

Gee's Bend Quilt Making: Shapes & Art in Architecture

Grades 2+

Goal of the lesson plan:

Learn about Gee's Bend quilt making and how it was informed by the world around the quiltmakers, particularly the architecture of Gee's Bend, Alabama. Use architectural elements from your life to design your own quilt

Background:

"The residents of Gee's Bend, Alabama are direct descendants of generations of slaves who worked the cotton plantation established in 1816 by Joseph Gee. After the Civil War, their ancestors remained on the plantation working as sharecroppers. In the 1930s the price of cotton fell and the community faced ruin. As part of its Depression-era intervention, the Federal Government purchased ten thousand acres of the former plantation and provided loans enabling residents to acquire and farm the land formerly worked by their ancestors. Unlike the residents of other tenant communities, who could be forced by economic circumstances to move—or who were sometimes evicted in retaliation for their efforts to achieve civil rights—the people of the Bend could retain their land and homes. Cultural traditions like quilting were nourished by these continuities... Throughout this time, and up until the present, the settlement's unique patchwork quilting tradition that began in the 19th century has endured. Hailed by the New York Times as "some of the most miraculous works of modern art America has produced," Gee's Bend quilts constitute a crucial chapter in the history of American art and today are in the permanent collections of over 20 leading art museums." *Citation: Soulsgrowndeep.org*



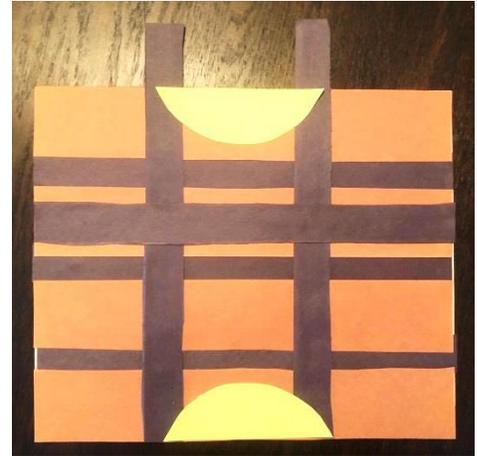
Bars And Strips, Amelia Bennett
1929, Cotton, denim, muslin
87 x 73
Collection of The Dallas Museum of Art. Museum purchase and gift of the Souls Grown Deep Foundation



Sixteen-block "Star" variation, Clementine Kennedy
c. 1940
Cotton, corduroy, cotton twill
74 x 68 inches
Collection of Souls Grown Deep Foundation

Discussion Points:

- Examine some of the Gee’s Bend quilts:
 - Do they look abstract or realistic?
 - What kinds of shapes make up the patterns?
 - Are there repeating patterns or single ones?
 - What kinds of colors do the quiltmakers use?



Instructions:

1. Think about a particular image that you would like to inspire your quilt. Is it architecture? Nature? Art?
2. Think about the shapes that make up that image. Are there mostly squares? Circles? Are there repeating patterns that you can see?
3. In the example to the right, you can see the artist was inspired by the sunburst fireplace in the Martin House. They used the long lines, color, and shapes to make an abstract version of the fireplace.
4. Use the pre-cut shapes to make a pattern on your paper. Don’t glue them down yet—move them around and see what kinds of arrangement makes the most sense!
5. Once you have determined how you want your shapes, glue them down carefully.
6. BONUS: Think about the ways that quilts look and consider drawing stitches or wrinkles on your paper “fabric” cut-outs.



Vocabulary:

Abstract
Patterns

Composition
Architecture

Harmony

Materials:

Piece of heavy paper or
cardboard

Glue
Scissors