



## **SURPRISE QUILT PRESENTED TO MARY A. GROW**

Various quiltmakers

Plymouth, Michigan; 1856

Cotton with inked and embroidered signatures; 87 × 82 ½"

Gift in memory of Margaret Trautwein Stoddard and her daughter, Eleanor Stoddard Seibold, 2003.2.1

Photo by Gavin Ashworth, New York

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### **BACKGROUND INFORMATION ON THE OBJECT**

Quilts have a long history in the United States as both functional objects and artistic creations. The types, styles, and techniques of quilting are as diverse as the communities of quiltmakers that can be found throughout history and across the geographic United States.

During the nineteenth century, occasions for members of a community to come together were as varied as the nature of their living circumstances, and were different still for men and for women. Relationships within the social networks in cities, where the population was dense and transient, were not the same as those in established rural communities in New England, in widely scattered homesteads in the West, or on plantations in the South. Although quilts were made by individual women, and sometimes men, quilting bees or gatherings in which women collectively worked on a single quilt were popular and efficient. In quilting bees, quiltmakers were able to share not only the resources but the workload, accomplishing more in a shorter period of time than an individual quiltmaker could. Quilting bees also provided a forum for socialization, relaxation, and a respite from the busy, hard, and sometimes lonely life on the farm or frontier.

Oftentimes, quilts were made to commemorate special occasions, such as weddings and births, or as farewell gifts when community members moved away. Such types of quilts represented a gesture of friendship from many members of a community to one of its own. When the quilt was a participatory

project intended for presentation to a friend or neighbor, it also enhanced the traditional opportunity for quiltmakers to gather in a communal act.

It is not known why this particular quilt was made. Like the pages of an autograph album, each block bears the name of a friend who contributed to this “surprise” for Mary A. Grow, as the quilt is inscribed in ink on the back.

### **RELATED LESSONS**

- “Coming Together: Creating a Community Quilt” (2–3)
- “Exploring Folk Art Through Poetry” (2–3)
- “Symmetry and Symbols” (2–3)

# COMING TOGETHER: CREATING A COMMUNITY QUILT

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2-3

**GRADE LEVEL: 2-3**

**NEW YORK STATE LEARNING STANDARDS: THE ARTS, ENGLISH  
LANGUAGE ARTS, AND SOCIAL STUDIES**

**ESTIMATED TIME: ONE 60-MINUTE PERIOD**

## **OBJECTIVES**

- Students will learn about the quilt as an artifact of early American experience.
- Students will work collaboratively to plan, design, and create a community quilt.
- Students will practice collaborating, planning, negotiating, and problem-solving in their artmaking.

## **MATERIALS**

- Images of *Surprise Quilt Presented to Mary A. Grow*
- Paper and pencils for sketches
- Scissors
- Glue sticks
- Fabric or paper collage (a mix of prints and solid colors)

## **LESSON ACTIVITIES AND PROCESSES**

### **Introduction**

- Ask the students to share their knowledge and understanding of quilts and quiltmaking.
- Define a quilt and identify some of the differences between quilts and other bedcovers. A quilt is primarily defined as having three layers stitched, or quilted, together, generally including a top layer of fabric, a layer of cotton or wool batting for warmth, and a bottom layer of fabric.

### **Discussion**

The students will view and discuss a reproduction of *Surprise Quilt Presented to Mary A. Grow*.

- What do you notice about this quilt?
- Ask the students to choose one individual quilt square and study it closely. Then choose another square and study it. Do the students notice anything different when looking at the quilt this way?
- Share some of the background information about friendship quilts and the *Surprise Quilt Presented to Mary A. Grow* in particular. Does this information make the students think about the quilt in a different way?
- How is the experience of making art different when it is done individually versus collaboratively, with several people working together on one shared project?

### **Activity**

- Have the students, as a class or in smaller groups, plan and create one or more quilt(s).
- Each student will create an individual square; however, the class or the group will decide on a common design that will unite these squares. Remind the students that while all of the squares in the *Surprise Quilt* bore the same shape, they were not all identical. The students may opt to follow this model, choosing something that remains the same in each of their designs and something that is unique to each quilt square.
- Facilitate negotiations and agreement on a common element. If the quilt is being created to celebrate or commemorate a certain event or occasion, this may suggest a common element.
- Sketches should be used in the planning and design process.
- Assist individual students, or groups of students, as they execute their quilt squares in fabric or paper collage.
- When the squares are complete, decide on the overall composition—the sequence and arrangement of the squares—as a group or as a class.
- Join the quilt squares by “sewing” them with a hole puncher and yarn or by taping the paper quilt squares together on the backside. The students should participate in the assemblage of the quilt.
- Have a concluding discussion addressing the process and experience of working on a communal art form, and sharing the finished work.

### **PRE- AND POST-LESSON ACTIVITY SUGGESTIONS**

- This lesson may be conducted within an extended unit on nineteenth-century American history.
- Visit the American Folk Art Museum for a guided tour. Conduct this lesson before or after your museum visit.
- The “Counting Quilts” lesson designed for pre-K–grade 1, which explores the symbolism of an appliqué quilt through math concepts, may be adapted for use with older students and taught in conjunction with this lesson.

### **ASSESSMENT/EVALUATION METHODS**

- Students closely and thoughtfully observed and discussed the presented quilt, relating the background information provided to their own observations and questions.
- Students successfully collaborated to plan and design their own quilt(s), either in groups or as a class.
- Students selected, agreed on, and executed a shared element in their quilt squares.

## RECOMMENDED RESOURCES

### Recommended Books for Students

Hines, Anna Grossnickle. *Pieces: A Year in Poems & Quilts*. New York: Greenwillow Books, 2001.  
Poems about the four seasons accompanied by photographs of quilts made by the author.

Lyons, Mary E. *Stitching Stars: The Story Quilts of Harriet Powers*. New York: Scribner, 1993.  
A picture-book profile of Harriet Powers, who was born a slave in 1837 and stitched biblical stories into appliqué quilts, written at a level appropriate for upper-elementary and middle-school students.

Paul, Ann Whitford. *Eight Hands Round: A Patchwork Alphabet*. New York: HarperCollins Publishers, 1991.

Introduces the letters of the alphabet with names of early American patchwork quilt patterns and explains the origins of the designs by describing the activity or occupation they derive from.

Polacco, Patricia. *The Keeping Quilt*. New York: Simon & Schuster Books for Young Readers, 1988.  
An autobiographical picture book about a handmade quilt, and the memories that it preserves, passed down through four generations of a Russian Jewish family.

### Recommended Book for Teachers

Warren, Elizabeth V., and Sharon L. Eisenstat. *Glorious American Quilts: The Quilt Collection of the Museum of American Folk Art*. New York: Penguin Studio in association with Museum of American Folk Art, 1996.

Describes the American Folk Art Museum's quilt collection with chapters on whole-cloth quilts, chintz quilts, signature quilts, appliqué quilts, pieced quilts, log-cabin quilts, show quilts, revival quilts, Amish quilts, African American quilts, and contemporary quilts.

### Recommended Websites

EDSITEment Lesson Plan "History in Quilts":

[www.edsitement.neh.gov/view\\_lesson\\_plan.asp?id=241](http://www.edsitement.neh.gov/view_lesson_plan.asp?id=241)

EDSITEment Lesson Plan "Stories in Quilts":

[www.edsitement.neh.gov/view\\_lesson\\_plan.asp?id=242](http://www.edsitement.neh.gov/view_lesson_plan.asp?id=242)

EDSITEment Lesson Plan "Family and Friendship in Quilts":

[www.edsitement.neh.gov/view\\_lesson\\_plan.asp?id=346](http://www.edsitement.neh.gov/view_lesson_plan.asp?id=346)

National Endowment for the Humanities lesson plans with links to online resources.

International Quilt Study Center at the University of Nebraska–Lincoln:

[www.quiltstudy.org](http://www.quiltstudy.org)

Database of images and information regarding historic and contemporary American and international quilts.

National Museum of American History, Washington, D.C., Quilt Collection:

[www.americanhistory.si.edu/collections/quilts/](http://www.americanhistory.si.edu/collections/quilts/)

A selection of images of quilts, including those categorized as patriotic quilts, album quilts, Amish quilts, and more.

The Quilt Index:

[www.quiltindex.org](http://www.quiltindex.org)

An online research and reference tool with contextual information and images of quilts held in private and public collections. Browse by category: collection, time period, style/techniques, purpose/function, or location.