



MINGEI INTERNATIONAL MUSEUM
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EDUCATION GUIDE

INFORMATION AND IDEAS FOR EDUCATORS

BOLD EXPRESSIONS

African American Quilts

from the Collection of Corrine Riley

May 15 – December 18, 2011



EXHIBITION INTRODUCTION

BOLD EXPRESSIONS – African American Quilts from the Collection of Corrine Riley showcases quilts made throughout the American South between 1910 and the 1970s. Stunning color combinations and distinctively free patterns epitomize an art form that is unique to the American folk art tradition. African American quilts, made entirely by women, are celebrated for their geometric shapes, bright and bold colors, asymmetrical designs and improvisational patterns based on traditional designs.

African American quilt-making has been celebrated across the nation in several touring exhibitions featuring quilts made in Gee's Bend, Alabama, a remote community noted for its exceptional quilters and its rich quilting tradition dating back several generations. ***BOLD EXPRESSIONS – African American Quilts from the collection of Corrine Riley*** looks beyond the quilts of Gee's Bend to celebrate quilts made throughout the southern states.

The materials chosen for these quilts often reflect their intended use. Light summer quilts are frequently made with cool cotton, while heavier winter quilts dictate the use of wool, corduroy and thick batting. Many of the quilts are made from materials that were readily available to the makers, including flour sacks, old blue jeans and work clothes and fabric remnants. This early form of recycling and reuse was a necessity that became the foundation for unique expression. The exhibition also explores a variety of construction and quilting techniques.

More than thirty years ago, Corrine Riley found herself drawn to the color combinations and unique patterns of these expressive creations. As a student at the Art Institute of Chicago, Riley was exposed to “big” modern paintings, which set her on what she described as a quest “to look for things in the real world that displayed this quality of intense personal expression.” Her personal journey as a quilt collector has taken her to antique shows, county fairs, flea markets, church gatherings and quilt sales throughout the southern and midwestern states.

GEOGRAPHIC CONNECTION



*Map of the United States of America with southern states represented in **BOLD EXPRESSIONS** in color.*

Many of the quilts in **Bold Expressions** were created in Alabama and Texas. However, quilts from Mississippi, Georgia, Louisiana, Tennessee, Illinois, Indiana, Kentucky, Florida, Missouri and Arkansas are also represented. This area of the United States is commonly referred to as the American South, an area with a rich cultural heritage.

AFRICAN AMERICAN QUILT CHARACTERISTICS

Geometric Shapes

Shapes such as squares, circles, triangles and polygons created with lines, curves and angles are found throughout African American quilts, often loosely based on a traditional pattern that have been re-imagined and/or improvised.

Bright and Bold Colors

Bright and bold colors stand out and catch our attention. African American quilters use a variety of colors to attract the eye and create movement throughout the composition of the quilt.

Asymmetrical Designs

African American quilts emphasize asymmetry in its compositions. Asymmetry means *not* balanced, or that the design on one side or half of the quilt does not match the design on the other.

Improvisational patterns

Instead of following straight and orderly patterns, many of the quilts in *Bold Expressions* are improvised, or created in a freer style, often made up as the quilter goes along.

Use of Available and Unique Materials

Many of the quilts in *Bold Expressions* were made with accessible materials such as worn work clothes, old denim jeans, flour sacks and scrap fabric from previous sewing or quilting projects.

EXHIBITION VOCABULARY

PARTS OF A QUILT

Top – the uppermost layer of a quilt that is intended to be viewed

Backing – piece(s) of cloth that form the underside of a quilt

Batting – the middle layer of a quilt, usually cotton, but is sometimes made of newspaper or scrap fabric

Seam – a line where two pieces of fabric are sewn together

CONSTRUCTION TECHNIQUES

Appliqué – a technique in which pieces of fabric are sewn or stuck onto a larger piece of fabric to form pictures or patterns

Piecing – a technique in which two pieces of fabric are joined together along a seam

Strip quilting – a technique in which long, narrow pieces *or* strips of cloth are joined (or pieced) together lengthwise

FINISHING TECHNIQUES

Quilting – the process of attaching multiple layers of fabric together with continuous stitches, either by hand or with a machine

Tying / Tacking – the process of using string to tie the layers of a quilt together with knots

MINGEI INTERNATIONAL VOCABULARY

Mingei – a Japanese word meaning *art of the people* or, literally, *everybody's art*, and referring mainly to useful objects of everyday life made by hand

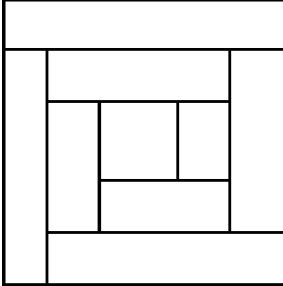

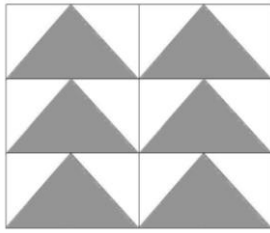

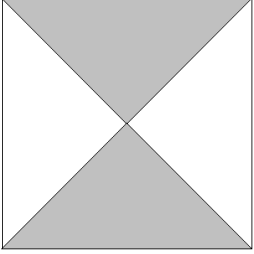

Folk Art – often referring to art produced using the traditional practices of a particular nation or region, usually reflecting traditional culture, everyday customs, history and/or religion; Folk art objects are often created by artists who have not received an academic education or formal training, but rather, have learned traditions passed down within a culture

Craft – often referring to objects created by a skilled artisan or tradesperson, requiring training and manual dexterity; pottery, woodworking, metalsmithing and weaving are all examples of craft

Design – today, often refers to the creative process leading to objects of use mass produced by machines

QUILTING PATTERNS

Use the graph below to see how African American quilters have used improvisation to re-envision traditional quilt designs and patterns.

Pattern Name	Pattern Description	Traditional Pattern	Improvised Pattern
Log Cabin or House Top	A strip pattern block with the largest strips on the outside and graduated shorter strips toward the center. This pattern is recognized as either a Log Cabin or House Top design.		
Flying Geese	Triangles positioned one on top of another; the pattern name and design refer to the northerly migration of geese.		
Egg Timer	Two triangles with their points meeting, resembling the shape of an egg timer.		

INTRODUCING STUDENTS TO QUILTING

A quilt is a type of bed covering that usually consists of three layers of cloth:

Top – often decorative layer meant to be visible

Batting – middle layer of cotton or other materials such as newspaper

Backing – the bottom layer

The layers are sewn or *quilted* together using a series of continuous stitches, either by hand or machine, or pieces of string called *tying*. The visible top layer is often created by sewing or *piecing* smaller pieces of fabric together in a decorative pattern.

More than just an object to keep one warm, a quilt represents security, tradition, family and history. Parents and grandparents pass special techniques and patterns down to their children, who in turn, preserve these traditions for future generations.

Consider the following questions (*Questions adaptable to grade level*)

- What is a quilt?
 - Have you ever seen a quilt before? Or used one?
 - What kinds of images, shapes or lines might you expect to find on a quilt?
 - What are quilts made of?
 - What are quilts used for?
 - What is the difference between a quilt and other types of bed coverings? How are they the same?
- Referencing the quilts in Mingei International's ***Bold Expressions***, explain to students that the quilts were made by African American women (1910-1970s), and contain common characteristics such as bright and bold colors, geometric designs, asymmetry, improvisation and the use of unique materials. Review these characteristic with students.
 - Using the *Educator Resource* page on Mingei International's website, show students examples of the quilts from ***Bold Expressions*** and ask them to discuss either as a class or in small groups how the characteristics just discussed were used in each quilt.

HANDS-ON ACTIVITIES

Improvising a Pattern

Grades K-5th

OBJECTIVES

- Students will use lines, shapes, forms and colors to make patterns.
- Students will use geometric shapes/forms in a work of art.
- Students will describe how art plays a role in reflecting life.
- Students will discuss how the subject and selection of materials relates to the meaning and/or purpose of a work of art.

MATERIALS

- Pattern template A (pg. 7) copied onto various colors of paper
- Template B (pg. 8) copied onto regular white copy paper
- Scissors
- Glue sticks
- Large sheet of butcher paper

WARM-UP - *Questions adaptable to grade level*

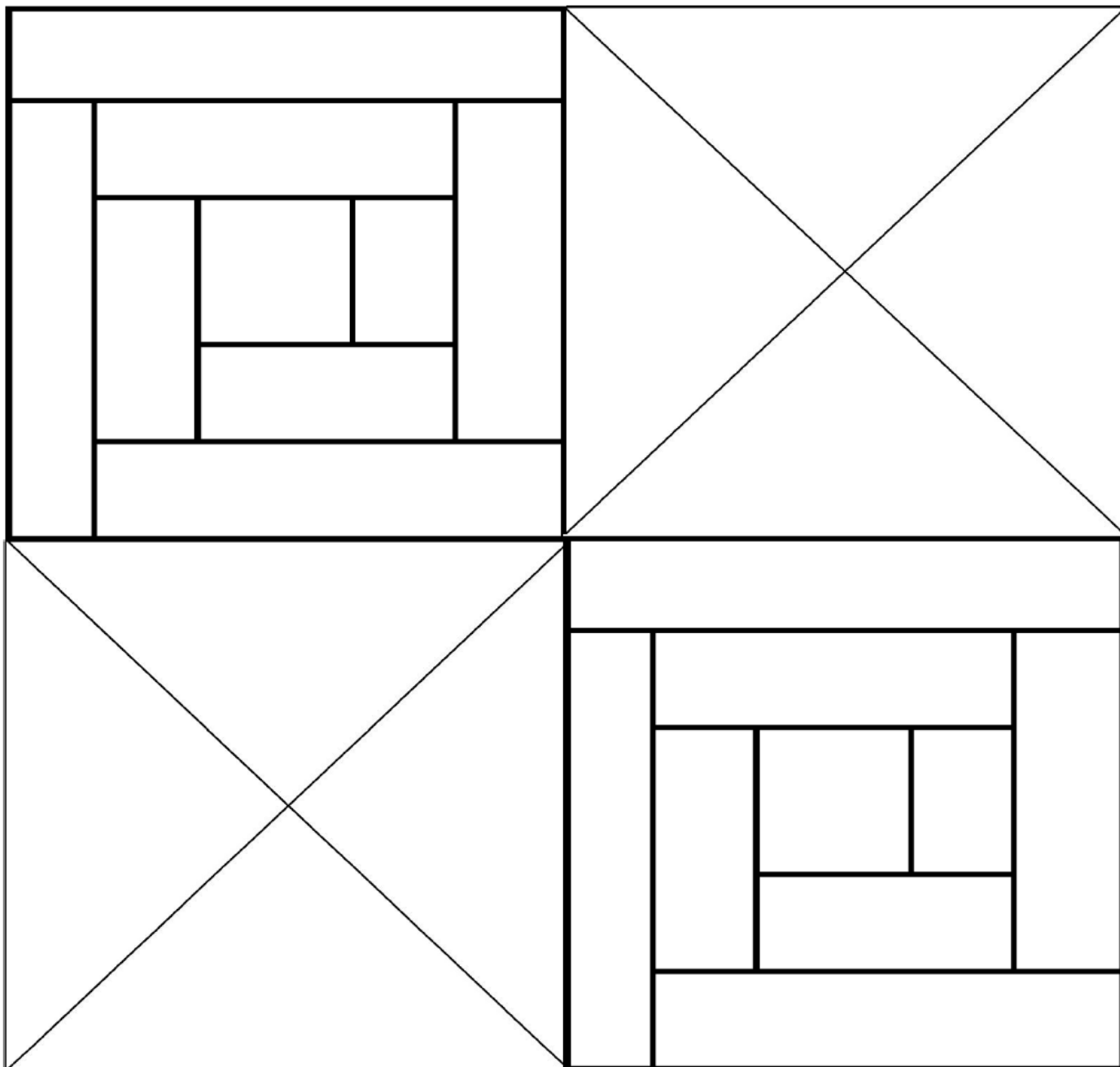
- Show students several quilts from ***Bold Expressions*** (high resolution images are available on the museum's website). Allow students to study each image for at least thirty seconds, and before sharing any background information ask them what they *see*. Engage visual literacy skills by asking students to think critically about the object prior to having any background information: *What are you looking at? What do you think it is made of? How do you think it was created? What do you think it is used for? What do you see that makes you say that?*
- Discuss patterns with your class. Explain that a pattern is a design or motif that is repeated. Find examples of patterns in the classroom or on someone's clothing.

Explain that traditional American quilting begins with a basic pattern that is repeated throughout the quilt. Introduce the egg timer, house top, log cabin and flying geese patterns while viewing the quilts from the exhibition. Explain the characteristic of African American quilting as described in ***Bold Expressions***, bright and bold colors, geometric designs, asymmetry, improvisation and unique materials. Focus on the idea of improvisation and using the works from the Museum's exhibition, ask students to point out how improvisation might have been used. Does it look similar or different from the traditional American-style patterns? *High resolution images are available at www.mingei.org/education/resources*

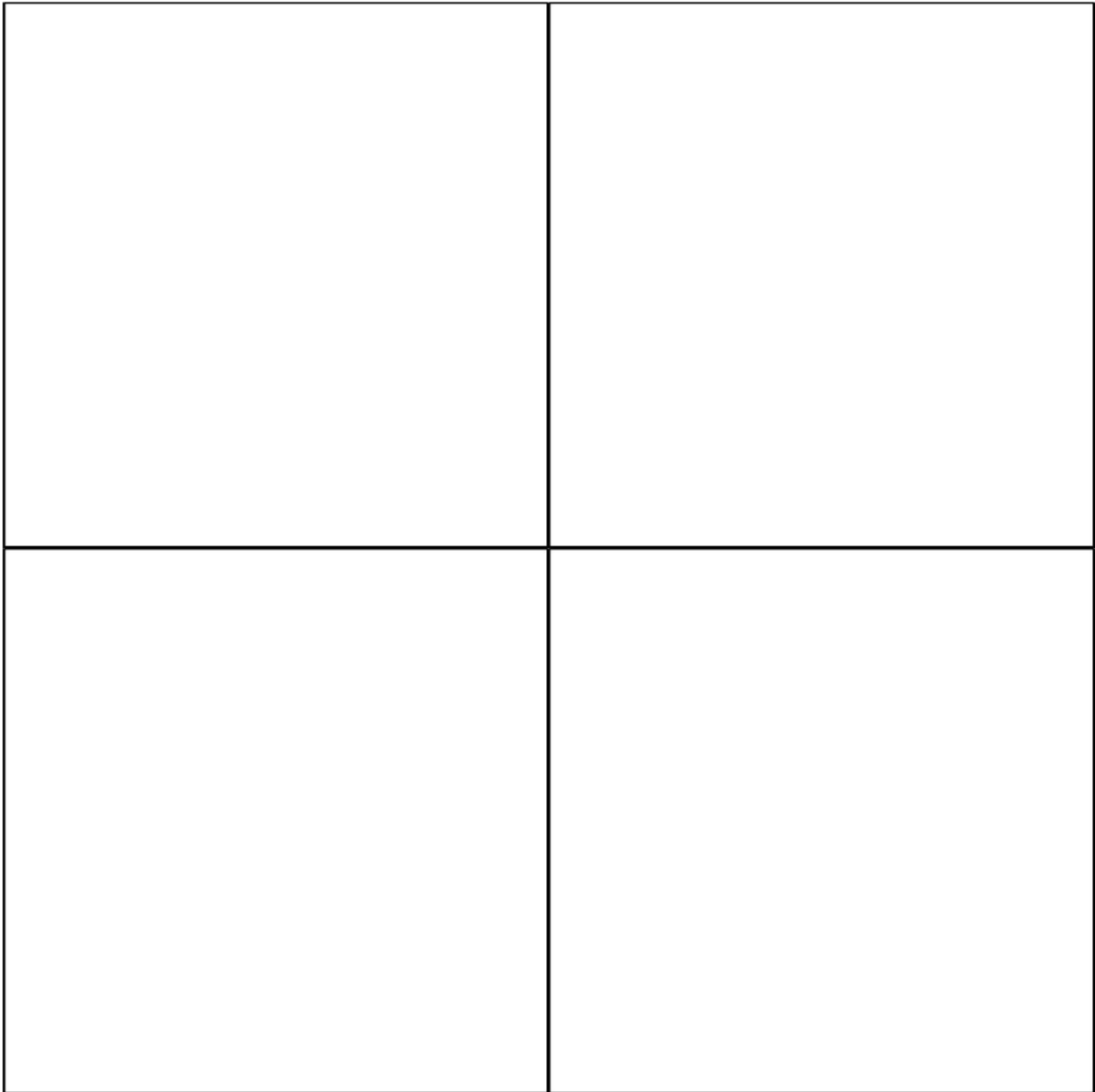
DIRECTIONS - *Directions adaptable to grade level*

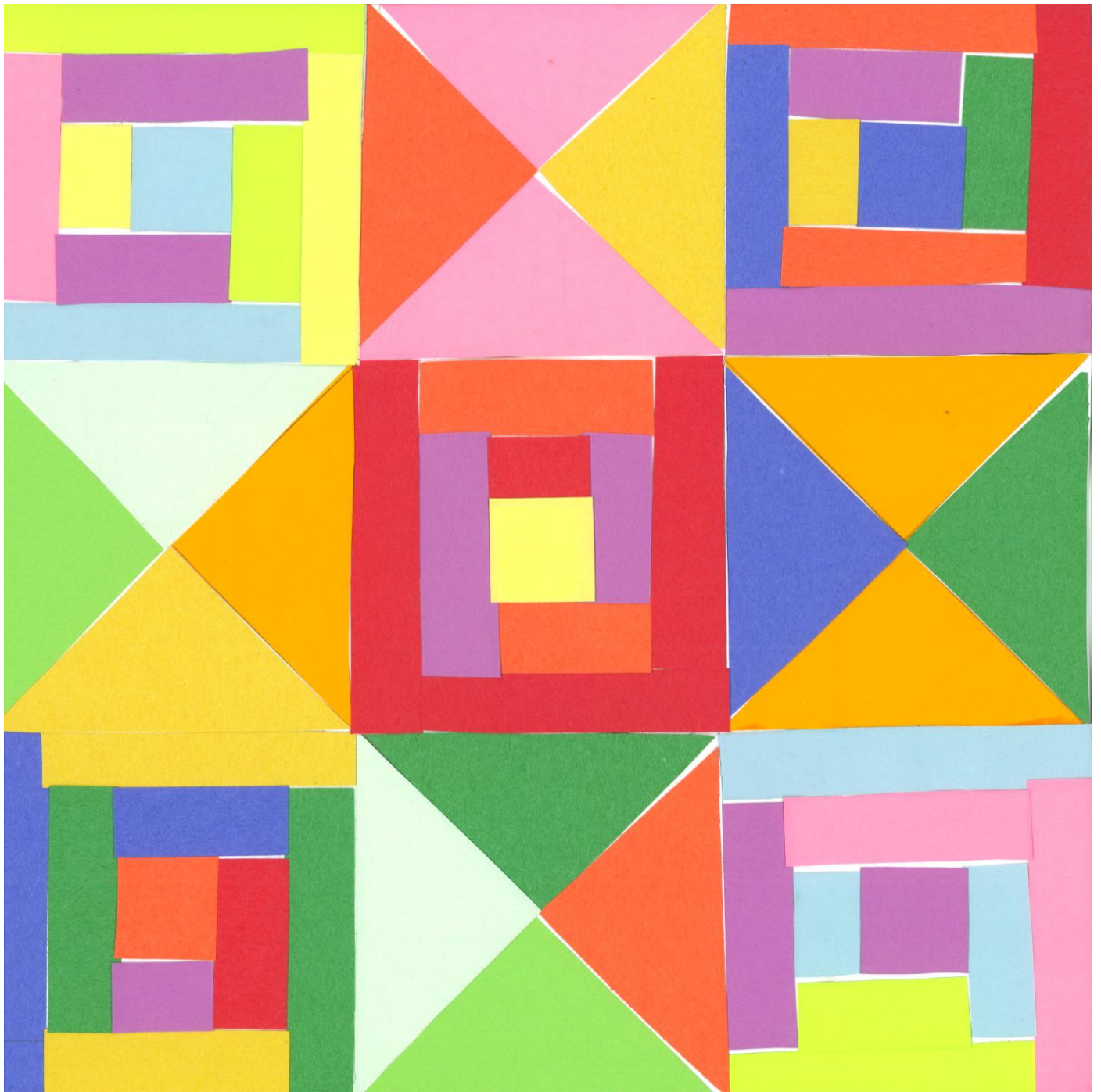
- Make photocopies of pattern template A (House Top and Egg Timer patterns) onto different colored paper. Give each student a sheet, and ask them to cut out each of the shapes on the page (this should add up to 16 rectangles, 2 squares and 8 triangles in front of every student).
- Have students team up in groups of four or more with students who have colors different than theirs. Have everyone in the groups compile their shapes together. Using template B, ask students to pick a variety of colors and shapes and arrange them in the 4x4 in. squares on template B, anywhere they would like, experimenting with different colors, patterns, positions and shapes. Once arranged, the shapes can be glued down.
- Arrange everyone's squares onto a sheet of large butcher paper to create a large paper quilt. Depending on the number of students in the class, a few extra squares may have to be created in order to create a perfect square or rectangle.

Template (A)
House Top and Egg Timer patterns



Template (B)
4x4 inch Squares





Student Quilt featuring Improvised House Top and Egg Timer Patterns

Create an African American-style Quilt

Grades 6th-12th

OBJECTIVES

- Students will identify and describe all the elements of art found in selected works of art.
- Students will identify and describe how balance is used in a work of art
- Students will recognize and describe how art reflects the society in which it was made.
- Students will analyze and justify how their artistic choices contribute to the expressive quality of their own work.
- Students will create increasingly complex original works of art reflecting personal choices and increased technical skill.
- Students will construct and describe plausible interpretations of what they perceive in works of art.

MATERIALS

- Cardboard or poster board cut into 6x9 in. rectangles
- Denim cut into 7x10 in. rectangles
- Mod Podge or Elmer's Glue thinned down with water
- Paintbrushes
- Scissors
- Yarn
- Tape
- Scraps of various kinds of fabric: printed fabrics, denim, velvet, corduroy, cotton, polyester, wool, etc
- Optional: invite students to bring in articles of clothing or old fabric that they can cut up

WARM-UP – *Questions adaptable to grade level*

- Show students several quilts from ***Bold Expressions*** (high resolution images are available on the museum's website). Allow students to study each image for at least thirty seconds, and before sharing any background information on the images, ask them what they *see*. Engage visual literacy skills by asking students to think critically before sharing background information: *What are you looking at? What do you think it is made of? How do you think it was created? What do you think it is used for? What do you see that makes you say that?*
- Show students an example of a quilt made with multiple types of fabric, such as *Crazy Quilt with Improvisational Strip Construction (Alabama, 1920s-30s)*. Ask students how many different types of fabric might have been used to create it. Are the fabrics similar to one another or different? How would each fabric feel if they could touch it? Which seasons of the year would they wear each fabric? Show students an image of *Work-Clothes Quilt (Georgia, 1940s)* made from denim work clothes. Ask them what materials they think might have been used to make this quilt? What do you see that makes you say that? Why might someone make a quilt out of old jeans? Do you think it would be light or heavy? Do you think the design was made from a pattern or improvised? What do you see that makes you say that?
- Explain that many of the quilts in ***Bold Expressions*** were made with readily available materials. This includes old work clothes, blue jeans, bed sheets and even flour sacks. Even the tiniest of scraps were salvaged and sewn together. Clothing belonging to loved ones were also used to create quilts that family members could remember them by. What might the materials used in a quilt tell you about the person who created it? What can the material tell you about the social, cultural and natural environment of the American South?

DIRECTIONS - *Directions adaptable to grade level*

- Give each student a cardboard or poster board rectangle.
- Have students begin to choose scraps of fabric, or cut out their own. Experiment with arranging different shapes, colors and textures together to create a design using characteristic found in African American quilts (geometric designs, bright and bold colors, asymmetrical designs, improvisational patterns and unique materials, see pg. 3).
- Use the paintbrush to “paint” a thin layer of Mod Podge onto the board and glue the fabric pieces down, covering the entire surface. Apply more layers of glue to overlap fabric. If fabric extends beyond the board, students may trim the edges or leave as is.
- Allow a few minutes for the Mod Podge to dry. Tape a piece of yarn to the back to allow the quilt to hang. Apply more Mod Podge to the back of the piece over the taped yarn, and adhere to the middle of the denim rectangle. This will cover the tape on the back and create a denim border around the quilt. Have students hang their quilts around the classroom to create their own mini quilt exhibition!



Student quilts inspired by African American quilting techniques

IN PREPARATION FOR YOUR VISIT:

- Schedule a Museum visit and Docent-led tour through the Education Department. Mingei International offers **free** admission to all K-12th grade groups and transportation reimbursements for Title 1 schools.
 - Email: ec-asst@mingei.org
 - Call: 619-704-7492
 - Complete an online tour request form:
www.mingei.org/education/museum-tour-request

- Discuss Museum etiquette:
 - Touching harms the art; refrain from touching objects in the Museum. A Museum Docent will point out any objects that may be touched.
 - Running and roughhousing in the Museum is both dangerous and distracting to others – instead, walk quietly, talk softly and listen carefully to the interesting information your Docent will share with you.
 - All food and drinks must be left at the front desk prior to entering the galleries.

- Explain to students that a Museum Docent will guide them through the exhibition. Explain that a Docent is a knowledgeable Museum-trained volunteer who will share lots of valuable information with them.

- Explain that Mingei International is a Museum of folk art, craft and design that shows work from all over the world, and that “Mingei” is a Japanese word that means “art of the people.”

- Use the Museum’s mission statement to encourage understanding:

Mingei International Museum is dedicated to the understanding and appreciation of 'art of the people' (mingei) from all cultures of the world; this art shares a direct simplicity and reflects a joy in making, by hand, useful objects of timeless beauty that are satisfying to the human spirit. The Museum collects, conserves and exhibits these arts of daily life — by unknown craftsmen of ancient times; from traditional cultures of past and present; and by historical and contemporary designers.



EXTENSIONS

California Content Standard Aligned

Kindergarten – GRADE 2

Show students an image of a quilt from *Bold Expressions* (high resolution images are available online) and have students describe the lines, shapes and colors they see. Review colors, shape, line and size while discussing the quilt. Have students draw, locate and count the shapes, colors and lines as they are reviewed. (**English Language Arts:** K Speaking Applications 2.1; **Math:** K Number Sense 1.2, Measurement and Geometry 2.1; 1st grade Measurement and Geometry 2.1, **Visual Arts:** 1st grade 1.3)

Bring in examples of different types of fabrics: denim, cotton, corduroy, velvet, etc. Have groups of students examine each fabric and sort them according to color, texture, height, etc. What do they feel like? When would you use or wear each fabric (winter vs. summer, special occasion vs. going to school)? (**Science:** K 4b, 4d)

GRADES 3 – 5

Introduce tessellations by discussing pattern and repetition. A tessellation is a series of interlocking shapes with no spaces between them, such as a brick wall, a honeycomb or a checkerboard. What are some other examples of tessellations students have seen? Show an image of *Broken Stars Quilt* (Louisiana, 1940s). What shapes is the quilt composed of? What are the properties of each shape (attributes and angles of polygons and triangles)? How do different shapes fit together to form other shapes? Does this create a tessellation? Discuss what kind of symmetry appears. Have students create their own tessellation using this worksheet <http://www.teachervision.fen.com/tv/printables/Creating-Tessellations.pdf> (**Math:** 3rd grade Measurement and Geometry 2.0-2.6, 4th grade Measurement and Geometry 3.4-3.8)

As a class, discuss the significance of tradition. What is tradition and why is it important? Explain how quilting was a tradition that was often passed down within a family. In a reflective journal entry, have students write about a tradition that is special to their family, culture, school, community or country. What traditions did their parents or family members pass down to them? Why is that tradition important? Has this tradition changed over time? (**English Language Arts:** 3rd grade Writing 1.1, 4th grade Writing Applications 2.0)

GRADES 6 – 8

Research the history of quilting and its origins in other areas of the world. Compare and contrast quilting traditions in at least two different regions, such as China and Europe, or India and Egypt. How did these traditions begin and why were they important in these cultures? How do the geography, history and tradition of quilting in these areas compare with African American quilting? What role do quilts, weaving or textiles play in each culture? Illustrate an example of a quilt from each civilization using a drawing program on the computer, and compare and contrast each based on the elements of art. Have students share their findings with the class. (**History Social Science:** 6th grade 6.2, 6.5, 6.6; **Visual Arts:** 6th grade 1.1, 2.6, 3.0, 3.2, 3.3, 7th grade 3.1, 3.2)

Study the origins and development of jazz music. How does jazz relate to the quilts in *Bold Expressions*? What role does improvisation play in each artistic form? Create a multimedia presentation that reflects that time and culture. (**Visual Arts:** 7th grade 5.1)

GRADES 9 – 12

Introduce the concept of *phi* or the Golden Ratio, a mathematical constant found repeatedly in nature, equal to 1.618. Renowned artists and architects throughout history have been known to use the Golden Ratio in their work. Although the quilts in *Bold Expressions* may not follow the Golden Ratio, many quilters use the concept to determine proportions and borders of their quilts. It is still possible to find traces of the Golden Ratio in some parts of the quilts in the exhibition. Explore the Golden Ratio with activities on this site <http://math.rice.edu/~lanius/Geom/golden.html> and confirm the ratio using algebra and geometry. (**Mathematics:** 8th-12th Algebra I 5.0, 13.0; Geometry 3.0, Algebra II 6.0)

Using the book *Spirits of the Cloth: Contemporary African American Quilts* by Carolyn L. Mazloomi, compare and contrast the work of contemporary African American quilters with the quilts in *Bold Expressions*. How are they similar to and different from one another? Review the quilts by applying the elements of art and principles of design. How is the composition of each quilt affected by use of a particular principle of design? How do the significance of the quilts in Bold Expressions differ from the contemporary quilts illustrated in the book? Have students create an example using the Quilt Activity above. (**Visual Arts:** 9th-12th 1.4, 4.2)

WEB RESOURCES

Mingei International Museum

www.mingei.org

Bold Expressions – African American Quilts from the Collection of Corrine Riley

<http://www.mingei.org/exhibitions/details/900>

African American quilts – General

http://www.womenfolk.com/quilting_history/afam.htm

http://www.womenfolk.com/quilting_history/colonial.htm

<http://xroads.virginia.edu/~ug97/quilt/atrad.html>

http://www.louisianafolklife.org/quilts/features/aa_quilters.shtm

<http://www.allmattersafrican.com/african-american-quilting-tradition.html>

Log Cabin pattern activity

<http://www.museum.state.il.us/flashapps/clink/logcabin.swf>

Gee's Bend

<http://www.quiltsofgeesbend.com/>

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