Mountains. Her father worked in the coal mines, but died from coal miner's disease. One of his wishes was for Minna to go to school. The family was too poor and could not afford to purchase a coat for Minna to walk to school in the winter.

Minna's mother's friends decided to make a patchwork coat for Minna. As the women stitched and quilted the coat, they told Minna stories about the scraps of fabric, which emphasized that there truly is a story stitched into every patch of a quilt.

Minna's coat was finally finished and she wore it to school on Sharing Day. The children teased her when they saw her rag coat. They later realized that they each had an emotional bond with her coat, since it was made of scraps that their mothers had saved from their baby blankets and clothes.

I read the story several times. I used the title of the book as my nucleus word. From there, I used webbing and mapped a list of concepts that were central to the story line and could be illustrated in a quilt. I narrowed my list down to thirteen ideas. I designed a rough draft for each square and selected fabrics and ornaments for the quilt that illustrate the concepts nonverbally.

A brief explanation of the quilt follows, starting with the top left square.

First, the title square. The title and author's name are appliquéd in this square.

Second, a mountain range to represent the Appalachian Mountains where Minna and her family lived.

Third, a feed sack to represent poverty. This has two-fold meaning, in that Minna used a feed sack for warmth since she didn't have a coat. I filled the feed sack with popcorn to give it some authenticity and dimension.

Fourth, a coal mine entrance to depict the coal mine in which her father worked and subsequently developed his illness. A small "Danger" sign is post outside the mine entrance.

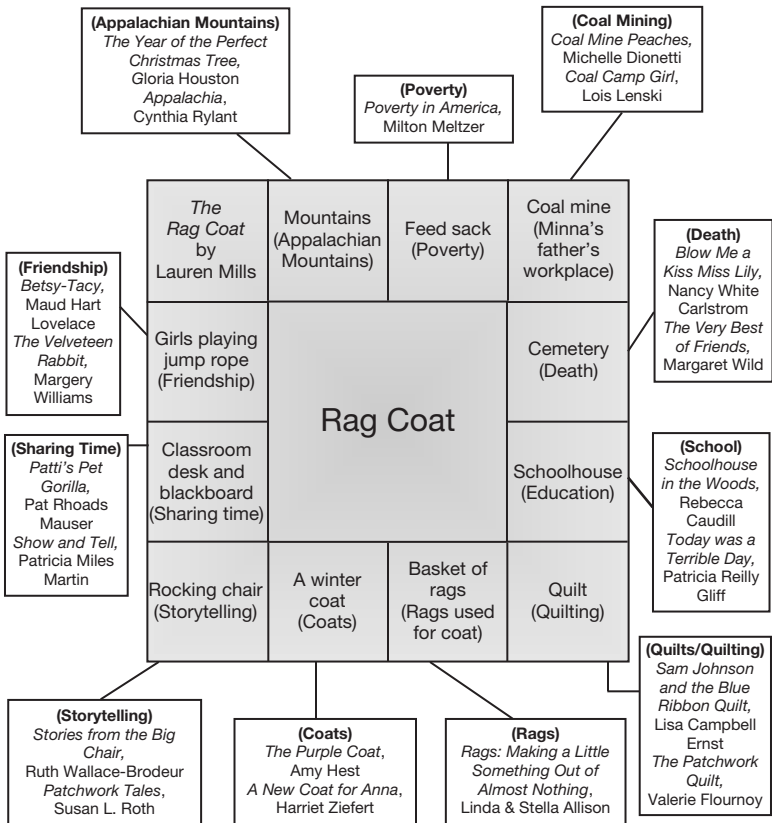
Fifth, a cemetery site, to illustrate the death of Minna's father.

Sixth, a schoolhouse to portray education. This was a very important issue in the story. Minna's father was very concerned that Minna have an opportunity to go to school.

Seventh, a quilt, because Minna's mother and her mother's friends were quilters, not only for additional income, but for companionship. The quilt is hanging on a clothesline, made from a string running between two small twigs.

Eighth, a basket of rags to represent the rags from which Minna's coat was made.

DIAGRAM OF THE RAG COAT QUILT AND WEB



Ninth, a winter coat. The crux of the story was that Minna needed to have a warm winter coat in order to go to school year-round. This is a small purple coat with tiny black buttons down the front.

Tenth, a rocking chair in a sitting room. This square illustrates storytelling, depicting how the mothers narrated their memories of the fabrics to Minna as they quilted.

Eleventh, a classroom desk and blackboard to depict sharing time. I sewed small decorative buttons (a clock, ball, teddy bear, boat, train, and an apple) along the top of the table to represent items that children would bring in for show and tell.

Twelfth, three girls playing jump rope. This square represents friendship. Friendship was an important element in the story, not only because of the friendship among the mothers who quilted, but also because Minna's friendship with her classmates represented acceptance by her peers. This was my last square, and I kept putting it off because I didn't know how to "show" friendship. My daughter suggested a square showing girls playing jump rope because you have to have friends in order to jump rope.

Thirteenth, a rag coat. I made a rag coat that was similar to Minna's. I stitched together scraps of fabric and lined it in burlap.

The quilt is 33" x 33" and is completely hand appliquéd. The squares are stitched together by machine and machine quilted around the seams.

THIRD GRADERS AND A STORY-WEB QUILT

The *Rag Coat Quilt* had a enthusiastic response from those who saw it. I wanted to take story-web quilting a step further and try it with a class of children. Would children have the imagination and tactile skills needed to create a story-web quilt? Instead of having children illustrate or write their webs on paper, would they be able to transfer their ideas to fabric?

I asked my daughter's third-grade teacher if I could use her class for a story-web quilt project and she enthusiastically agreed. I explained that the children would draw their pictures on fabric which I would then stitch together to form the quilt.

I selected the picture book *My Great Aunt Arizona*, by Gloria Houston. This children's picture book tells the story of Arizona, a girl born and raised in the mountains. Arizona grew up to be a teacher and for many years taught the children in her mountain town in a one-room school. Arizona never left her home, yet she said she traveled around the world by reading books. The story offered an abundance of concepts that the children could select to illustrate in their quilt.

The teacher and I allowed two hours for the children to create their quilt. First, I read the story to the class. We used the title of the book as our key word or nucleus. The class brainstormed ideas and I set up a cluster diagram on the blackboard. The children suggested ideas that were pertinent to the story and they narrowed the selection down to ten concepts that they would illustrate in their quilt. The following is a list of their selection and their rationale for selecting those concepts:

1. A log cabin because that was the type of house in which Arizona lived.
2. Reading, because Arizona loved to read.
3. A mailman who delivered the letter from the uncle who suggested Arizona's name.
4. The desert, to represent Arizona's name.
5. A fiddle to represent square dancing.
6. The world, because Arizona visited countries around the world through reading.
7. Christmas trees. Every year Arizona and the school children planted a Christmas tree in the schoolyard.
8. A picture of Great Aunt Arizona.
9. The schoolhouse in which Arizona taught.
10. Arizona as a baby.

There were twenty children in the class so we divided the class into pairs and each pair of children selected one of the ideas for their square. They drew a rough draft of their concept on plain white construction paper before they drew their picture onto their square of fabric. I anticipated that the children would be more comfortable drawing their rough draft on paper because none of the children were familiar with drawing on fabric. I also had visions of wasting several

yards of fabric due to possible artistic errors by the children.

After the children sketched their concept on the construction paper, they were given one twelve-inch square of white cotton fabric that was ironed onto freezer paper. The freezer paper provided stiffness and stability to the fabric. They sketched their picture onto the fabric with a pencil and then colored the picture with Pentel Fabricfun Pastel Dye Sticks.

Some of the children were hesitant to step outside of the structure of the illustrations in the book. There were two boys working together, who were most concerned with duplicating the illustration of Arizona's log cabin. An argument ensued at one point between the boys because one wanted the footbridge in the picture even though it wouldn't fit on their paper.

Some children wanted permission from either the teacher or myself to draw their squares creatively. Could they draw a fiddle with musical notes to represent square dancing? Would a picture of a desert be okay to symbolize Arizona's name? After about ten minutes of reassuring the children that they were allowed to be creative in their design of their squares, they began to relax and became more confident in their artwork.

Throughout the drawing process, the teacher and I were not only amazed at the cooperative learning taking place, but also at the enthusiasm and precision that the children were applying to the design of their squares. The book, *My Great Aunt Arizona*, was passed from group to group so the children could copy the log cabin, the schoolhouse, and Great Aunt Arizona.

Two girls were very creative in their square that portrayed the concept of reading. They ventured outside of the story line of *My Great Aunt Arizona*, and drew a person reading outside, along with a bird flying through the air reading, a squirrel reading, and a little bookworm with eyeglasses, who is sitting underground in a rocking chair, reading a book.

The girls who had Christmas trees for their square had the most difficulty deciding what to draw. To them it was too simple to just draw some Christmas trees. They wanted to embellish their square and go beyond the simple concept of a Christmas tree.

We encouraged the children to use lots of colors and to fill in the whole square, not just the center. As time went on, the children started to visit each other and they enthusiastically bestowed compliments on their classmates' art work.

Gradually, the squares were finished and the children, logically and cooperatively, laid out the blocks of their quilt. I took the blocks home, stitched them together, and returned one day later for the children to finish the quilt. It would be too time consuming and difficult for the children to hand quilt their story-web, so I had them tie the quilt. Each child received a length of yarn and a darning needle. At the corner of their square, they poked the needle through all three layers of fabric, and tied a bow.

Lastly, I had each child sign their name on a plain square of white fabric with a special fabric pen. I stitched this patch on the back of the quilt. Any quilt historian or quilter will tell you that the signature of the quilter is a vital link to its history.

The quilt was now finished and the children, their teacher, and I were thrilled with the result. This project reinforced the parallel between webbing in Whole Language and quilting. It was not necessary for any of the children to be skilled seamstresses, nor was it a gender-biased project. This activity allowed both boys and girls to experience quilting as an art form.

It also allowed the children to creatively express the highlights of the story through pictures and without the use of words. Some children cringe when they hear a teacher emit the word "writing." It is not a skill in which every child exhibits competence. The story-web quilt allowed those children to creatively express concepts generated by the story through a channel other than writing. Anyone familiar with the story would be able to "read" the quilt. Plus, anyone not familiar with the story would quickly get an oral recitation of *My Great Aunt Arizona* and after traveling around the squares of the quilt, they too could "read" the story.

The boys and girls alike, thoroughly and enthusiastically embraced the idea of making a quilt and no one made a comment about sewing being only for girls. One boy volunteered the expression "Cool!" after I explained the project to the class.

The creation of a story-web quilt in a classroom situa-

tion further reinforces the importance of cooperative learning. Every angle of this project was a group effort and the result is proudly displayed in their classroom, preserving the memory of *My Great Aunt Arizona*.

I encourage teachers and librarians to try a story-web quilt with the students in their class. This is also a project that can be adapted for any grade level. One of the kindergarten teachers tried a story-web quilt with her class. A five-year-old does not have the manual dexterity needed to draw on fabric, so the teacher had the children draw their ideas on construction paper. She stapled the drawings on the bulletin board in a quilt pattern.

As a final word of encouragement, you don't have to be a quilter to make a story-web quilt. If you can cut out squares of fabric and sew a straight line, this is a perfect project that links the history of quilting with the experience of webbing in Whole Language.

Today, it is important to expose children to the history of quilting and allow them to experience the creation of their own quilts. It is an art form that can be easily integrated into a classroom curriculum. Quilting can be used in a math class to develop skills in measurement, geometry, and fractions. A history or geography class can examine the multicultural background of quilting or a quilting bee could be re-enacted. Quilt patterns and designs can be created in an art class. A science teacher could dye muslin fabrics using berries, nuts, and other ingredients that were used in the nineteenth century to color material.

Quilting is not a uniquely American art form, but it has a very important part in our past. Story-web quilting is a good way to engender an understanding of this art form and the development of a child's writing skills.

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