

The Quilted Community – Community Mapping through Quilting

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Suggested Grade Level(s): P-3 May be adapted for older children.

Suggested Length of Class Time: Two 30 minute classes, or 1 hour long class.

Subject Areas: Social Studies, Visual Arts

Rationale:

Quilting is an excellent metaphor for community; diverse pieces coming together to form a whole. Though this metaphor may in some ways be beyond young children, it nonetheless offers excellent inspiration for exploration.

The material and techniques used to create a quilt are themselves worth exploring. It is sometimes surprising to discover that many children have only a very vague idea of sewing. This craft, which was once so day-to-day and commonplace, is now rarely seen in the home. Children enjoy inspecting such handiwork especially if they are given a chance to see how it is done. A small sewing demo (no need for expertise, just a few stitches will do!) can go a long way to helping them understand.

The subject matter of a quilt as an old community in Nova Scotia allows children to contemplate different aspects of a community. The map contains both natural and constructed characteristics: a river, a lake and a forest as well as buildings, roads and train tracks. Through this project the children will become familiar with the physical aspects of a community, and as they work together on their quilts they will be experience the human side of community through co-operation.

Logistics:

Classroom setup – Class discussion and group work. Children will make quilts in groups of eight or less. Each group should have space on the floor for their quilt as well as a table or group of desks. Alternatively, all can be done on the floor.

If you are doing the whole lesson at once, the contact paper must be set up beforehand. However, it is very tempting to little hands so be prepared to warn them not to touch.

Materials –

Coloured or clear contact paper

Additional clear contact paper for finishing the quilts (optional)

Fabric scraps (see note) or construction paper in different colours

Masking tape

Scissors

Markers

Needle and thread for sewing demo (optional)

Note: Using fabric for this project ties it in with the idea of quilting and children will enjoy using real material. As an added dimension to the project, scraps of fabric could be solicited from children's families. This strengthens the idea of reusing old material to make something new, and using diverse pieces to make a whole. The only downside to using cloth is that young children will find it difficult to cut so more preparation is necessary.

Suggested resources/images – Map of Meaghers Grant quilt by Evelyn Dickie (included with this lesson plan, page 5) or other images of community quilts available online.

Suggested Outcomes:

Students will be expected to

- Describe some of the natural and constructed characteristics of a community
- Use basic mapping skills
- Identify connections between their community and other communities
- Use a range of materials and processes
- Work with others in art-making
- Recognize quilting as one of a variety of art forms

Prep: Cut two or three (depending on the width) large pieces of contact paper for each quilt. Remove backing and tape contact paper **STICKY SIDE UP** to the floor, overlapping pieces together so you have a large square or rectangle. Be sure to tape all around the edges. If you have chosen to use fabric and are working with primary students, some initial cutting of cloth into squares, triangles, rectangles and strips is advisable, as cloth can be tricky to cut. Loosely group the fabric pieces by category in baskets on each group table. Put markers on the table.

Suggestions for Teaching and Learning:

Introduction: (first session) View *Map of Meaghers Grant* as a group. Solicit children's thoughts and ideas about the quilt and begin discussing the piece.

1. Explore what the quilt is made of and how it was made. A quick sewing demo could be useful.

2. Discuss the quilt as a map of a "community". What is a community?

3. Create a map "legend" as a way of documenting different aspects of the community. Look closely at all the aspects of the quilted map. What are the green patches? What is that blue line? When the class has decided on the meaning of a part of the map add it to a legend on a large piece of paper. Guide this close examination by beginning with the natural characteristics, progressing to the transportation infrastructure and on to the buildings, as this order will be useful later.

4. Compare Meaghers Grant to your community. Brainstorm together what things are NOT in Meagher's Grant but might be in your community, or might be good to have in a community. Add a few of these suggestions to your legend.

Creating the Quilts: (second session) Before beginning demonstrate how the fabric sticks to the contact paper. Allow children to use ONE FINGER to feel the paper.

1. Invite each group to start their quilt with the natural characteristics of the community – forests, rivers, lakes, and fields, etc. Encourage children to work as a group to lay these out. It is best to limit the supply of cloth, or paper, for these features as the children often enter enthusiastically into the project and cover the whole quilt with lakes and forests. Some open sticky space should remain for the other parts of the community.

2. Refer to the *Map of Meaghers Grant* quilt and your legend and invite children to create roads/paths/railways through their community. How are people going to get around?

Steps 1 and 2 will take a relatively short amount of time.

3. Encourage the children to create buildings for their community. They may work at the table and draw details on houses and buildings with markers before placing them in the community. Circulate between the groups and ask the children about the buildings in their community. Use the legend you created together to inspire them to make different buildings. Groups may also come up with some unique community features (swimming pool, art gallery....) At this point in the building, you can provide more green cloth pieces for children to add to the quilt.

Just as each community is different, each group will create a unique quilt. Some may include high-rise buildings and become very “built up” while others may remain more rural in appearance. These variations will be exciting to talk about later. When the quilts are complete, each group can name their community.

If possible, cover the finished quilts with a layer of clear contact paper, which helps all the pieces stay in place. Hang quilts on the wall.

Extension of ideas:

- Sewing – Allow children to become acquainted with the technique of hand sewing and gain appreciation for the work involved in making a quilt. This would be a perfect lead-up or follow-up to this activity.
- Sewing Station: Have a sewing station in your classroom comprised of a few embroidery hoops with cloth in them. Thread needles with embroidery thread and make a few stitches to start off. As long as you have talked about using a sharp needle, even young children can sew.
- Sewing Cards: The possibilities are endless. Simple sewing cards can be made from cardstock, or laminated paper, with holes punched round the edges. String is sewn or threaded through the holes. Continue the community theme and use old

- maps - maps printed from the Internet, or children's drawings of aspects of their community as the base for a sewing card.
- Quilting – Continue your exploration into quilting with more examples and through children's books. Find out if anybody in the class has quilt at home they can bring in to show the class.
 - Green Spaces – Explore the importance of “green spaces” in communities. Use maps and satellite images to identify the green spaces in your community. What does the green symbolize? (a park, a soccer field, a garden...) What do we feel about these spaces? How do we use them? Go on a class outing to a green space in your community.

Suggestions for Assessment:

- Group presentation of the quilted communities, sharing information about their community.



Map of Meaghers Grant, quilt by Evelyn Dickie