Quilting: A thread to connect the curriculum

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QUILTING: A THREAD TO CONNECT THE CURRICULUM

BY

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Quilting: A Thread to Connect the Curriculum

This is an account of the author’s year long project on quilting. Her exploration connects the theme of quilting to all curriculum areas of her fourth grade classroom, and to her own development as a quilter/artist.

The author will provide an account of projects that were worked on in the classroom and on her own, the process that both she and her students underwent, classroom resources, and various lesson plans and reproducibles she developed and gathered for her unit on quilting. The study of quilting led to a final presentation of the students’ and author’s projects to the public.

The in-depth studies of quilting helped students make strong connections between their lives and the classroom. The project also gave the author a license to explore her own artistic creativity through quilting, an area that has always held her interest.
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CREATIVE PROJECT STATEMENT

Project Intent

My intention with this project was to take the craft and art of quilting and connect it to all the areas of the curriculum in my fourth grade classroom. Some of the most powerful classroom projects I have done in the past with my students are ones in which the students come to the project with some background knowledge. I felt that most of my students have had some prior experience and history with quilting or quilts, because they are so much a part of our lives here in America. Most children have quilts in their homes from past generations, or they have been given a gift of a quilt at some point in their lives. My hope was to take this common connection of quilts and explore with my students how to look at quilting mathematically, historically, scientifically, and through art, literature and writing.

At the same time, I wanted to do some personal exploration of quilting. In previous years I have had friends who quilt make presentations to my classes. Though I intend to continue to solicit their help in future projects, I wanted to wean myself from relying on them in order to teach a concept on quilting, or work on a quilting project with only my direction in the classroom. I took quilting classes and tried projects of my own at home to broaden my knowledge of quilting.

Throughout the year I documented the process through journaling, lesson plans and poetry. The culminating activity was a public presentation of the year-long quilting project. This included a Power Point presentation of the various projects my class and I did through the year, a reading of some of the stories and poems we wrote, and a gallery walk through an exhibition of the projects.


**Inspirations**

“If you are lucky, you have a quilt that was passed down to you from a grandmother or even a great-grandmother. And with the quilt you have the family’s story embroidered around it. The delicate stitches bind you with your sisters, aunts, mothers, and all your foremothers, into a complex pattern of love and creativity. You can wrap yourself in its comfort and history, knowing that what was passed on to you, will be passed on again. From woman to woman.” —*Twelve Golden Threads* by Aliske Webb

When I was growing up we used to travel to my grandmother’s cottage in Michigan to spend a few weeks. The cottage was furnished with my grandmother’s antique dishes, cane-seat rocking chairs, and beautiful old bed quilts. I am not sure if that is where my interest in quilts began, or if it was through the variety of quilts that have been given to me by friends over the past fifteen years in celebration of my birthday and the births of my two children. I do know that I have always been very touched when a friend has taken the time to make a quilt for me.

My friends who quilt have varied tastes in their choice of design, as well as the styles and colors of fabric they use in their work. I have been exposed to many types of quilts, and even though I enjoy some more than others, I am always impressed by the art, hard work, and love that goes into each one. Friends that quilt, as well as other quilters in Missoula, Montana, and the quilts they have made, were the inspiration for this project.
The Project Idea

Upon finishing the last summer of my master’s coursework in the Creative Pulse, I was faced with making a decision as to what my final project would be. During the previous school year I toyed with several ideas such as writing poetry, acting in a play, composing music, or trying more pottery (my first year’s project). The list goes on, but the idea of quilting and connecting it with my classroom kept coming back to me.

In previous years, I have had friends who are experienced quilters come in and do projects with my students. The excitement the students exhibited when they were involved with the quilting activities was thrilling to watch. Allowing the students to enjoy the tactile sense of making a quilt as well as exploring the choice of fabric patterns and colors was exciting. I realized that besides the artistic nature of making a quilt, studying and making quilts had the potential of being powerful ways to teach geometry in math. Quilts could be used to connect the students to eras of American history.

Historically, quilts have been made for a variety of purposes. Fabric patterns and choices have direct links to the time period in which the quilt was produced. Quilts can also be used to enhance interpersonal skills. So many of us have quilts in our families. Often our family histories are woven into the pattern or fabric of a quilt. In addition, several pieces of literature have used quilts as a theme. I felt quilting would be a project that I could do in my classroom and the connections to multiple areas of the curriculum would be invaluable. It would also be a project I could improve upon and use in the years to come.
"No matter what your age or your life path, whether making art is your career or your hobby or your dream, it is not too late or too egotistical or too selfish or too silly to work on your creativity." (Cameron, 1992)

For my Creative Pulse field project, I tried doing some pottery and poetry. They were two things I had never done before. Before I took a class in pottery, I decided to read the book *The Artist's Way* by Julia Cameron. The book helped me explore my own creativity and helped me understand the importance of looking at myself as an artist and being open to create. It also helped me realize that in order to be a good teacher, I had to dive into an art form and try it for myself.

When the quilters came into my class, I found myself feeling envious that I didn’t know enough about quilting to do some of these projects on my own. Even though I’ve done a few quilting projects in the past, I have never looked at myself as a quilter. Trying my own hand at quilting would be a way to explore the artist within me, as well as make me a better teacher of quilting in my classroom.
The Creative Project
Quilting: A Thread to Connect the Curriculum

Section 1: Starting the Year

I started out the year explaining to my fourth grade students at Lewis and Clark School that we were going to do a year-long project centered on the theme of quilting. Some of the groans from my students were audible all the way to the office. I told my class that a final creative project was required for me to get my master's degree and I was excited that they would be a part of it. They were informed that one afternoon a week would be spent on some aspect of quilting. I hoped once we were involved in the project, they would buy into the idea.

As most teachers do, I like to assess what prior knowledge the kids have on a subject before I begin to teach it. The first day of the quilting project I started by reading the book The Keeping Quilt by Patricia Polacco. Reading a book with a quilting theme out loud was a pattern that continued throughout the year. The book immediately elicited discussions of family quilts the kids had at home. It was just the response I was looking for.

A resource book I used quite frequently was Quilting Activities Across the Curriculum by Wendy Buchberg. It is geared for primary classrooms, but many of her ideas can be adapted to the intermediate classroom. She suggested starting off the year with a KWL chart to assess my students' prior knowledge of quilting. A KWL chart assesses what the kids know about a subject, what they want to learn, and then documents what they did learn as the year goes on.
After reading The Keeping Quilt, we created a KWL chart. I was impressed with the amount of knowledge the students already had about quilts, yet the chart also showed there were many gaps in their knowledge. After charting what the students already knew about quilting, we discussed what they wanted to learn about quilts. Some students wanted to know why they are called quilts and what makes a quilt a quilt. Other students wanted to find out how people came up with quilt designs. Still others wanted to try some quilting and wondered if they were going to get a chance to do some quilting of their own. We left the chart up so we could write down additional questions and what we learned about quilting as the year progressed.

In addition to the KWL chart, I put up a vocabulary chart so the students could write down any quilting vocabulary words they learned throughout the year. The students had copies of their own KWL charts and vocabulary charts in their own quilting folder they made so they could individually add to their charts during the year (Appendix A). Their quilting folders were also used to keep any finished work or work in progress in a central location.

The last thing I did was have the students share one of their own quilts and that quilt’s history. If they had a quilt at home, they were asked to bring it in, as well as be prepared to share its history. The day we shared our quilts, I started off the afternoon by reading My Grandmother’s Patchwork Quilt by Valerie Flourney. The intent was to get the students motivated to share their own quilts and quilt histories. I found they needed little motivation. They loved sharing their quilts. A friend of mine, Lisa Walser, who is not only an experienced quilter but very knowledgeable about quilt history, came in and shared her knowledge of each student’s quilt as they showed their quilts. Lisa explained
the type of design and fabric that was used, as well as the significance of each quilt. The students loved presenting their quilts and enjoyed hearing some information about their quilts that they had not known before. The activity was a wonderful motivator for the rest of the year (Appendix B).
Section 2: Connections to Literature

I use literature is to help students make connections in my classroom. I often use a book to begin a new activity or project. There are so many wonderful books that use quilting as a theme. The literature helped students make connections to many other curricular areas—history, math, art, interpersonal relationships and writing.

During the year of this project, I used picture books to help the kids look at the American history of quilts and quilting. Some books that tie into quilt history are: Selina and the Bear Paw Quilt by Barbara Smucker; Mary Cobb’s book, The Quilt Block History of Pioneer Days; and My Grandmother’s Patchwork Quilt by Janet Bolton (Appendix C). These stories either theorize the origin of patchwork quilt designs or how the history of a family can be traced through the history of a family quilt.

The books elicited discussions about quilting and its role in history. There is a debate right now about the theory that quilts were used to help slaves escape to the north just before and during the Civil War. Some historians believe quilts were patterned to represent maps of the Underground Railroad, a secret route for slaves to escape to the north. Other historians theorize that quilts with specific patterns such as the log cabin design were draped on fences or clothes lines as signals to runaway slaves that the house was a safe one for hiding. Sweet Clara and the Freedom Quilt by Deborah Hopkinson was a great book to use to get the kids talking about this debate and discussing whether it really could have happened. A book that got us interested in looking at star quilts and their role in Native American history was Star Boy by Paul Goble. After reading this book, a mother of one of the Native American students in my class came in and talked about star quilts during Native American Week. The story helped them understand the
reason star quilts are so important to Native Americans. The star quilt incorporates the night sky, the sun and the North Star which are significant to Native American culture.

Picture books were a great way to introduce many of the math related activities we did throughout the year. Two books that helped immensely in getting the students to start looking at specific patterns and how to build onto geometric shapes and colors to make new shapes were Eight Hands Round by Ann Whitford Paul, and My Grandmother’s Patchwork Quilt by Valerie Flourney. As we read the books and studied the quilt patterns illustrated in the books, the kids began to see the similarities and differences of pattern blocks. They realized that rotating or flipping a shape within a pattern caused a whole new design to appear. At the same time, they started recognizing specific patterns and were anxious to invent their own designs.

One of my favorite books with a quilting theme was The Quiltmaker’s Gift by Jeff Brumbeau. The book helped the kids make a connection between the art of making a quilt and the joy of giving it as a gift. One of our projects was making a nine patch quilt with Suzanne Sterrett, a local quilter. The quilt was later given to the Missoula Health Department for someone who may need a blanket or quilt for their baby. After reading The Quiltmaker’s Gift, the student’s were more than ready to donate their quilt to a needy family.

I used picture books to springboard my student’s own writing. We had a variety of writing assignments throughout the year that will be discussed in section 4.
Section 3: Connections to Math

There were some wonderful connections we were able to make to our math
curriculum through our quilting project. Geometry and measurement principles have a
natural connection to quilting. Even after completing the quilting project, the students
continued to work with the pattern blocks; exploring symmetry and repeating patterns
with geometric shapes.

One project involved giving each of the students six paper blocks of the same
patchwork pattern. They were told to color each of the blocks the same way, using only
three colors. I had twelve different patterns, so many of the students colored the same
pattern. When they put the blocks together they discovered that new geometric shapes
were formed by putting two geometric shapes together. In addition, when they colored
the patterns with different colors, the design looked entirely different. (Appendix D).

Later in the year we explored geometric concepts involving nine-patch designs.
The students first experimented by using a variety of colors to make different designs on
a nine-patch template. Next they picked their favorite design and reproduced it on a nine
patch paper block. They discovered how triangles and squares, when put together in
different ways, made new shapes like diamonds, parallelograms, quadrilaterals, and
larger squares and triangles. I enjoyed watching students explore with shapes.

Another project using math skills involved making a quilt with snowflakes printed
on fabric blocks. The project started with the class cutting out individual six-pointed
snowflakes from butcher paper. The concept of symmetry was introduced and reinforced
by the folding and cutting of the snowflakes. The students also discovered that when
they cut a shape on a fold, it became an entirely new shape when unfolded. For example,
when they cut a triangle on a fold, it became a diamond when unfolded. (For more on the snowflake quilt, see section 6.)

The importance of measuring came out in several projects. We made snowflake fabric squares by ironing our butcher paper snowflakes onto fabric and sponge painting fabric paint over the top. The kids then sewed the square together. They saw the importance of sewing a consistent $\frac{1}{4}$” seam onto the border of their square. When the squares were inconsistent, the quilt top did not come together evenly. (I spent a couple long evenings squaring up their blocks!)

Using arrays of quilt blocks reinforced the idea of squares and rectangles. When we put together a holiday memory quilt, my students spent an hour placing their squares where they wanted them. They began to understand that if they had a five-by-five array of quilt blocks, it turned out to be square quilt (Appendix E). If the array of blocks was of unequal numbers, it was turned out to be a rectangular quilt. Their leaf print quilt was a four-by-six array and turned out rectangular (Appendix K).

One part that I loved about math and quilting was that the students who told me they hated math, loved these projects. They were learning math by utilizing it in practical, hands-on activities and projects.
Section 4: Connections to Language Arts

I often used our writing time to connect the theme of quilting to writing. For my students who love to write, this was a way for them to process what they had learned. There are a number of possibilities we could have explored with writing. We touched on just a few.

When the students brought in their own quilts, I wanted them to have some form of written documentation to share their quilt’s history. This required them to conduct a short interview with a person who knew about the origin of the quilt. We also developed an interview format so when speakers came in, they could ask questions to springboard more discussion. It was good for them to have some specific questions in mind to ask our visiting speakers, as well as a way to record what was said. These activities strengthened their interpersonal skills. In addition, building good interview skills will be valuable to them their entire lives.

While studying the use of descriptive language in writing, as well as using figurative language like similes and metaphors, I had the students write poems about their favorite quilt or a favorite project we worked on in the classroom. I started out by having the kids brainstorm sensory images of their own quilts or quilts we made in the classroom. We came up with short descriptive words and phrases that described the quilt. I then had them write their telephone numbers vertically in the margin of their draft books. Using the ideas we brainstormed, they wrote a poem describing their quilt. Each line had to have the same number of words that matched the number in their telephone number. It was a way to keep the poems succinct and avoid narratives. When they were finished, I was impressed with the quality of the poems. Their word choice and the
feelings they expressed about the quilts were wonderful. The poems allowed them to share their knowledge and emotions about quilts in a creative way (Appendix E).

Over the Christmas break, I sent home a fabric quilt square with the students. They were to come back with a design of some kind on their square that symbolized their favorite holiday memory. (It did not have to be Christmas.) In addition to the quilt block, they had to write about the memory. Their memories ranged from going up into the mountains to get a Christmas tree, to watching fireworks up on the hill with the family on the Fourth of July. Sharing the quilt blocks and holiday memories gave the students a chance to reflect on how family traditions are important in our lives (Appendix F).

During the course of the year we studied story elements in their writing and in literature. Using this idea, I had the students write a story using quilting as a theme. The quilt could either be the problem or the solution in the story. Students followed the writing process. They developed a plan for their story, wrote rough drafts, edited, revised, and wrote final drafts. As with most writing projects, some stories turn out better than others. Yet I found that my students were incorporating much of the knowledge they were learning about quilts into their writing. Many of the stories included information about how the quilt was “sandwiched” together with the top, the batting, and the backing. Some of the students wrote different patchwork designs into their writing. Even historical information, like medieval knights using quilted vests for padding underneath their armor, was woven into some of their stories (Appendix G).

This year we were matched with pen pals from Nicaragua. We were required to send at least four batches of letters throughout the year. As a way for the students to process what they had learned about quilting, in one of the latter packets of letters we
sent, I had the students write to their pen pals about the quilt project. They were to include an explanation of quilting, its importance to the American culture, what they had learned about quilting, and their favorite project and why. It was a good way for the kids to reflect on the year.

Finally, for the quilt presentation, I had the kids write a short biography about themselves. We edited these and wrote a final draft. The biographies were mounted with their pictures so the audience at the presentation could read about “The Quilters” from my classroom.
Section 5: Connections to Social Studies

Connecting quilting to social studies was an easy fit. Quilting is so much a part of our American culture and history that it wasn’t hard to help the kids make the connection. Much of the literature we read (Section 2), contained a lot of information about quilt history.

In October, Lisa Walser, a local quilter and good friend, came in and talked about the history of Amish quilts. This presented another aspect of quilting-hand stitching. After we studied Amish quilts, Lisa gave each of the kids a sandwiched square of fabric. They drew a leaf design on top in chalk. Lisa then showed them how to thread their needles, tie a knot, bury the knot in the fabric and hand stitch their square. She also brought in an Amish style pieced top which we put on a quilting frame. After the kids had experience with the small square, they chalked designs on the large top and spent the year working on hand stitching the quilt top (Appendix H).

In December we took a field trip to Fort Missoula to see a quilt show that was on display. There were quilts from the 1800’s through the 1900’s. After listening to the curator talk briefly about the history of quilting, the kids were given the activity of looking at one specific quilt and learning as much about it as they could. It was exciting for the students to see quilts with the designs they had been reading about for three months. Many of the quilts in the museum were patchwork designs the students had studied and colored with the paper patchwork patterns. They were able to see how the patterns transferred into fabric blocks. Reading about a particular quilt’s history was very meaningful to them. Discovering why the quilt was made, the fabric used in the quilt, how old it was and who made it, made fascinating reading for the students. After
studying their quilt for twenty minutes, they could not wait to share their information
with the rest of the class (Appendix I).

I am fortunate to work in a school district that has access to some wonderful
resources. Vee Kiatoukasy works in the bilingual office in the Missoula County Public
School System. She emigrated from Laos several years ago. I invited her to come in and
share a Hmong story quilt with my students. She spent an afternoon with us, explaining
how the quilt told the story of the Hmong’s flight from Viet Nam. She had us study the
embroidered figures on the quilt. Each part of the quilt told a different part of her
people’s story. The quilt was beautiful and the story had so much meaning for my kids
when they could see it represented in the embroidered pictures on the quilt. The story
quilt helped my students understand an entirely different purpose for quilting. They had
read and studied the functional purposes of quilts. With the Hmong story quilt, the
students saw how a quilt could be used to preserve history (Appendix J).

In March I found a great website on the internet which had historical information
on many kinds of quilts from different American time periods. I printed off the
information and put it into folders. I then had the kids brainstorm some questions they
had about certain types of quilts. They were curious about the types of fabric that were
used in the quilts. They wanted to know why the quilters used the patterns they did and
how it was put together. Questions about how the quilts were used were also asked.
They then used those questions to research a type of quilt. To document their research,
they put the information onto an index card, illustrated the type of quilt and put the
information on a timeline.
Section 6: Connections to Science and Art

The connection of science and art to quilting evolved naturally. One of our units in science is weather. I am fortunate to work with an art teacher in the district, Janet Potts, who is not only a wonderful art teacher, but one who can make a connection in art to just about anything we do in the curriculum. When I approached Mrs. Potts with ways I could connect art to quilting and the curriculum, the area of science was the natural choice.

One of our first art/science projects was looking at weather and its relationship to the change of seasons. We studied how seasonal changes of sunlight and moisture caused deciduous trees to drop their leaves and move into a semi-dormant state. In the fall we collected several types of leaves. We then “painted the leaves” with fabric paint and printed the leaf print onto fabric. I then pieced and quilted the fabric squares into an autumn quilt. It’s a beautiful reminder of seasonal changes (Appendix K).

Later on we worked on our snowflake quilt (Section 3). We were studying snowflake crystals and how snowflakes vary with temperature and weather. I found a wonderful idea for a snowflake quilt in the book Creative Quilting with Kids by Maggie Ball. It entailed cutting out snowflakes from butcher paper, pressing them onto fabric, sponge painting the fabric squares with fabric paint, and then piecing the squares into a quilt. Janet’s help was invaluable in cutting out the snowflakes (so they stayed together and were symmetrical) and sponge painting the squares. The kids spent two days machine piecing the quilt squares to a black border and then sewing the blocks together into a quilt top. We then had a local machine quilter, Suzanne Sterrett, machine quilt our quilt. Her quilting outlined the snowflakes and the effect made the snowflakes look
three-dimensional. When the whole quilt was put together, it gave the appearance of looking out the window and seeing enlarged snowflakes falling. The idea that "no two snowflakes are alike" was driven home by the variety of snowflakes the students produced (Appendix K).

Another unit we study in science is matter. Some quick and easy projects we did for fun were translucent squares and Shrinky Dinks. These projects were wonderful for teaching the physical and chemical properties of matter. In the activity with translucent squares, the kids colored a paper quilt pattern with crayon. They colored every part of the pattern with crayon as dark as they could. They then explored what it looked like when it was held up to a window. They noticed that not much light came through the square. When they were finished, they rubbed salad oil over the top of the square and let it dry. When I asked them to predict what their square would look like when it was held up to the window again, almost everyone said that less light would show through. They were surprised when we held them up to the window-the salad oil made their squares translucent. It had changed the physical property of the paper by being absorbed into the pores of the paper (Appendix L).

Shrinky Dinks are made by drawing a design onto squares of size six plastic and then baking the plastic squares in the oven at 350 degrees. When the squares are heated, they shrink to about two-thirds of the original size, but the design is not distorted. The chemical reaction of the heat to the plastic changes the physical size of the plastic. The kids enjoyed this activity immensely, although they did not seem to fully understand the scientific principles involved (Appendix L).
Our last, and probably my favorite project, was what I called “The Fish Project.” This project was satisfying in many ways. First of all, it incorporated so many aspects of the curriculum. At the beginning of the year we studied Montana and Montana history. This unit incorporated the indigenous fish of Montana and each student picked a native fish to study. More than one student wanted the same fish so I allowed them to research information about the fish in groups of two or three. They spent several days collecting information on their fish from materials from Montana Fish and Game, library books, encyclopedias, and the internet. The collected information was put into the format of a research guide.

After doing their research and becoming the “expert” on their fish, Janet Potts came in and did a water color/craypa activity with the kids. Each one of them drew their fish, and then outlined the major parts of the fish with craypas. They then painted their fish and its surroundings with water colors.

The final step was reproducing their fish into a fabric wall hanging. Lisa Walser and another quilter, Joni Stormo, came in with a large tub of multi-colored fabric. Using a paper pattern and muslin form of the fish, the students cut out fabric to represent various parts of the fish. These were then glued onto the muslin form and onto a background. Students added fabric plant life and rocks later. When this was completed, Lisa then sandwiched the fish to the batting and backing. Afterwards, several quilters and I quilted the wall hangings. The results were beautiful. When the students were choosing the fabric for their fish, many chose fabric I wouldn’t have dreamed of using. I remember thinking, “That fabric doesn’t look anything like the fish. What made them choose that piece?” Yet I was surprised how some of the fabric the students chose
worked. The results were unique and amazing. I found that the students who took some “artistic license” with their fish often produced ones that were the most interesting. I was witnessing future Van Gogh’s, O’Keefe’s, and Rembrandt’s unfold before my very eyes. It was satisfying as well as amazing to see the variety. When the kids were asked which project during the year was their favorite, the majority said “The Fish Project” (Appendix M).
Section 7: My Personal Growth as a Quilter/Artist

At the outset of this project, I felt I needed to do some personal exploration in the art of quilting. I made a commitment at the beginning of the year to take some quilting classes, learn more about quilting, be a better teacher of quilting, and not be so dependant on my guest quilters to do projects with my students. Besides learning basic quilting techniques, I was curious to see how my own creativity in quilting would evolve.

At the beginning of the year, I knew very little about quilting. As mentioned before, I had done a few projects in the past. They consisted of sewing together simple block quilts that required little understanding of quilting skills. I was anxious to attempt some more complex quilt blocks, as well as piece together an artistic quilt. My quilting friends said that without a good machine, I would only get frustrated with the project. I had an old Singer sewing machine, so my first goal was to get a decent machine. Fortunately, I was able to purchase a good used Pfaff sewing machine from my friend Connie Running. After using my old machine for so long, the Pfaff made all the difference in the world! I actually had a machine that sewed consistent and even stitches and the thread wasn’t breaking every five minutes.

Throughout the year I took some quilting classes. In November I signed up for a double nine-patch quilt class at the Berry Patch sewing store here in Missoula. I spent five weeks putting together a quilt top and learning the basics for piecing a patchwork quilt. I picked solid colors of pink, purple, light blue and black. I’ve always liked Amish quilts and decided to pattern my quilt in the Amish style. There were some positive and negative aspects of the class. The step-by-step approach to piecing a quilt was great for learning how much fabric to use and how to cut the fabric using a rotary cutter, ruler, and
cutting mat. I also learned how to square up my blocks, mark off a quarter-inch seam, and the importance of ironing the seams! Finally I learned how to use triangle grid paper to piece triangles into squares which I had never tried before this class.

Even though I learned a lot in five weeks, I found the class frustrating. I couldn’t get a perfect quarter-inch seam so my blocks were uneven. When it came time to fit the blocks together, I had to even up each block so the top wasn’t crooked. The result wasn’t as satisfying as I had hoped either. I used too much light blue in the top. The effect made the quilt top much brighter than I wanted. I had to use a dark border to detract from the light blue. The last step involved framing the top with a saw tooth border. This entailed sewing two hundred one-inch triangles together for the border. The work was tedious and boring, though the result was beautiful. Yet with all the frustrations, I learned a lot about fabric choice. I also realized that smaller projects that didn’t require the same kind of piecing over and over were more appealing to me.

In December I practiced quilting using techniques I learned in my class. During this time, I tried small patchwork wall hangings to get the feel of piecing together a variety of designs. I also tried some machine quilting. I had fun making quilted Christmas tree ornaments for friends. I was right about the smaller projects. I didn’t get bored with them and they weren’t so unwieldy to sew. They were perfect pieces for me to practice what I had learned.

Later, in January I experimented piecing together a quilted vest. I was hoping to take a class to learn the techniques, but that didn’t work out so I tried it on my own. I’ve sewn several vests in the past, but have never tried to do a patchwork vest. I examined a quilted vest a friend had given me and modeled mine after that. It entailed sewing
together strips of fabric to make large pieces of pieced fabric. I am partial to the color blue, so I chose a variety of blue fabrics for the vest. After I cut strips of fabric, I randomly sewed the strips together. I enjoyed watching the results. Depending on the fabric pieces I sewed together, some piecing was more interesting and the effects more pleasing. What I found most satisfying was the exploration of color and design choices. When I put two busy pieces of fabric together the result was overwhelming to the eye. Some blues blended nicely next to each other, while others were awful. After I sewed the strips together I used a vest pattern to cut out the pieces to sew into a vest. Making the vest gave me the freedom to “play” with fabric color and design. I finished the vest and I wear it quite often, but it was the process and not the product that was so satisfying.

I had little experience with quilting with my machine so in March I took another class on machine quilting from Connie Running at the Bernina Sewing Center. I was nervous to try machine quilting because I didn’t want to ruin any of my pieces. The great thing about the class was that we used two pieces of inexpensive muslin for practice. The five hour class taught me many different machine quilting techniques. As with anything, the more I practiced, the better I got. I gained enough confidence that I finally machine quilted some small wall hangings at home.

In addition to the projects I was trying outside of school, I also created my own projects with my students in class. I felt that if this was a unit I wanted to do in future years, I really needed to have first hand knowledge of each and every project. That way I would know what went well, what needed tweaking, and what to eliminate. It was great sitting down next to my students, rolling up my sleeves, and diving into whatever quilting activity was in progress. The students enjoyed watching me work along side them,
struggle, and make mistakes and discoveries just like they did. I often tell my students during the year that I am also a student. They teach me as much as I teach them every day. I enjoy not knowing all the answers and having the opportunity to explore and discover right along with my students. This was very apparent in this project!

When we were hand-stitching our Amish squares, I had a very hard time keeping my stitches even and placed evenly apart. Many of my students faced the same challenge, but just as many caught on to the hand-stitching extremely well. It helped me empathize with students who lacked the same fine-motor control that I lacked. Those students who had no problems with the stitching enjoyed being significantly better than their teacher.

When the year started, I knew relatively little about quilting. What fun it was to ask questions and research quilting with my students this year. We learned so much with every field trip we took and every guest speaker we had into the classroom. And with each experience, it brought about new questions and opportunities for exploration in quilting. I loved having the opportunity of being a fellow student with my fourth grade class as well as a student of my fourth graders.

For the most part, my students were wonderfully uninhibited. They were great mentors for me. I tend to be cautious and afraid to try something because I am unsure of the result, whereas most of my students dive in and try. They have fun with the process of making something and they aren’t so concerned with the result. The best example I can give is the fish project. I wanted to make sure that the fabrics I chose were closely patterned to the paddlefish, which was the fish I studied. I carefully selected each piece so that it matched the coloring and patterns of the fish. I felt anxious when I couldn’t
find a piece that really matched the fish. Then I started looking at my students pieces. Some were like me, choosing each fabric piece to match their fish. Yet many chose fabric patterns that were totally different from their fish. One student used butterfly wings for fins. Another student used a bald eagle for part of his fish’s body. Seeing these amazing and interesting uses of fabric encouraged me to go back to my own fish and try artistic exploration of my own. Observing my students helped me learn about my own creativity and gave me the courage to explore different color and design choices (Appendix N).
Section 8: The Final Presentation

For my final presentation I planned to share the quilt projects and what the students learned. So many of the projects the kids worked on were so visually pleasing, I felt an audience needed to see them first hand. At the beginning of the year, I asked the class if they were interested in helping do a presentation at the end of our unit. Several of the students volunteered to help.

Various scenarios came to mind for the final presentation, but I eventually decided that a slide show was needed to present the project. I was fortunate to have a parent in my classroom, Jan Madison, who was willing to come in every week to take digital pictures of the ongoing projects. Through pictures, I documented every thing we did. An Americorps volunteer, Jimmy Shipley, helped me put the pictures into a Power Point Presentation.

In addition to the slide show, the students needed to show off their hard work through a display. I decided to have a gallery walk through the projects as well. I picked the University Congregational Church as the venue. It is my church and I am familiar and comfortable with its surroundings. The church members were helpful and willing to let me put up my projects in that space. Invitations were sent for the presentation to the faculty and my peers in the Creative Pulse program, the teachers at Lewis and Clark School, members of my church, my family and friends (Appendix O).

The final presentation consisted of displaying the quilts in the church sanctuary with a variety of draped and hanging quilts made by friends. As the audience arrived, they were directed by two of my students, who handed out programs, to take some time to look at the quilts in the sanctuary (Appendix P). The rest of the presentation consisted
of a short lecture about the project, the Power Point presentation of the projects my class and I worked on, and students reading some of their stories and poems and assisting me to narrate the show (Appendix Q). Afterwards the audience was directed to another room in the church to view the class projects and my personal projects (Appendix R).

I was extremely pleased with the presentation. There are always so many things that can go wrong, even with the best planned production. My Power Point presentation was in three parts and for some reason, one of the links connecting the second part to the ending wasn’t working. My husband and I were frantically working on it up until an hour before the presentation was to begin. Fortunately, we were able to trouble-shoot and got it to work. Even with the last minute glitch, I could not have asked for things to go any better.

The audience was enchanted with the quilts that were hung in the sanctuary. That was just the effect I wanted. I wanted the audience to see the beauty of these quilts and understand and appreciate what inspired this project. (Some audience members, inexperienced with quilting, asked if my class had done all the quilts!)

I was afraid I was going to be nervous, but when it came time to speak, I felt very comfortable and relaxed. I had chatted with several people before the show. So many in the audience were friends and family members, as well as peers from my Creative Pulse class; I had plenty of moral support.

My students did a wonderful job sharing their stories and poetry, as well as helping me narrate. I feel they were probably the most calming influence of all. It meant so much to me to have them be a part of the program and it was so important to have them help me share what we worked on throughout the year.
The gallery walk through the projects was very fulfilling. Even I was amazed at the amount of work we did through the year. Afterwards I was struck by how much fun I had giving the presentation. I was so proud of my students or the work we had accomplished in the project.
Analysis of the Project

Looking back on the year, I am extremely pleased with the project. There were many positive outcomes that I had not foreseen. There were also a few surprises and revelations along the way.

“Only if we expand and reformulate our view of what counts as human intellect will we be able to devise more appropriate ways of assessing it and more effective ways of educating it” (Gardner, 1993). It was exciting to meet the challenge of finding ways I could to help my class study the art of quilting. Opportunities were provided to allow each student’s strength to shine in different areas. Whether the activity was research, designing geometric patterns, writing poetry, or hand stitching a fabric square, there were several avenues for my class to connect with the concept of quilting.

At the beginning of the year, I was concerned there would not be enough to do with the students for a whole year. I was so wrong! As the year progressed, it got to the point that I had to be selective with my ideas. The project seemed to take on a life of its own. Continuing with the project all the way into June would have been no problem.

Another aspect of this project that was stimulating for me was watching the students explore something and get involved when they discovered a new concept. One activity that comes to mind, time after time, is when the kids colored six patchwork blocks and put them together. I loved watching their reactions when they discovered that the way they colored their block made it look totally different from their neighbor’s block, even when they had the same pattern. That was a real revelation! The class was particularly stimulated when Dr. Johnny Lott came in and showed us a quilt his grandmother had made. There were about thirty-six patchwork blocks in the quilt. Each
block had a matching block somewhere on the quilt, but the way it was put together gave
it a totally different design. My students were fascinated with the geometrical patterning.

In the future, it would be good to have the students journal regularly about their
learning. As I look back on the year, journaling consistently would have helped them
process their own individual learning as the year went on. We were doing so much, yet
time could have been taken to stop and have the students write down their thoughts. I did
my own journaling and it helped me process what I learned; what went well and what did
not. Weekly journaling would have been beneficial to my students as well as a way for
me to assess their learning.

A revelation that became apparent in the middle of the year was the need to slow
down. At the beginning of the year I had many quilting activities in mind. When we
started out, we had our “quilting” day on Friday afternoons. I attempted to do at least
two activities or projects every Friday. By the time 3:30 came around, both my students
and I were frazzled. In January I changed quilting day from Friday to Thursday. On
Thursday we have an early out so the school day only goes to 2:30. This allowed us to do
one project or activity each week and do it well. When we slowed down, learning was
much more relaxed, the quality of time spent on an activity improved, and the students
had time to finish their projects without feeling rushed.

In my own personal growth, I developed a joy in quilting. It was almost
therapeutic to go down to my sewing room and sew on a project. I also found that I am
not a patchwork quilter. The repetition of doing the same block over and over drives me
crazy. I got bored. The exploration of piecing fabric together in a variety of ways is
more my style. The fish project was great because it allowed more artistic latitude. My
seams did not need to be exactly one-quarter inch in order for the piece to go together. Half the fun of quilting was randomly taking fabric and putting it together to see how it turned out. The “grab-bag” style of quilting is for me.

I had hoped my own poetry writing would be inspired by this project. However, it just did not happen. I wrote a few poems, my favorite being “Histories” which I read at my final presentation, but for some reason, the poetry didn’t flow for me as it did when I worked on pottery. To write poetry, one should slow their thinking and concentrate on each concept. There were so many things I wanted to do and try, I was always thinking of what we were going to do next. I got caught up in the high energy of the project and had a hard time sitting back and taking time to reflect through poetry. It might come in time, after I have had time to relax and look back over the year.

The biggest benefit from this year was the in-depth study of a theme over the course of the school year. Each week that we keyed in on an idea, activity or project with quilting, the kids deepened their own understanding of the quilting process. Through this I realized the importance and benefit of taking a teaching idea and making multiple connections to the classroom curriculum. The in-depth study of quilting gave the class time to study a topic and deepen their understandings. The opportunity to thoroughly explore a topic was invaluable in helping the students see how a theme can be related to many areas of the classroom. Why choose quilting and not something like baseball or a foreign country to make those connections? I think I chose quilting because every student can connect to a quilt in some way. There wasn’t one student who didn’t have some personal connection with a quilt. They had either been given a quilt, had family or heirloom quilts in the house, or had made a quilt. A quilt is so wonderfully personal.
When we have been given a quilt, we have a strong emotional connection because it is tied to a person or special event. Quilts often celebrate births, birthdays, weddings, anniversaries, and even deaths. They are something we can handle and wrap around us for comfort.

In addition to the craft of quilting, the students had the opportunity to be artistic with the project. Besides learning about the history and mathematical aspects of quilting as well as a quilt’s functional purpose, they discovered quilting can be an art form. Choosing fabric colors and styles to develop a piece of fabric art enhanced a connection to the classroom which would have been hard to do with another area of study.

An added bonus was that this project pushed my creativity in teaching. I knew I was not going to be the expert and would have to rely on the help of others; people in the community, classes, and quilt literature to make the project work. A teacher does not have to know everything. A good teacher can be the “orchestra conductor” and with a little foresight, conduct a well thought-out project by bringing in the needed resources. The fun part was pulling it all together and having the opportunity to learn right along with my students.

Through this year, my eyes have been opened to my own teaching. I have found it is invaluable to have a concept that connects me to all my students. The quilting project cemented a strong bond between my students and me. I hope my students feel the same way. It was a wonderful year!
Epilogue

In the fall, one of my students brought in an old, faded baby quilt when we were sharing our quilts and quilt histories. The interaction between the guest quilter, Lisa Walser, and her, prompted me to write this poem.

Histories

Amid the intricate, colorful quilts lay a faded blue, much worn quilt. No fancy patchwork adorned this ragged bed covering.

Our guest quilter held up the quilt for the class to see, as the owner shared her quilt's history.

Tattered pieces of yarn hung loosely from the fuzzy blue flannel; and lumpy pieces of batting pooled in clumps at the quilt's bottom edge.

It was a plain quilt, with no complex pattern to set it apart from the other, fancier ones.

As my snaggle-toothed student finished her breathy explanation, the quilter stroked the quilt gently and thoughtfully.

"I can tell," said the quilter, "that this is a much-loved quilt!"

The student grinned and nodded as another student called out,

"Just like the Velveteen Rabbit!"

The quilter paused and smiled, "Yes, just like the Velveteen Rabbit."

Jane McAllister
2003
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Appendix C

Quilt Literature
Appendix B

Lesson Plan
Quilt Project
Example 1

Title: Quilt Designs and Histories

Subject/Grade Level: Social Studies
   Grades 3-6

Description: The student will study historical quilt designs and then share their own quilts and histories.

Objectives:
1. To understand the reason for the varying patchwork quilt designs.
2. The ability to recognize different patchwork patterns
3. To relate the historical knowledge of patchwork designs to their own personal quilts

Materials:
Book: My Grandmother’s Patchwork Quilt by Valerie Flourney.
Personal quilts
Written histories of their own quilts
A quilter who is knowledgeable about quilts and quilt history

Procedure:
A week prior to the activity, kids will take home a letter informing the family of the project. They are to bring in a personal quilt from home along with a paragraph that describes the quilt’s history. Some information that could be included would be who made the quilt, what materials were used, is it a certain pattern, and what was the quilt made for.

The day of the activity, read the book My Grandmother’s Patchwork Quilt. Talk about the quilt’s significance to the family in the story.

One by one, have the kids share their quilts and the quilt’s history with the rest of the class. If the kids don’t know some information about the quilt, the experienced quilter may be able to enlighten the student on what era the fabric is from or what type of design it is.

Follow-up: While the kids are presenting, the other kids should take notes in their quilting journals. At the end, have them journal about the quilts that were presented i.e. which quilts were their favorites and why? What they learned from the presentation.
Six Patch Pattern Blocks

Tulip square

Morgan Hyde

Tulip Square
By Samantha McInally
Appendix D

Lesson Plan
Quilt Project
Example 2

Title: Building on Shapes

Subject/Grade Level: Math
Grades 4-6

Description: The student color six blocks of the same pattern with three different colors. Each block will be colored the same.

Objectives:
1. The student will become familiar with various quilt block designs
2. The student will see how geometric shapes make new geometric shapes when they are put together
3. The student will understand the effects of different colors and geometric designs

Materials:
Book: Quilting Activities Across the Curriculum
Copies of quilt block patterns
Markers
Construction paper to mount the designs

Procedure:

Hand out six copies of a patchwork design to each student. (It doesn’t matter if more than one student has the same design. It’s even better if they do, then they can compare their overall design in the end.)

Have the kids make a three color choice from their markers. Make sure they only use three colors. Direct them to color their six copies of the design with their three colors and that each one must be colored the same way.

After they’ve colored the six blocks, have them assemble them into a six block paper quilt. Mount the squares onto black paper.

Follow-up: When everyone is finished, hang the blocks up. Have the kids study the designs and tell what they notice. Chart their discoveries on paper next to the blocks. (They should see that the way the blocks are assembled and the color choices that were used make very different patterns, even when one uses the same quilt design as someone else. They should also see that new geometric shapes are formed when put together.)
Putting together the holiday quilt
Appendix E

Sample of poems written by students

_Falling Snowflakes_

From top to bottom, remarkable.  
Snowflakes fall  
down and  
down, until you can no longer see them.  
They have so many  
designs; like six points or  
circular middles, separated  
into black framed squares, quilted  
all together.

_Katie Seaholm_  
_April, 2003_

_**My Quilt**_

My favorite quilt lies on my bed.  
It’s tattered,  
ripped,  
covered with Grandma’s love.  
Shaggy like a lion’s mane and old.  
My quilt keeps me  
warm. I will always love it.

_Ellie Dick_  
_April, 2003_

_Sunset Summer_

Up down up down up  
the needle sews swiftly  
around tight corners with  
gleaming colored threads.  
Up down, a beautiful  
sunset quilt glowing orange,  
yellow, and white lightly  
blowing in the breeze  
like gentle water  
ripples.

_Zack Murphy_  
_April, 2003_
Appendix F

Holiday Quilt Project

Letter to parents explaining the project

November, 2003

Dear Parents,

As part of our quilt project, I am having the kids write about a favorite holiday memory they have. For example, one of my favorite memories is of a Christmas my family spent at my cousin’s cabin in the woods. I had always wanted to have an “old-fashioned” Christmas where we cut down our tree, popped popcorn over the fire and strung cranberries and popcorn to decorate the tree. We cooked our turkey in a wood burning stove, (a feat in itself). On Christmas Day we spent the day hiking in the forest around the cabin and watching at Bighorn Sheep that were grazing in a meadow below the cabin. When we got cold, we sat inside the cabin watching the snow and drinking hot chocolate. To me, it was perfect!

I would like the kids to write about a favorite memory, and then represent that memory in a quilt block. I am sending home an 8” X 8” block with each of the kids. They can draw on the block, appliqué a scene, use fabric paint, use fusible web to fuse fabric onto the piece, or even design and sew a “symbolic” quilt block. In my case, I might sew a log cabin patchwork block to represent my memory. The project is very open-ended, but I want to allow freedom for each student’s creativity.

If you have any talent in sewing, you might help guide your child through sewing a block, but remember, I really want this block to be theirs. I am asking that the quilt block be finished and brought back in by Monday, December 9. Thank you so much for your cooperation.

Sincerely,

Ms. McAllister
Appendix H

Working on hand quilting squares and an Amish quilt
Appendix G

Example of a student’s quilt story

The Giving Quilt
By Morgan Squires

One morning in a little cottage, a nine-year old girl named Grace told her mother, Martha, “We need a quilt. I get too cold at night.” Grace had hair the color of the sun and she was strong from chores. Martha’s hair was amber. She was tall with gentle blue eyes.

“Grace, we don’t have any fabric or money for fabric. We just don’t have any extra money,” said Martha quietly. But Grace got an idea. She told Ma she was going to town, and set out to accomplish her plan. On her way to town, she came to a deserted Homestead. There was an old brown barrel that had been left behind. So, she rolled it into town and into the General Store. Grace wrote a sign that read:

Wanted Fabric for a Quilt.

A couple of days went by, but nothing was left in the barrel. Then one day, she found a four-by-four piece of fabric and a dress just her size in the barrel. Grace wondered what she would do with the fabric and dress. “I know! I will hide the dress in my doll box and sew the fabric into a quilt.”

Late into the night, Grace traced the sunset pattern in the moonlight. Grace chose that pattern because it was easy enough for her first quilting project. From then on, every week, there was one more piece of fabric in the barrel. One week there were two pieces of fabric instead of one. One week she found thread in the barrel. She was grateful because she was running dangerously low.
After a month went by, she had enough fabric to finish the quilt and then some. So that week when she went to the store, Grace flipped her sign over and wrote:

**Thank you with all my heart for the fabric and dress.**

That evening, Grace finished the quilt. She realized that Martha’s birthday was the following day. She would sew an apron for Ma. Because of all the sewing she had been doing, she had very nimble fingers. She finished the apron by 10:30 that night. With a little spare fabric, she wrapped up the quilt and apron then went to bed.

At midnight, she crept back downstairs. It was a clear, crisp night in late November with a full moon shining in the window. An owl called in the distance. She set the present on the table, ran upstairs to bed and fell sound asleep.

The next morning, she awoke to the ringing of the clock tower. “Hurry up Grace. It’s seven o’clock,” called Martha. Grace hopped out of bed, carefully lifted the new dress out of the doll box and put it on. The dress fell to Grace’s ankles. It was the best dress Grace ever had owned. Grace went downstairs and breakfast was waiting on the table. When Martha saw Grace, she was astonished. But before Ma could say anything, Grace said, “Open it!” Ma opened the package, careful not to rip the fabric. She would use it for patching up clothes. She drew out the quilt and opened it wide so Grace could see. Then she tried on the apron. It was beautiful on Ma.

The apron was light blue with dark blue straps and magenta pockets. “Everything is so lovely Grace. How can I thank you? Where did you get all this fabric?” asked Ma. And Grace told her the whole story. “But what shall we call the Quilt?” asked Ma.

As they ate breakfast, grace announced, “The quilt shall be called the Giving Quilt because all the fabric was given to us!”
Appendix I

Going to Fort Missoula Museum
to look at historical quilts
Appendix J

Vee Kiatoukasy Sharing the Hmong Story Quilt
Appendix K

Autumn Leaf Print Quilt

Snowflake Quilt
Appendix L

Translucent Squares

Shrinky Dinks
Appendix M

The Fish Project

Doing the research

Painting the fish with Mrs. Potts
Example of the painted fish

Making the fabric fish
Appendix N

Working on my own projects
Jane McAllister cordially invites you to attend her master’s presentation on “Quilting: A Thread to Connect the Curriculum.

April 24, 2003
7:00 pm
UCC Church
401 University Ave.
Missoula, Montana

Reception and gallery walk will follow the presentation.
Appendix Q

The Presentation

Hanging and draped quilts in the church sanctuary
Appendix P

Quilt Program

I give my sincere thanks to the countless number of people who supported me in this project.

To all quilters, past and present, you are truly an inspiration to all of us!

Quilting: A Thread to Connect the Curriculum

Presented by
Jane McAllister and Fourth Grade Students
7:00 PM
April 24th, 2003

Ms. McAllister’s Class of 2002-2003:

Aidan Avery
Taylor Sheridan
Allecia Leszczcz
Tylor Martin
Cade Cross
Veronica Engebretson
Ellie Dick
Yasmin Chaudry
Howard Juneau
Zack Murphy
Jack Marso
Jeff Madison
Jeremy Stewart
John Alonso
Johnny Terry
Karrah Mitchell
Katie Seaholm
Mack Schaefer

Matthew Harris
McCall Hasquet
Morgan Hyde
Morgan Squires
Neil Emminger
Quinton Gangle
Ryan Bowers
Samantha
McInally
Shavez Hiatt
Tannin Trafton

Tonight’s Program

Inspirations
Hanging Quilts
Creative Pulse Background
Jane McAllister
Poem
Jane McAllister
About the Project
Jane McAllister
Golden Threads
Sam McInally
Project Slide Show
Jane McAllister, Aidan Avery, Yasmin Chaudry
Stories/Poems
Karrah Mitchell, Morgan Squires, Morgan Hyde
Poem
Jane McAllister
Images from the year Power Point presentation

At this point, please join us in the Fireside Room for refreshments and a viewing of the projects.
Presenting the Power Point slide show
Viewing the class projects
Viewing the class projects
Bibliography


