

## Keeping Us in Stitches Activity: Be a Quilt Detective

**Purpose:** to help the students understand that history is recorded in a handmade object. This is a quilt-based activity similar to the historical research activity in the Behind the Scenes unit. Detective work similar to this could be carried out on other historical objects.

**Illinois State Museum Web site used:** <http://www.museum.state.il.us/muslink/art/htmls/ks.html>

**Objective:** students will be able to find information about quilt identity from written sources, online sources, and people, condense and rewrite this information in the form of a report or exhibit label, and tell about newly discovered family history uncovered during their research.



**Grade Level:** 6-10

**Time Required:** one class period (with quilter help), or two class periods (online and with library loans), homework assignment to interview owner.

### Materials:

- one antique or family quilt per student or group (if there aren't enough, perhaps a quilt guild or quilting group could help)
- list of online sources and written quilt resources to be acquired from interlibrary loan
- list of people to contact, like experts, family members, quilters

**Motivation:** Information about family objects gets lost because we do not ask questions of the owners soon enough. The older family members get too ill to answer the questions, documents are lost, or the object and the family member with the information become separated. A little piece of history is lost when this happens.

There are interesting stories to be heard from the people who made or used the quilts. These stories are often associated with events or people in family members' lives. Class members can learn about their families and friends while researching a quilt. The information can be published as an exhibit label for a class quilt show or in some other form of writing determined by the teacher. Information gleaned from the research can add to a written history of the owners of the quilts.

**Procedure:** Students view ISM online quilt unit, visit other quilting web sites, read books about quilting, brainstorm about aspects of a quilt that might tell them when it was made, by whom, of what materials, in what design, for whom, etc.

- interview the owner of the quilt to determine origin, maker, date, family stories.
- take notes along the way.
- resolve conflicts in information.
- come to conclusions based on information.
- write up conclusions as a report for all members, go through the editing process

**Publication and Closure:** Publish reports  
in a book  
as an exhibit catalog  
as exhibit labels  
as family history  
as an oral report

**Assessment:** gaps in knowledge may not be filled in, but some new information should have been found by comparisons with other quilts and by the interviews.

**Resources Online:**

<http://www.quilthistory.com/> The Quilt Heritage Listserv has a list of book resources, a listserv to join, archives of discussions and other topics on quilt history.

<http://www.womenfolk.com/grandmothers/qhlinks.htm> Quilt History Links is a treasure trove of links to articles about quilts, women and quilts, quilt museum sites, quilt pattern history, and quilt history book lists.

<http://quilt.com/Blocks/AlphaBlockList.html> Quilt Block Patterns in Alphabetical Order from the World wide Quilting Page. Each block name link takes you to directions for cutting and piecing the block, with diagrams.

Naomin Parkhurst's Quilt Block page; <http://ils.unc.edu/~parkn/quilt/> She is a University of North Carolina student; this page is a data base of alphabetical, visual, thematic and units blocks. Colorful graphic of each block. Site contains links to other quilt history sites.

<http://quilt.com/HowTo/SettingsPage.html> with colorful graphics, this World Wide Quilting section shows the different types of settings that blocks can be organized in. it has a Coloring Book section, in which you print out a block and design your color scheme.

**Book Resources**

Brackman, Barbara. *Clues in the Calico*. Howell Press, 1989. Out of print, but an important authority.

Brackman, Barbara. *Encyclopedia of Pieced Quilt Patterns*. American Quilter's Society, 1993. Definitive book for identifying quilt block patterns; organized by type of block; source of name and dates given. Hardcover or ring binder.

Trestain, Ellen. *Dating Fabrics: A Color Guide, 1800-1960*. Collector Books, 1998.

Mellor, Susan. *Textile Designs : Two Hundred Years of European and American Patterns for Printed Fabrics Organized by Motif, Style, Color, Layout, and Period*. 1,823 Illustrations in Color. 1991.

Shih, Joy. *Forties Fabrics*. 1997.

**Personal Resource:** A quilter from your local guild or quilt store.

**Illinois State Board of Education Goals and Standards addressed:**

**Social Science: Goal 18.A.2: Late Elementary:** Explain ways in which artistic creations serve as expressions of culture.

**Visual Art: Goal 27.B.4a: Early High School:** Analyze and classify the distinguishing characteristics of historical and contemporary works by style, period, and culture.