

Historical Context

"The many Eskimo, Aleut and Indian groups that occupy Alaska had extensive sewing traditions of their own before contact with 'outside' cultures." (*Quilts of Alaska*, pg. 70). The Native Tlingit people of Southeast Alaska traditionally used the same sewing techniques of piecing and appliqué that you find in American quilting. Quilted armor was made of two or three layers of hides (hairless animal skins) tied or sewn together. Also small pieces of leather, fur, or bird were pieced together in patterns to make objects such as bags. The American quilt-making tradition crossed cultural lines sometime in the 1800s. From reading documents from the 1800s we learn that Native women used metal needles and thread. Tlingit women used cloth, such as calico, to piece different colors and patterns into shapes. It was said that because early Tlingit quilts were used as bedcovers, they did not survive daily use. (*Quilts of Alaska*, pg. 73) In early photographs of Alaska Natives we see quilts but we do not know if the quilts were Native-made or given as gifts or traded to the Natives.

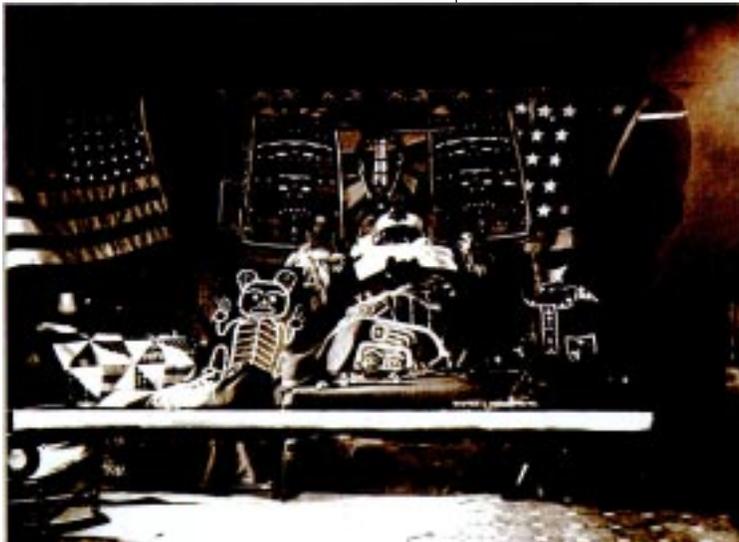


FIGURE 13A: Takou Chief Lying in State, Alaska. ASL PCA 87.268

The one-patch quilt is an example of how the quilt-making tradition popular throughout America was adapted by the Yup'ik women of Nelson Island to suit their own traditions.

SEAL PARTY QUILT

Design Elements

The Tlingit ceremonial robes referred to as "button blankets" are unquilted robes made from wool or trade cloth. An appliqué of a clan symbol is sewn in the center. White buttons are used to outline the border and the appliqué designs.

The one-patch quilt from Nelson Island is a simple quilt with squares of the same size sewn together. The colors and patterns do not seem to have a set order; they may have been randomly sewn together. The layers of the quilt are held together with neatly tied yarn.

Artists and Origin

We do not know the name of the woman who quilted the One-Patch quilt, but we know it was made on Nelson Island, off the western shore of Alaska. Almost every home there has a colorful quilt because the Yup'ik women have a wonderful tradition each spring. Parties are held to celebrate the taking of the first seal of the season and to share gifts with each other. Strips of cotton cloth, as well as many other household things, are thrown off the porch by the hostess to a group of women waiting excitedly outside. Women collect the strips of cloth from many seal parties and make pieced covers. The quilts and quilt tops are then given out during the winter dances later in the year. For more information about this tradition, read "How Yup'ik women spoil their cloth: The Seal Party Quilts of the Nelson Island Eskimos" by Ann Fienup-Riordan. (*Quilts in Alaska*, pp. 75-79).



FIGURE 13: One-patch, 1979, unknown maker, Nelson Island, Alaska

Compare and Contrast

What other quilts in the show use simple patchwork to create covers?

Can you find another quilt that uses yarn or heavy thread to tie the quilt together?

Visit the Alaska State Museum's website — www.museums.state.ak.us

MAKING A QUILT SANDWICH

What makes a quilt a quilt?

Level: Primary (grades K–3)



Summary

Young students learn that a quilt is made of 3 different layers by making a paper quilt called a “quilt sandwich.” They use simple addition to determine the size of the class quilt.

Estimated Time

60 minutes



Students visiting the Alaska State Museum copied their favorite patterns from the quilt exhibit to make their individual squares.

Part 1

- Find out what the children already know about quilts. Show either a real quilt or look at the pictures from the museum show.
- Discuss & ask questions such as:
 - What is a quilt? (Blanket, colorful bed covering, warm winter vest, etc.)
 - Have you ever seen or touched a quilt? Where? (On a bed, on a wall, in a photograph, in a catalog, in a store, a sleeping bag, etc.)
 - Who makes quilts? (Mostly women but also some men, in the United States for about 200 years, companies, etc.)
 - What is a quilt made of? (Bits of fabric, cloth, recycled cloth, stuffing or filling, fluff)

Part 2

- Show and help children understand the three parts of a quilt:
 1. A top made of cloth (usually with a pattern).
 2. A filling that helps insulate and helps the quilt keep you warm when you sleep.
 3. A backing of cloth, to hold the top in place and keep the batting “sandwiched” between the top and bottom. Stitches (made with needle and thread or yarn) keep all three parts together.
- Tell the children that they will be making a paper quilt, by putting three simple layers together, just like a sandwich is made (two pieces of bread with a filling).
- Make a paper quilt.

Top:

- Choose a simple pattern that can easily be made by all of the students, such as a square or a triangle.

Ideas: Use colorful squares, cut from

construction or butcher paper, or old wrapping paper. Students could also hand color pictures on squares with paints, crayons or markers.

- Determine the desired size for the finished class quilt. Make the size of each child’s square the same. (As a simple math problem, students can figure out how many children will be making a square and the number of squares needed to put together for your finished size.

Example: If 20 students each make a 3 inch square it would make a top with 4 squares across and 5 squares down or $3+3+3+3=12$ inches across and $3+3+3+3+3=15$ inches down. The top would be 12 x 15 inches.)

- After each student has finished a square, glue them onto one piece of paper to complete the top.

Backing:

- Use one piece of paper for the backing. Cut it to be at least 2 inches wider on each side so that you can turn up an edge. *Example:* The backing piece of paper for a quilt top that is 12 x 15 inches will need to be 2 inches wider all the way around, or 16 x 19 inches so that you can turn up an edge.
- Staple or glue the top to the bottom along three sides. Leave one side open so that you can put in the filling.

Filling:

- Use bubble wrap or shredded paper as the filler. Carefully stuff the shredded paper into the quilt or put in the bubble wrap. When it is as full as you like, staple or glue the last side together. You may use office brads (small brass fasteners that open on the backside) or large yarn to close the quilt.

Part 3

- Look at the finished quilt and talk about it. Ask the students, “What do you like about it? What would you change if you did it again?”
- Tell students that sometimes quilts are bed coverings, but quilting is also a technique used to make clothing, such as a jacket.
- Ask students to watch for examples of quilts that they see in their homes and in stores, such as quilted vests, sleeping bags, down jackets, etc.

Alaska Content Standards

In this activity students will focus on the following:

FINE ARTS A3 Use new and traditional materials, tools, techniques and processes in the arts.

MATH A1 Understand and use numeration.

Assessments

Check to see that each child can explain that a quilt has three parts: a top, a bottom and filling. Check to see that students understand that “real” quilts are usually made of cloth, not paper.

Vocabulary

Backing — A piece of cloth forming the underside of a quilt. It may be several pieces seamed together.

Filler — The middle layer of a quilt, usually a fluffy layer of cotton, wool, or polyester, that makes a quilt warm and gives it a characteristic “puffy” look and feel.

Quilt — A textile bedcover usually made of three layers: a decorated top, a plain backing, and a fluffy filling between them. The layers of a quilt are usually sewn together with stitches through all the layers; or they may be tied or “tacked” together with yarn knots.

Materials

- Paper for top: colored paper, wrapping paper, plain paper, scraps, etc.
- Markers, crayons, paints, etc.
- Paper for bottom: large enough for finished size of quilt, allowing an extra 2 inches on each side.
- Filling: bubble wrap, shredded paper from newspapers, scrap paper, etc.
- Glue
- Scissors
- Stapler and staples
- Brads (office paper tacks) or thick yarn with large-eyed needle
- Select appropriate books about quilts to read or display in the classroom.

We highly recommend *Quilts of Alaska: A Textile Album of the Last Frontier* for schools and teachers who plan to use the exhibit or materials from the exhibit. The catalog is extravagantly illustrated with full color pictures of selected quilts and historic photographs. Five chapters provide detailed information about quilting as it applies to Alaska. A full index, appendix, bibliography and endnotes make it a valuable resource for reference and teaching. Ordering information: The Store at the Alaska State Museum, 395 Whittier St., Juneau, Alaska 99801. \$21.95 +\$7 (postage / handling) per book.

Hall, June, Guest Curator. *Quilts of Alaska: A Textile Album of the Last Frontier*. Gastineau Channel Historical Society, 2001 ISBN: 0-9704815-0-0.