

## EDUCATOR GUIDE

Story Theme: Needlework  
Subject: Anna Von Mertens  
Discipline: Visual Arts (Quilting)

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Quilts in the MATRIX project series by Anna Von Mertens on exhibition at the Berkeley Art Museum in 2003. Reprinted with permission from <http://www.annavonmertens.com>. Photo: Jean-Michel Addor.

## SECTION I - OVERVIEW

### EPISODE THEME

Needlework

### SUBJECT

Anna Von Mertens

### GRADE RANGES

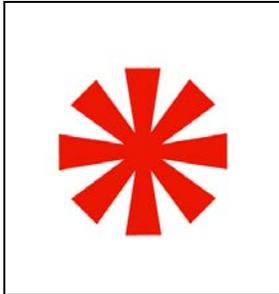
K-12 & Post-secondary

### CURRICULUM CONNECTIONS

Visual Arts, Social Studies, Language Arts & Math

### OBJECTIVE

To introduce students to contemporary quilting and to situate it within the lineages of visual art, quilt making, and fiber arts in the Bay Area and the art history.



### STORY SYNOPSIS

SPARK visits with contemporary quilt artist Anna Von Mertens, who shows how she makes her work from first concepts to the last stitch.

### INSTRUCTIONAL STRATEGIES

Group oral discussion, review and analysis, including peer review and aesthetic valuing as a group

Teacher-guided instruction, including demonstration and guidance

Hands-on individual projects in which students work independently

Hands-on group projects in which students assist and support one another

Critical reflection on personal expressions and how they are seen and received by others

### INSTRUCTIONAL OBJECTIVES

To enable students to -

Understand the development of personal works of art and their relationships to social themes and ideas, abstract concepts, and the history of art.

Develop basic observational drawing and/or painting skills.

Develop visual, written, listening and speaking skills through looking at, creating and talking about visual artworks.

Develop an expressive visual vocabulary with which to address personal and/or social themes and ideas.

### EQUIPMENT NEEDED

- TV and SPARK story “A Stitch in Time” about Anna Von Mertens on DVD or VHS
- Computer with Internet access, navigation software, speakers and a sound card, and printer

### MATERIALS NEEDED

- Access to libraries with up-to-date collections of periodicals, books, and research papers
- Pencils, pens, and paper

### INTELLIGENCES ADDRESSED

Bodily-Kinesthetic - control of one's own body, control in handling objects

Interpersonal - awareness of others' feelings, emotions, goals, motivations

Intrapersonal - awareness of one's own feelings, emotions, goals, motivations

Spatial - ability to manipulate and create mental images in order to solve problems

Logical-Mathematical - ability to detect patterns, reason deductively, think logically



See more information on [Multiple Intelligences](http://www.kqed.org/spark/education) at [www.kqed.org/spark/education](http://www.kqed.org/spark/education).

## SECTION II – CONTENT/CONTEXT

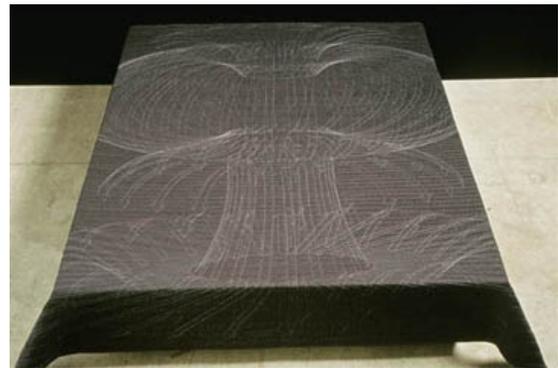
### CONTENT OVERVIEW

Anna Von Mertens' quilts are works of extraordinary depth and complexity. Composed of bold colors in broad geometric patterns, Von Mertens' quilts at first glance resemble color field paintings or minimalist sculptures. Up close, however, it becomes apparent that Von Mertens has superimposed multiple systems and layers of meaning in a single piece, merging the psychological with the geographic, the aesthetic with the scientific. The SPARK story "A Stitch in Time" we follow Von Mertens as she begins work on her new series of three quilts, provisionally titled "Gray Area."

For Von Mertens, the process of making a quilt requires an enormous investment of both time and painstaking labor. Once she has developed the concept for a piece, Von Mertens begins her design on a computer, working out the colors and overall arrangement of the piece. Using the colors she has selected in the computer model, she goes about hand-dyeing the material for the quilt, attempting to match the colors of the model as accurately as possible. After she has cut and machine sewn the individual pieces of the quilt, she goes back to the computer to work out the stitching pattern, which can come from a variety of sources--from geological profiles of landmasses to patterns of energy dispersion to the topography of her own body. Using a transparency, Von Mertens projects the pattern and traces it onto the material itself. Von Mertens then sets about the laborious process of stitching the pattern. Since a single work may incorporate as many as 100,000 stitches, this arduous task may take several months to finish.

Von Mertens's most recent series uses the West Coast as a metaphor for the future and the inevitable uncertainty that comes with it. The works draw on the vibrant colors of the Western sunset, laid out in wide bands that are pulled out to a point just beyond the surface of the quilt. For Von Mertens, this suggests the uncertainty of the future, a point beyond

the horizon that is always just outside of view. For the stitched layer, Von Mertens has decided to use the tide patterns of the San Francisco Bay, but has rotated and overlain them to create an image of chaos.



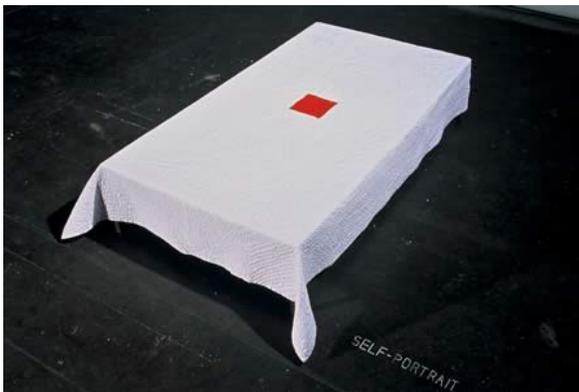
Anna Von Mertens, Black and White, 2004.  
Reprinted with permission.  
Photo: Don Tuttle Photography

In the past, Von Mertens has used a wide variety of sources for her work. In the diptych Black and White, she stitched the dispersion of energy from a nuclear blast from above and in profile. While the image on the black quilt is readily recognizable as an iconic mushroom cloud, the white quilt shows the same image rotated to an aerial view. The pattern now appears as a round, symmetrical pattern, recalling a mandala (a Hindu or Buddhist symbol of the universe), and apparently free of the violence of its pendent image. For Von Mertens, the piece examines a simplified way of presenting information--often used by politicians and the media--to cast alternatives in the polarized terms of good/evil, for/against, right/wrong. Such a way of thinking denies more difficult, complicated truths not reducible to simple dichotomies.

In another work, entitled Self-Portrait, a work that is part of Von Mertens's Body Topography series, a red square sits in the center of a large white field. The

stitch pattern shows the topography of Von Mertens's own body as it was plotted out at half-inch elevations by a laser leveler while the artist lay underneath the material. The red square is intended to suggest the wedding night bloodstained sheet, privileged in many cultures as a sign of the bride's virginity, but also that left by a girl's first menstrual period and the acute sense of the body the accompanies it.

Whereas many contemporary quilt artists have tried to separate their quilt making from the medium's traditional status as craft by hanging their work on walls as one might a painting, Von Mertens insists on exhibiting her work on flat platforms, in order to deliberately associate her creations with beds. For Von Mertens, the bed provides a context rich in associations, from birthing, to sexual activity, to sleeping and dreaming, to death, all themes to which Von Mertens regularly returns.



Anna Von Mertens, *Self-Portrait*, 1999. Reprinted with permission. Photo: Jean-Michel Addor.

## THE BIG PICTURE

Though the fiber arts--such as quilting, weaving, basketry, and knitting--have been practiced since the very beginnings of civilization, they have long been considered "craft," and secondary to the "fine arts" of painting and sculpture. The reasons for this have been many, although the practical/utilitarian function and the fact that they were traditionally made by women are central to the distinction of these art forms as less valuable. As part of the many upheavals of the 1960s and 70s, many artists (men and women alike) re-examined fiber arts, seeking to recover lost histories and elevate them to the status of fine art. Central to this movement was the work of two San Franciscan artists, Charles "Ed" Rossbach and

Katherine Westphal. Rossbach was known for researching older civilizations' examples of textiles and baskets and combining these ancient techniques with images from contemporary popular culture, such as Mickey Mouse or John Travolta. He was a pioneer in the use of non-traditional textile and basketry materials such as newspaper, plastics, metal foils, rice paper, twigs, plastic film, natural wood fibers, foil, staples, and twine.

Though Westphal and Rossbach were married, their styles differed considerably and they did not collaborate on artistic projects. Westphal's work ranges in form from large installation pieces to wearable art, all of it demonstrating her mastery of a very difficult color photography heat-transfer process, which she often used in her work as a way to incorporate photographic imagery into her quilts and garments.

Westphal and Rossbach taught weaving at the University of California, Berkeley for nearly 30 years. Both are considered pivotal figures in developing the San Francisco Bay Area as a center for fiber arts and involved their students in the activities of fiber arts centers, schools and galleries throughout the region. The proliferation of university programs in fiber arts in recent years can in part be credited to their influence as many of their students have since gone on to become prominent members of the successive generation of artist-teachers across the country.

Since the fiber arts were often thought of as "women's work," the movement to elevate these practices was also closely associated with the first wave Feminist Movement of the 1970s. Artists such as Faith Ringgold, Judy Chicago, Joyce Weiland, and others incorporated the fiber arts in their pieces, which often dealt with the subjugation of women within the patriarchal order. Though it is more often thought of as a work of ceramics, Chicago's iconic *Dinner Party* incorporated quilting and embroidery as fundamental components to the monumental piece. Chicago also organized the *International Quilting Bee*, a project that brought together over 700 quilt blocks made by women from all over the world. Ringgold's many quilts and tapestries similarly work to advance the cause of women, but also that of people of color, linking the fiber arts to traditional African and African-American folk history.

Anna Von Mertens' work merges these traditions with a keen awareness of broader transformations in art since the 1960s. The preoccupation with mapping, topographies, and other presentations of information in Von Mertens' quilts, along with the artist's insistence that her pieces be exhibited on a horizontal bed recalls the comments of art critic and historian Leo Steinberg. In his 1972 essay "Other Criteria," Steinberg identified what he considered a fundamental change in Western art and culture, as artists no longer seemed to be thinking about their work as a window onto the world, but rather as a horizontal "flatbed."<sup>1</sup> What Steinberg meant by this was that where in earlier times art often took the form of a picture to be placed on a wall, with an obvious top and bottom, the new art was closer to a map or a newspaper, which could be looked at with the same degree of legibility if it is laid out on a table or held up to a vertical surface.



Anna Von Mertens transfers a pattern onto a quilt using an overhead projector.  
Still image from SPARK story, May 2003.

Borrowing the term from the flatbed printing press, this shift was more than merely a matter of matter of horizontal versus vertical orientation. For Steinberg, this change in the way art is thought of reflected a fundamental change in the way people experience the world. Where before, people came to know things about the world by experience, in our contemporary culture we search for and exchange information without direct experience (tele-technologies such as TV, teleconferencing, phone, email, and, computerization, virtual reality, etc.). To illustrate his point, Steinberg noted that while we used to step outside or look out of a window to find out the weather, we now turn on a radio to hear a

<sup>1</sup> Steinberg, Leo. Other Criteria: Confrontations with Twentieth Century Art. Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 1975.

pre-recorded message transmitted from far away to get information about climatic conditions--for example, 68 degrees, mostly clear, 20 percent chance of precipitation.

The significance of this shift in how we experience the world is perfectly expressed in Von Mertens' work. Shown on forms that resemble beds, Von Mertens' quilts directly challenge the expectation that art become "windows," reading more like traditional textile crafts. As viewers, we try to *read* the works employing two different associations – one with quilting and its history and role, and the other with other forms of information such as maps and papers, etc. And, the forms are *not* beds, they are shown in a gallery, not in a bedroom, and they do not convey information in the traditional way of a map or newspaper. Thus, the works exceed easy classification – they do not belong to either realm (art or craft), rather, they belong to the realm of continual change and re-combination that to great extent defines contemporary art making.

## RESOURCES – TEXTS

Adamson, Jeremy. Calico and Chintz: Antique Quilts from the collection of Patricia S. Smith. Washington, D.C.: Smithsonian Institution, 1997.

American Fiber Art: A New Definition [exhibition catalogue]. Houston: Sarah Campbell Blaffer Gallery, University of Houston, 1980.

Batchelor, David. Minimalism. London: Cambridge University Press, 1997.

Battcock, Gregory, editor. Minimal Art: A Critical Anthology. New York: E. P. Dutton, 1967.

Beardsley, John, et al. The Quilts of Gee's Bend. Atlanta: Tinwood Books, 2002.

Berger, Maurice. Minimal Politics: Performativity and Minimalism in Recent American Art. Los Angeles: Distributed Art Publishers, 1997.

Berlo, Janet Catherine and Patricia Cox Crews. Wild by Design: Two Hundred Years of Innovation and Artistry in American quilts. Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2003.

Crews, Patricia Cox, ed. A Flowering of Quilts. Lincoln, NE: University of Nebraska Press, 2001.

Grubbs, Daisy. Art and Craft of Quilting: A Beginner's Guide to Patchwork Design, Color and Expression. Watson-Guptill Publications, 1995.

Hicks, Kyra E. Black Threads: An African American Quilting Sourcebook. Jefferson, N.C.: McFarland & Co., 2003.

Kough, Lynn G. Quilting for Beginners: A Stitch-by-Stitch Guide to Hand and Machine Techniques. NTC Publishing, 1999.

Matsunaga, Karen Kim. Japanese Country Quilting: Sashiko Patterns and Projects for the Beginner. Kodansha America, Inc., 1990.

Meyer, James. Minimalism: Art and Polemics in the Sixties. New Haven: Yale University Press, 2001.

Pierce, Sue and Verna Suit. Art quilts: Playing with a Full Deck. San Francisco: Pomegranate Artbooks, 1995.

Smucker, Janneken, Patricia Cox Crews, and Linda Welt. Amish Crib Quilts from the Midwest: The Sara Miller Collection. Intercourse, PA: Good Books, 2003.

Spear, Judy, ed. From Fiber to Fine Art. Boston: Museum of Fine Arts, 1980.

Steinberg, Leo. Other Criteria. New York: Oxford University Press, 1972.

## RESOURCES – WEB SITES

All Fiber Arts – Web site dedicated to quilting and other fiber arts - <http://www.allfiberarts.com>

Anna Von Mertens' personal Web site – <http://www.annaVonmertens.com>

Fiber Arts Magazine - <http://www.fiberarts.com/>  
Including a review of Von Merten's work

Fine Arts Museums San Francisco – Legion of Honor – The FAMSF ImageBase offers 12 examples of quilts on-line for viewing - <http://www.famsf.org/>

Hugh Lauter Levin Associates (publisher) - A history of the contemporary Art Quilt - <http://www.hlla.com/reference/artquilt.html>

NOQERS – Webs site for the National Online Quilters (NOQ), featuring a bulletin board, chat room, information about quilting sites on the net and much more. - <http://www.noqers.org>

PBS (Public Broadcasting System) – Web page from two PBS specials on quilts – “A Century of Quilts,” and “American Quilts,” with information about quilters and the history of various styles. (Both available on video in the store section of the Web site.) - <http://www.pbs.org/americaquilts/>

Quilt.com - Quilting site with useful information about how to make a quilt, a glossary of quilting terms, and more! - <http://www.quilt.com/MainQuiltingPage.html>

Quilt.net – A regularly updated Web site listing quilt shows in California. - <http://www.quilt.net/californiashows.html>

Quiltropolis – A Web site hosting a multitude of quilt and sewing related mail lists, chat rooms, and quilting forums. - <http://www.quiltropolis.com>

San Jose Quilt Museum – Web site for America's first quilt museum. - <http://www.sjqiltmuseum.org/>

Yale University – “The Art of the Quilt” lesson plan from the Yale-New Haven Teachers Institute - <http://www.cis.yale.edu/ynhti/curriculum/units/1995/4/95.04.04.x.html#d>

## BAY AREA RESOURCES - CLASSES

California College of Arts  
<http://www.cca.edu>

City College of San Francisco -  
<http://cloud.ccsf.cc.ca.us>

Mendocino Art Center – Mendocino - 707/937-7799 -  
<http://www.mendocinoartcenter.org>

Peggy Osterkam – Larkspur – 415/925-8666 -  
<http://www.weaving.cc>

Richmond Art Center – Richmond -  
<http://www.therichmondartcenter.org>

San Francisco State University – <http://www.sfsu.edu>

San Jose State University – <http://www.sjsu.edu>

SCRAP – Scrounger’s Center for Reusable Art Parts-  
San Francisco – <http://www.scrap-sf.org>

The Caning Shop – Berkeley – 510/594-3710 –  
<http://www.caning.com>.

The Names Project/Aids Quilt – San Francisco –  
<http://www.aidsquilt.org>.

## **BAY AREA RESOURCES – TEXTILE COLLECTIONS**

Fiber Scene

*An on-line gallery and promoter of Bay Area fiber artists*

2443 Fillmore Street, #364

San Francisco, California 94115

415/563.8383

<http://www.fiberscene.com>

Fine Arts Museums of San Francisco

Lincoln Park

San Francisco, CA 94102

415/750.3600

Hours: Tuesday-Sunday, 9:30am-5:00pm

<http://www.famsf.org>

San Jose Museum of Quilts and Textiles

110 Paseo de San Antonio

San Jose, CA 95112-3639

408/971.0323

<http://www.sjqquiltmuseum.org>

## SECTION III – VOCABULARY

### DISCIPLINE-BASED VOCABULARY AND CONCEPTS IN THE SPARK STORY

**Ambiguity**

Doubtfulness or uncertainty, particularly as to the signification of language, arising from its admitting of more than one meaning

**Chaos**

A condition or place of great disorder or confusion

**Consumed**

To be absorbed, engrossed

**Decode**

To extract the underlying meaning from

**Ebb**

The reflux or flowing back of the tide

**Embody**

To represent in material form

**Envision**

To imagine; to see in one's mind

**Hand-dye**

To color by hand, without the aid of machinery

**Highlight**

To make prominent, emphasize

**Horizon**

The apparent intersection of the earth and sky as seen by an observer

**Hue**

The apparent intersection of the earth and sky as seen by an observer

**Laborious**

Marked by or requiring long, hard work

**Landmass**

A large continuous extent of land

**Luminescent**

Capable of, suitable for, or emitting light

**Manifestation**

The material realization of a concept or plan

**Medium**

A specific kind of artistic technique or means of expression as determined by the materials used or the creative methods involved

**Meticulous**

Extremely careful and precise

**Microcosm**

A small, representative system having analogies to a larger system in constitution, configuration, or development

**Migration**

The periodic passage from one region to another for feeding or breeding

**Minimalism**

A school of abstract painting and sculpture that emphasizes extreme simplification of form, as by the use of basic shapes and monochromatic palettes of primary colors, objectivity, and anonymity of style

**Mock up**

Construct a model of

**Monitor**

Pay careful attention to

**Symbolism**

The practice of representing things by means of symbols or of attributing symbolic meanings or significance to objects, events, or relationships

**Tentative**

Not fully worked out, concluded, or agreed on;  
provisional

**Tide**

The periodic variation in the surface level of the oceans and of bays, gulfs, inlets, and estuaries, caused by gravitational attraction of the moon and sun

**Topography**

Graphic representation of the surface features of a place or region on a map, indicating their relative positions and elevations

**Transpire**

To come about; happen or occur

**Variable**

Something that varies or is prone to variation

**Yearning**

To have a strong, often melancholy desire

## SECTION IV – ENGAGING WITH SPARK

### STANDARDS-BASED ACTIVITIES AND DISCUSSION POINTS

#### Looking at & Responding to Quilts

Watch the SPARK story “A Stitch in Time,” pausing the video on each of Anna Von Mertens’ quilts to allow students time to look carefully at each one. (Von Mertens’ Web site can also be used for this purpose.) Watch without the sound for the first time so students can uncover their response to the visual work without the narration. Leave the volume on the second time the story is played and students to note the critical questions and/or concepts.

If it is possible and not too cumbersome, bring in a quilt, view on in a collection, and/or invite students to bring in a quilt to which they have access.

Introduce students to a language of aesthetics and criticism to talk about the quilts by structuring the critical process into four basic steps. In small groups invite students to:

**Describe** the design elements, including line, shape, color, texture, positive and negative space, dark and light. Encourage students to use this language of design. Use the Visual Arts Vocabulary list on the SPARKed Web pages as a resource – <http://www.kqed.org/spark/education>.

**Analyze** the balance, proportion, rhythm, and different emphases in the overall composition. How is it put together? Ask students to respond to what they see, not what they think in these first two categories.

**Interpret** the meaning, purpose, intention, motivation, and context for the work by looking beyond the visual. What do you think the maker of the quilt might be trying to say or achieve and how?

**Respond** to what is seen and felt. Ask students to use critical vocabulary to describe their responses.

This exercise is about developing a basic critical vocabulary and using a language of design to speak about visual art in a way that acknowledges creativity, while also defining personal preferences, asking how we understand what we are reacting to and why?

#### RELATED STANDARDS

##### VISUAL ARTS

##### Kindergarten

##### 1.0 ARTISTIC PERCEPTION

1.1 Recognize and describe simple patterns found in the environment and works of art.

1.3 Identify the elements of art (line, color, shape/form, texture, value, space) in the environment and in works of art, emphasizing line, color, and shape/form.

##### 2.0 CREATIVE EXPRESSION

2.1 Use lines, shapes/forms, and colors to make patterns

##### GRADE 3

##### 4.0 AESTHETIC VALUING

4.3 Select an artist’s work and, using appropriate vocabulary of art, explain its successful compositional and communicative qualities.

##### Grade 5

##### 1.0 ARTISTIC PERCEPTION

1.1 Identify and describe the principles of design in visual compositions, emphasizing unity and harmony.

1.2 Identify and describe characteristics of representational, abstract, and nonrepresentational works of art.

##### Grades 9-12 Proficient

##### 1.0 ARTISTIC PERCEPTION

1.1 Identify and use the principles of design to discuss, analyze, and write about visual aspects in the environment and in works of art, including their own.

4.5 Employ the conventions of art criticism in writing and speaking about works of art.

## Domestic Arrangements

Throughout history, women of many different cultures and strata of society have been encouraged to pursue artistic endeavors, although they were excluded from those considered to be “fine” arts most highly valued by (male-dominated) society – painting, sculpture, and architecture. Thus, one visual art to which many women dedicated themselves was needlework, a world of imagery, traditions, creativity, and education which women controlled completely. In needlework, the passing of its craft from generation to generation, as well as the nature and opinions of its audiences were defined completely by women. In addition, the creation of needlework pieces also often filled a practical need, creating: attractive, decorative fabrics for table service or bedding, clothing, furniture covers, etc. Prior to the Civil War (1860s) quilting was the most popular form of needlework in the United States, practiced in most households by women of all ages.

Working in small groups, ask students to research the work of important women fiber artists, such as Faith Ringgold, Judy Chicago, Miriam Schapiro, Suzanne Goldenberg, Johanna Bartelt, Rosie Lee Tompkins, or Harriet Powers. Offer the following questions to guide research.

- Describe the work of the artists and show illustrations. Explain what is unique about their work and their vision.
- Acknowledge how the “fine arts” of painting and sculpture were different from those creative endeavors called “crafts,” such as textile works, printmaking, ceramics, etc. Did the artist challenge this perception? How?
- How did the artist’s work or craft connect them to a shared history of art, history of women, and/or cultural tradition?

Invite each group to present the artist they have chosen to the whole group. Visual illustrations and images would enrich these presentations.

Initiate a discussion of Anna Von Mertens’ work using the same questions. Check the Web sites about Von Mertens to see samples of her work, which may be helpful as a preparation for the discussion.

<http://www.annavonmertens.com>

## RELATED STANDARDS

### VISUAL ARTS

Grade 8

#### 3.0 HISTORICAL AND CULTURAL CONTEXT

- 3.2 Compare, contrast, and analyze styles of art from a variety of times and places in Western and non-Western cultures.
- 3.3 Identify major works of art created by women and describe the impact of those works on society at that time.

Grades 9-12 Proficient/Advanced

#### 3.0 HISTORICAL AND CULTURAL CONTEXT

- 3.1 Identify similarities and differences in the purposes of art created in selected cultures.
- 3.3 Identify and describe trends in the visual arts and discuss how the issues of time, place, and cultural influence are reflected in selected works of art.
- #### 4.0 AESTHETIC VALUING
- 4.1 Articulate how personal beliefs, cultural traditions, and current social, economic, and political contexts influence the interpretation of the meaning or message in a work of art.
- 4.2 Compare the ways in which the meaning of a specific work of art has been affected over time because of changes in interpretation and context.
- 4.4 Articulate the process and rationale for refining and reworking one of their own works of art.
- 4.5 Employ the conventions of art criticism in writing and speaking about works of art.

### SOCIAL SCIENCE

Grade 8

US History and Geography: Growth and Conflict

- 8.4 Students analyze the aspirations and ideals of the people of the new nation.
4. Discuss daily life, including traditions in art, music, and literature, of early national America (e.g., through writings by Washington Irving, James Fenimore Cooper).
- 8.6 Students analyze the divergent paths of the American people from 1800 to the mid-1800s and the challenges they faced, with emphasis on the Northeast.
1. Examine the women’s suffrage movement (e.g., biographies, writings, and speeches of Elizabeth Cady Stanton, Margaret Fuller, Lucretia Mott, Susan B. Anthony).
2. Identify common themes in American art as well as transcendentalism and individualism (e.g., writings about and by Ralph Waldo Emerson, Henry David Thoreau, Herman Melville, Louisa May Alcott, Nathaniel Hawthorne, Henry Wadsworth Longfellow).

## Threads of History

Introduce students to the terminology related to *stitching* (running stitch), *quilting* (appliqué, backing, batting, and patchwork), and the *slave quilt* code patterns (monkey wrench, wagon wheel, bear's paw, crossroads, log cabin, shoofly, bow tie, flying geese, drunkards path, and North star.

In relation to the *slave quilt* code, explain how enslaved people used the quilts as maps to negotiate their way through the Underground Railroad and escape. African American quilts reflect history, cultural traditions, and regional diversity and their quilts are characterized by stripes, bright colors, large designs, multiple patterns, asymmetry, and improvisation, all design principles with roots in African textile techniques and culture. The University of Virginia Web site offers a wealth of information about African American quilting traditions -

<http://xroads.virginia.edu/~UG97/quilt/atrads.html>.

Most cultures in history have included some form of quilting in garment-making, decor, or functional furniture covers. Quilts were introduced to America by Dutch and English colonists early in the 17th century and were predominately appliqué. Other immigrant cultures - Irish, Scots, Welsh, French, Russian, Scandinavian among them - brought their own special blocks and piecing patterns when they sailed for America. Quilting reflects this huge international diversity with European quilting designs and techniques, Amish, Japanese and Russian approaches to this fiber art. Encourage students to seek out and research first-person histories and accounts as often as possible, including letters, diaries, journals, photographs, and illustrated books and prints. Use libraries, oral histories, archives, and the Internet for research.

Older students can trace one quilting tradition and write a 1,000-word essay, perhaps from the perspective of someone living at the time. Presentations should include images of the artworks, historical references, audio recordings, historic photographs, timelines, and other visual data. Challenge students to research where in their community, historic objects and images can be seen. Longer term projects can include field trips to historic sites and/or collections researched and led by the students.

## RELATED STANDARDS

### VISUAL ARTS

Grade 4

#### 4.0 AESTHETIC VALUING

*Make Informed Judgments*

4.4 Identify and describe how various cultures define and value art differently.

Grade 5

#### 3.0 HISTORICAL AND CULTURAL CONTEXTS

3.3 Identify and compare works of art from various regions of the United States.

Grade 8

#### 3.0 HISTORICAL AND CULTURAL CONTEXT

3.2 Compare, contrast, and analyze styles of art from a variety of times and places in Western and non-Western cultures.

Grades 9-12 Proficient/Advanced

#### 1.0 ARTISTIC PERCEPTION

1.3 Research and analyze the work of an artist and write about the artist's distinctive style and its contribution to the meaning of the work.

#### 3.0 HISTORICAL AND CULTURAL CONTEXT

3.1 Identify similarities and differences in the purposes of art created in selected cultures.

3.3 Identify and describe trends in the visual arts and discuss how the issues of time, place, and cultural influence are reflected in selected works of art.

### SOCIAL SCIENCES

Grade 8

8.7 Students analyze the divergent paths of the American people in the South from 1800 to the mid-1800s and the challenges they faced.

1. Describe the development of the agrarian economy in the South, identify the locations of the cotton-producing states, and discuss the significance of cotton and the cotton gin.
2. Trace the origins and development of slavery; its effects on black Americans and on the region's political, social, religious, economic, and cultural development; and identify the strategies that were tried to both overturn and preserve it (e.g., through the writings and historical documents on Nat Turner, Denmark Vesey).

### LANGUAGE ARTS

Grade 8

#### 2.0 Writing Applications (Genres and Their Characteristics)

Students write narrative, expository, persuasive, and descriptive essays of at least 500 to 700 words in each genre. Student writing demonstrates a command of standard American English and the research, organizational, and drafting strategies outlined in Writing Standard 1.0.

## The Language of Quilts

Quilting involves two kinds of needlework – *patchwork*, the art of piecing (sewing) together different fabrics, and *quilting*, the fastening together of layers (tying or stitching) of fabric.

There are 3 different kinds of quilts:

**Pieced** – fabric patches are pieced together

**Appliquéd** – a pieced design sewn atop a single piece of fabric

**Quilted counterpane** – padded or corded quilting in simple and complex designs, usually white, with decoration

Challenge students to design and make a pieced quilt. To begin, discuss the kind of quilt design the group wants to make - a repeated pattern, a minimal design or an assortment of individual blocks they will arrange in a single quilt. Use a range of prints, textures, shapes and colors. If a computer is available, consider mapping out the quilt design as Von Mertens does using creative software. Ask students to calculate the measurements of the various sections of the quilt and of each square, the borders, etc. and to use these measurements to make the sections, accounting for the losses that happen when the sections are sewn together.

Provide students with supplies and encourage each one to bring in materials of their choice to create their own block. Students may draw their block designs on paper or on the computer first and then transfer it the quilt as Von Mertens does, using transparencies and an overhead projector.

Any fabrics can be used for the quilt, including swatches from clothing or textiles that are going to be thrown away or donated, or they can be purchased at a charity shop. Fabric stores also often sell “off-cuts” or “selvages” cheaply – the ends of bolts or rolls of fabric.

For generations, women formed “quilting bees” – gatherings in which the women talked about issues of importance to them, like current events, family, faith, and the community as they made quilts. Suggest that students form a “bee” to make their quilt, perhaps meeting at lunch or for an hour after school. The bee could have a name and participants should be accountable for their contribution. To add an oral history perspective, encourage students to

visit *Today in History's* section on *Quilting* and to listen to some of the 181 sound recordings of quilters talking about their work and quilting techniques. - <http://memory.loc.gov/ammem/today/oct29.html>

When completed discuss the experience with students as well as the finished design. Display the quilt in school for parents or as part of an exhibition.

### RELATED STANDARDS

#### VISUAL ARTS

Grade 4

##### 1.0 ARTISTIC PERCEPTION

1.5 Describe and analyze the elements of art (color, shape/form, line, texture, space and value), emphasizing form, as they are used in works of art and found in the environment.

Grade 6

##### 2.0 CREATIVE EXPRESSION

2.4 Create increasingly complex original works of art reflecting personal choices and increased technical skill.

Grade 8

##### 2.0 CREATIVE EXPRESSION

2.1 Demonstrate an increased knowledge of technical skills in using more complex two-dimensional art media and processes (e.g., printing press, silk screening, computer graphics software).

Grades 9-12 Proficient

##### 1.0 ARTISTIC PERCEPTION

1.4 Analyze and describe how the composition of a work of art is affected by the use of a particular principle of design.

##### 2.0 CREATIVE EXPRESSION

2.1 Solve a visual arts problem that involves the effective use of the elements of art and the principles of design.  
2.3 Develop and refine skill in the manipulation of digital imagery (either still or video).

#### MATH

Grades 8-12

Geometry

8.0 Students know, derive, and solve problems involving the perimeter, circumference, area, volume, lateral area, and surface area of common geometric figures.

10.0 Students compute areas of polygons, including rectangles, scalene triangles, equilateral triangles, rhombi, parallelograms, and trapezoids.

11.0 Students determine how changes in dimensions affect the perimeter, area, and volume of common geometric figures and solids.

## Contemporary Quilting

As a contemporary artist Anna Von Mertens fuses the traditions of quilting with contemporary ideas about minimalist art and sculpture. The populist craft however – textiles - lives on in our lives and homes, preserving the past. Encourage students to ask their parents, grandparents, relatives, neighbors and/or friends about quilting, seeing if they can find examples of quilts. Students could find out how quilts were made and by whom, and whether they know anyone who makes quilts. The intention of the activity is to explore the role of quilt-making today.

Students may also find it of interest to visit the Web sites listed in this Resource section of this guide to explore quilt making organizations, styles, and forums. To extend this research, direct students to community organizations that use quilts to communicate, preserve histories, or commemorate events, often as part of a healing process.

For an activity ask students to work in groups to research quilts that are used today to raise awareness, to symbolize struggle or to commemorate and remember loved ones. Encourage students to go to see examples of these quilts, if they are accessible, and to report back on their findings. They should be prepared to talk about and/or write about the significance of the quilts for the communities represented, and indeed for them as spectators of a craft that is rich in symbolism, memory and history.

For more information about SPARK and its educational content, including the Visual & Performing Arts Standards, visit the Web site at <http://www.kqed.org/spark/education>.



For more information about the California Visual & Performing Arts Standards, visit the CA Dept. of Education at <http://www.cde.ca.gov/be/st/ss/index.asp>

## RELATED STANDARDS

### VISUAL ARTS

#### Grade 3

##### 3.0 HISTORICAL AND CULTURAL CONTEXTS

- 3.2 Identify artists from his or her own community, county, or state and discuss local or regional art traditions.
- 3.4 Identify and describe objects of art from different parts of the world observed in visits to a museum or gallery (e.g., puppets, masks, containers).

#### Grade 4

##### 1.0 ARTISTIC PERCEPTION

- 1.5 Describe and analyze the elements of art (color, shape/form, line, texture, space and value), emphasizing form, as they are used in works of art and found in the environment.

##### 4.0 AESTHETIC VALUING

- 4.4 Identify and describe how various cultures define and value art differently.

#### Grade 8

##### 3.0 HISTORICAL AND CULTURAL CONTEXT

- 3.2 Compare, contrast, and analyze styles of art from a variety of times and places in Western and non-Western cultures.
- 3.3 Identify major works of art created by women and describe the impact of those works on society at that time.

#### Grades 9-12 Proficient

##### 1.0 ARTISTIC PERCEPTION

- 1.1 Identify and use the principles of design to discuss, analyze, and write about visual aspects in the environment and in works of art, including their own.
- ##### 4.0 AESTHETIC VALUING
- 4.1 Articulate how personal beliefs, cultural traditions, and current social, economic, and political contexts influence the interpretation of the meaning or message in a work of art.
  - 4.2 Compare the ways in which the meaning of a specific work of art has been affected over time because of changes in interpretation and context.