

OVERVIEW

GRADE 5 ARTIST: DOLORES GRAY

EARLY AMERICAN ARTS: Freedom Quilt Project

Students will learn the historical significance of quilts in early America and how they were used in the Underground Railroad, guiding slaves to the North. Students will create their own quilt blocks that utilize these early secret codes from pre-civil war era quilts.

LESSON OBJECTIVES

- Students will learn about the history of the Underground Railroad and how quilts were used to help escaping slaves.
- Using geometric shapes, students will design and create a paper quilt block based on patterns used during the time of the Underground Railroad.
- Students will learn about design concepts such as pattern, repetition, and color theory.

LESSON BACKGROUND

The Underground Railroad was a way for slaves to travel from one safe house to the next on their way to the Free states and Canada. Slave quilts created in the early and mid-1800s were important to the slaves' journey to freedom. The secret messages embedded in the quilts, some say, assisted slaves from the South in their efforts to escape to freedom in the North. Each quilt contained a specific code or message that conveyed important information to those who were attempting the dangerous journey. The quilts were hung outside as if drying on a clothes-line. The slaves who were trying to escape to freedom could see the quilts and the designs (or secret messages) from far away. The messages told the slave if he/she was going in the right direction or gave hints about the journey.

MATERIALS

White paper (precut to 8" x 8" – one sheet per student)

Decorative and construction paper precut to 4" x 4" in a variety of colors (several sheets per student).

Scissors, Glue sticks

Color wheel

Copies of coded block designs and instruction diagrams for students

RESOURCES

Burns, Elenor. *Underground Railroad Sampler*. San Marcos, CA: Quilt in a Day, 2003.

Dobard, Raymond and Jacqueline Tobin. *Hidden In Plain View*. N.Y.: Anchor Books, 2000.

Fry, Gladys-Marie. *Stitched from the Soul Slave Quilts from the Antebellum South*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2001.

Gery, Michael. "The Secret Code of Quilts." [Online] Available. <http://www.carolina-country.com/storypages/ourstories/quilt/quilt.html> November, 2006.

Kiracofe, Roderick and Mary Elizabeth Johnson. *The American Quilt: History of Cloth and Comfort 1750-1959*. N.Y.: Clarkson and Potter, 2004.

Kooler, Donna. *Encyclopedia of Quilting*. Little Rock: Leisure Arts, 2005. by D. Kooler

VOCABULARY

Quilt: a bed cover made of two layers of fabric stitched together, with interior padding of cotton or feathers held in place by decorative intersecting seams.

Quilt Blocks: solid pieces of material of the same sized used in the construction of a quilt.

Geometric Shapes: a form such as a square, triangle, cone or cube.

Complementary Colors: The complementary color scheme is made of two colors that are opposite each other on the color wheel. The complementary scheme is high-contrast. Examples of complementary colors are red and green, blue and orange, and yellow and purple.

Analogous Colors: Colors that sit next to each other on the color wheel. They tend to look pleasant together because they are closely related. Examples are blue and green, yellow and orange, and red and magenta.

Color Temperature (warm vs. cool): Warm colors are hues from red through yellow, browns and tans included; cool colors are the hues from blue green through blue violet, most grays included. The concept of color temperature is related to the observed contrast in landscape light, between the "warm" colors of daylight or sunset and the "cool" colors of a gray or overcast day.

Symbol: Something that stands for or represents something else; a material object representing something, often something immaterial; emblem, token, or sign.

Contrast: Something that is different, compared with something else. To compare or arrange different things in a way that highlights their differences, ie. putting a circle next to a square.

VOCABULARY

Symmetry: The same on both sides of a central dividing line. Geometric objects that are equally positioned about a point, line, or plane that bisect the object.

Pattern: A repeated decorative design. A regular or repetitive form, order, or arrangement.

Quilt Block Secret code names (refer to attached sheet for images)

Crossroads: This block symbolized the halfway point of the journey.

Bow Tie: This block told escaping slaves that it was time for them to shed their old clothes and dress up to better fit into the style of the city.

Flying Geese: This block symbolized that it was time to head north. Many slaves, while working or traveling outside, would watch for flocks of geese. They knew that when the geese were flying north it was time to follow them.

Star: This block symbolized the direction of freedom.

Wagon Wheel: This block was a symbol to begin the journey. Many of the slaves would hide in the bottom of wagons under straw or produce. Some wagons had false bottoms for concealing stowaways.

Log cabin: It was an African tradition that when you passed a stranger you'd take a stick and inscribe a symbol of your tribe in the dirt to let the other person know who you were; it acted as a greeting. A log cabin symbol indicated that a person was safe to talk to.

INTRODUCTION

Begin by discussing the difficult task for a slave escaping to freedom. Explain that the Underground Railroad was not a train that ran on a track, rather it was a system of houses and places where slaves could hide and people would help them by giving them food and a place to sleep during their journey from slave states in the south to the northern free states. If anyone found out that a slave had run away and was trying to escape to freedom, they might tell the police. The slave would then be caught and sent back to his owner. Therefore, between each house on the Underground Railroad, the slaves had to travel in secrecy and could not speak to anyone. They could not walk up to another slave or a free person on the street or in a field and ask him or her for directions. The slaves who lived and worked in the miles between the Underground Railroad houses, hung quilts out for those who were secretly traveling between them. The slave owners did not understand the symbols and the meanings of the designs on the quilts; they assumed that the slaves were simply hanging out their quilts after washing them or to make them smell fresh. However the slaves knew the meaning of the symbols because they spoke with one another before trying to escape. Thus the slave quilts gave the runaway slaves directions toward the Underground Railroad houses, or suggestions about the journey so that they did not have to speak with anyone directly during their travels.

Show students the coded quilt block symbols and explain their meanings. Explain that each student will create one of the six coded quilt blocks symbols.

Prior to the lesson the teacher should create a sample quilt block to show students. The teacher should demonstrate the folding of the 8" x 8" white grids (the grids make it easier to properly place the colored shapes) and the folding and cutting of the colored pattern shapes made from the 4" x 4" sheets. Emphasize that in order to make an accurate design students must carefully fold, cut, and layout all the pieces carefully onto their white 8" x 8" paper grid. After checking with

other students and the teacher that it is accurate and symmetrical, the pieces can be glued on.

Show students examples of symmetry and pattern in the quilt block design samples. Explain the meaning of complimentary, analogous, warm and cool colors, and show examples on a color wheel. Ask the students to imagine how they might have chosen the colors in their designs if they were making a quilt during the Underground Railroad era. For example, if they want their symbols to be easy for escaping slaves to see, they might choose bright, warm colors or a complementary scheme. If they prefer the symbols to be subtle, so as not to attract suspicion, they may wish to use cool colors in an analogous color scheme. Students can also choose colors with a personal meaning to them.

STEP BY STEP

Preparation

1. Ask each student to decide which of the included quilt block patterns they would like to create.
2. Distribute an 8" x 8" sheet to each student.
3. Follow "Making the Grids" diagram steps 1-5 to make a 16-square grid. To make a 64-square grid (for Wagon Wheel and Log Cabin patterns) complete steps 6-9.
4. Select 4" x 4" color paper for quilt block using 2-3 colors only. Remind students to think about whether they would like to use a complementary or analogous color combination and whether they will choose warm or cool colors. Student can use the white paper as one color if they wish.
5. Have each student identify the appropriate "Shape Pattern" for the coded quilt block design they are making.
6. Fold and cut out the shapes by following the steps on the appropriate "Shape Pattern" diagram.
7. Lay out the colored pieces on the quilt block grid but do not glue. Make sure the design is symmetrical and matches the chosen quilt block design.
8. Have a fellow student and teacher review the quilt block layout. Make any needed corrections.
9. After review glue down color shapes.

During the lesson

Ask students to lay out all their colored pieces and finish placing all small shapes in the quilt block before they start gluing. Check that students' blocks are accurate and symmetrical before they begin gluing.

Concluding the Lesson

Cleaning up:

Allow 5 to 10 minutes for clean up.

Post-project discussion:

Display all finished quilt blocks and have students explain their meanings and why certain colors were chosen for their designs.

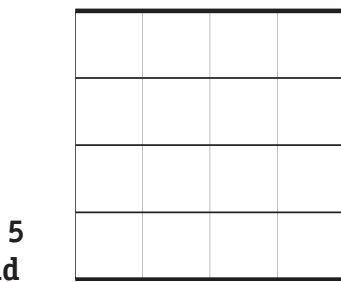
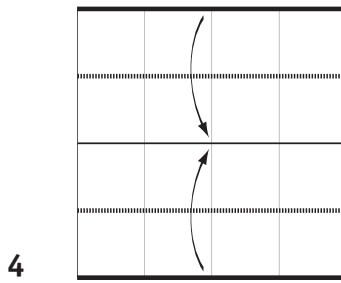
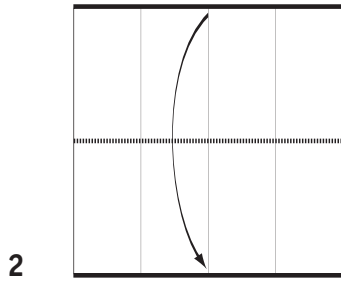
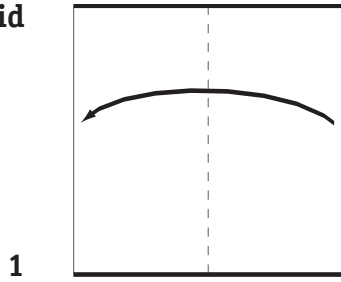
Variations:

1. Students can work in groups of four to create a 16" x 16" quilt with a quilt block made by each student. Have student groups discuss their blocks and chose secret codes that make sense together. After each student in the group has made his or her code block, arrange them face down and tape them together along the seams. Ask each group to explain the meaning of their quilt and the message that they hope it will convey. Ask one spokes-person from the group to explain what they want the slave journeying in secret to know from the quilt.

2. As a follow up activity, students can design and create their own secret quilt block symbol with a personal meaning using the shapes and grids from this lesson.

MAKING THE GRIDS

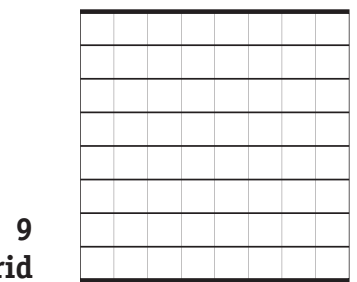
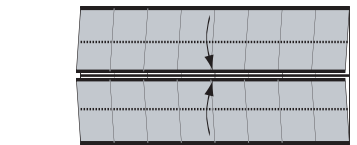
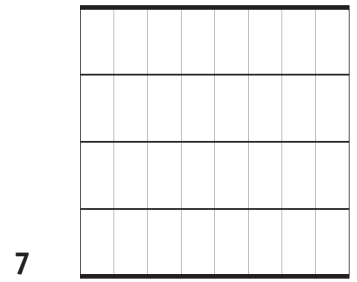
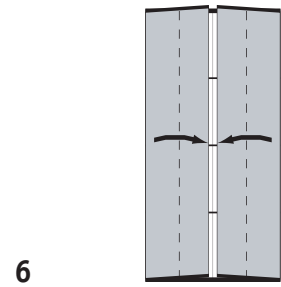
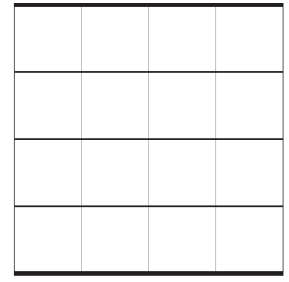
Making the 16 grid



Finished 16 grid

Making the 64 grid

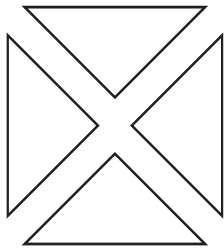
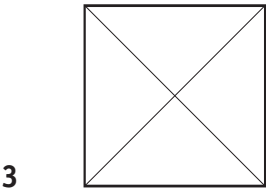
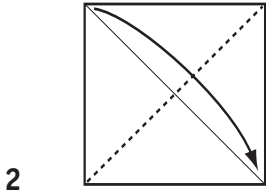
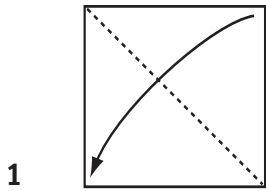
5
Finished 16 grid



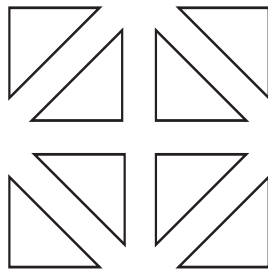
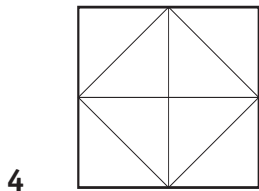
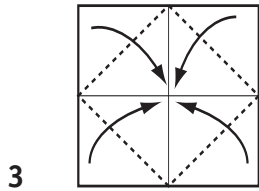
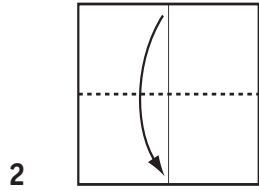
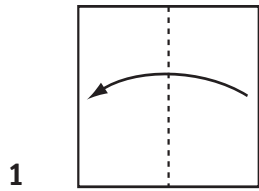
Finished 64 grid

CUT-OUT SHAPES

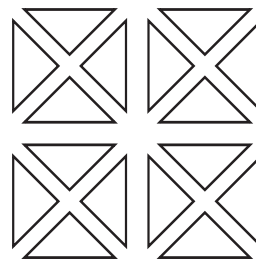
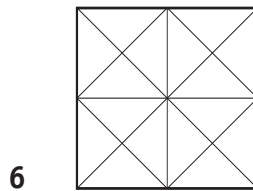
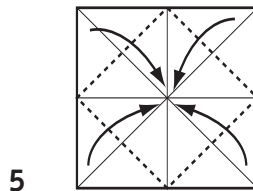
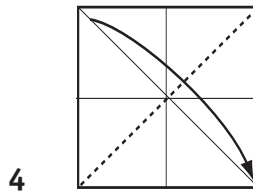
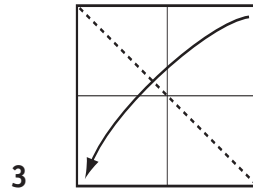
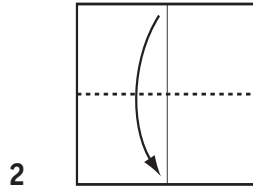
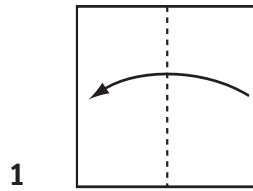
Shape Patterns based on 4" x 4" square



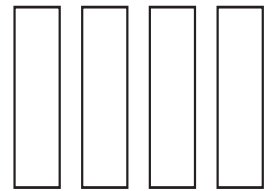
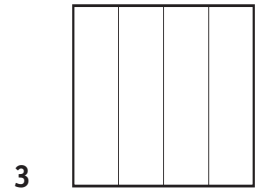
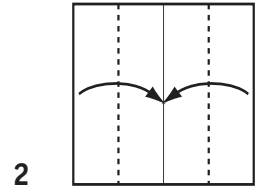
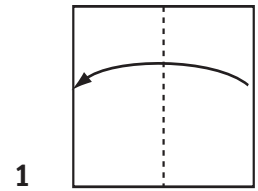
A
Bow Tie
Flying Geese
Crossroads



B
Star



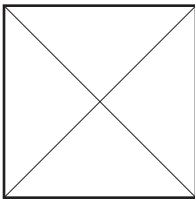
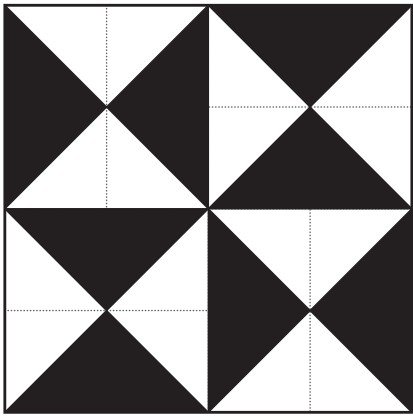
C
Wagon Wheel



D
Log Cabin

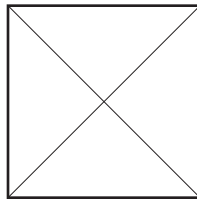
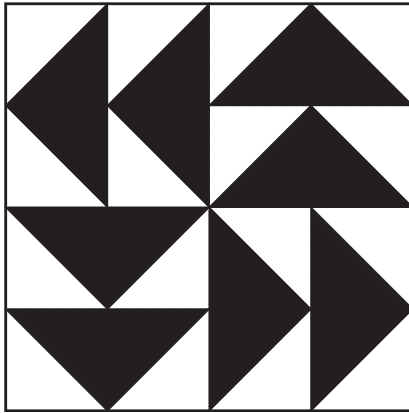
SECRET CODE NAMES

Bow Tie



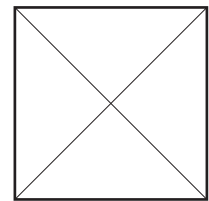
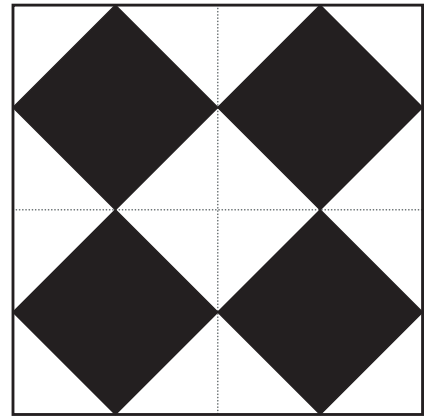
**16 Grid
Pattern A**

Flying Geese



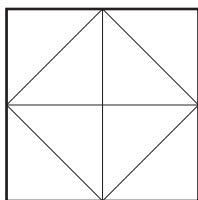
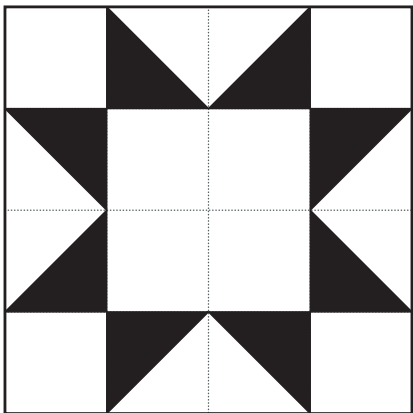
**16 Grid
Pattern A**

Crossroads



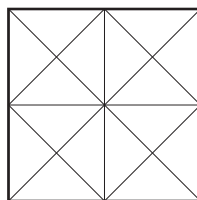
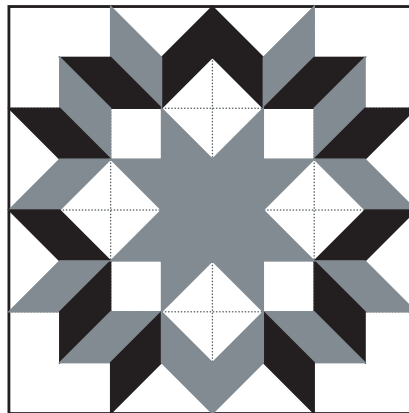
**16 Grid
Pattern A**

Star



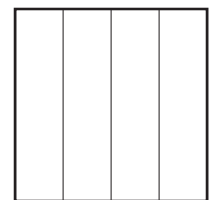
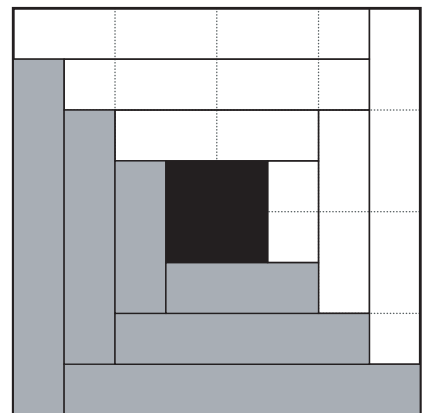
**16 Grid
Pattern B**

Wagon Wheel



**16 Grid
Pattern C**

Log cabin



**16 Grid
Pattern D**

STANDARDS

- 1.1** Identify and describe the principles of design in visual compositions, emphasizing unity and harmony.
- 2.4** Create an expressive abstract composition based on real objects.
- 3.2** Identify and describe various fine, traditional, and folk arts from historical periods worldwide.
- 3.3** Identify and compare works of art from various regions of the United States.
- 4.1** Identify how selected principles of design are used in a work of art and how they affect personal responses to and evaluation of the work of art.
- 5.2** Identify and design icons, logos, and other graphic devices as symbols for ideas and information.

NOTES