

Keeping the Pioneers Warm

Summary

The quilts of the pioneers tell a story like no other. Pioneer women made use of EVERY resource they had. Worn out clothing, blankets and even bits of the canvas from the wagon tops were cut into pieces and fashioned into warm quilts. Pioneer women would trade pieces of fabric in order to make colorful patterns. After studying different quilt patterns used by the pioneers, students will use math skills to design a quilt top.

Time Frame

2 class periods of 45 minutes each

Group Size

Large Groups

Life Skills

Thinking & Reasoning, Communication

Materials

Rulers Scraps of colored paper (optional) Graph paper Scissors Tagboard or lightweight cardboard
Fabric scraps Craft glue or thinned 'Elmer's glue'

Background for Teachers

Pioneer women were masters of using everything available to them. Bits of fabric taken from worn out garments, blankets, linens, and even the rough coverings from the wagons were painstakingly pieced together for quilts. These quilts tops and bottoms took on a life of their own as they could repeat a family's history by reminding members of significant events as they looked at the fabric squares. The women were proud of their quilting and gave great effort to make their patterns and designs into works of art. The women would trade fabric scraps with each other to ensure that their quilt had the 'right' colors and textures needed to make it symmetrical and pleasing to the eye. Many of the quilt patterns had unusual names. The designs were named after nature, religion and everyday life. The log cabin quilt was one of the most popular designs. Its pattern resembles the logs stacked to make the early shelters of the pioneers. A true log cabin quilt has a red center square signifying the fire as the 'heart of the home' as most activities revolved around the warmth of the hearth. A quilt has three layers: top, padding, and bottom. The inside padding for the quilts were sometimes made from cattails, grass, corn husks, or straw. When a pioneer family had collected enough feathers or goose down, these stratchy centers were then replaced with the softer materials.

Intended Learning Outcomes

Students will make a connection between math and art. Students will recognize the historical significance of textile patterns. Students will use measurement, symmetry and patterning skills to design and make a 'quilt square'. Students will use color, texture and pattern design to make their quilt aesthetically pleasing.

Instructional Procedures

Discuss material contained in the background section of this lesson. Show the students some pictures of pioneer quilts. (A few real examples will help the lesson move along more smoothly.) The

teacher may want to see related themes and lesson plans from the Utah Heritage Gateway lesson plan book. Review with the students the concept of patterning. Point out the patterning designs on the quilts and quilt pictures you are using for examples. Discuss color and texture arrangements. Tell the students that they will now be using patterning and measuring skills to create a quilt SQUARE. Review symmetry and the importance of precise measurement. Instruct the students to practice designing different geometrical patterns on their graph paper. It is best if the students limit their designs to those created with squares and triangles to begin with. After the students have found a design they are satisfied with, instruct them to use their rulers to draw the exact size and shape of the triangles and squares on the tagboard. Students then cut the pattern pieces from tagboard. Instruct each student to choose some fabric pieces for their quilt square. Remind them to pay attention to colors, designs and textures. Have students place each pattern piece on a fabric scrap and trace around it. Cut out the fabric pieces. Using an old paintbrush, cover the back of the fabric with the craft glue (or thinned school glue). Following the quilt design they drew on the graph paper as a guide, have the students glue the fabric on a piece of tagboard cut slightly larger than the finished quilt square will be. After it's dry, trim the cardboard around the edges. Display students work.

Extensions

Students could explore tessellations and design a quilt top using a tessellating pattern.

Assessment Plan

Assessment is the completion of a neat, symmetrical, and artistic quilt square.

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