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Curriculum Units by Fellows of the Yale-New Haven Teachers Institute
2001 Volume II: Art as Evidence: The Interpretation of Objects

Literacy & Art: The Story Behind the Quilt

Guide for Curriculum Unit 01.02.10
by Kathleen Ware

This unit is intended to expose second through fourth graders to the many ways quilts were used to chronicle the history and experiences of African-Americans in America. It presents students with a brief synopsis of the rich, cultural background of Africans and tells of the degrading effects of slavery. It tells of the struggles of African-Americans in America and the reasons for the development of a hidden code of communication. It discusses briefly how quilts were used to navigate the Underground Railroad and introduces two African-American artists and quilt makers: Harriet Powers and Faith Ringgold. This unit provides the children with the opportunity to examine their story quilts and finally, to tell their own story through quilting.

The activities found in this unit are integrated across the curriculum but focus mainly on literacy through art. These activities are intended to 1. encourage students to read, 2. increase vocabulary, 3. provide students with a reason to write, and 4. provide an outlet for creative expression.

(Recommended for elementary Art, Literature, grades 2-4.)

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