

**ISM: Bertha Stenge Quilt Collection Activity:  
Design a Local Quilting Pattern**

**Objective:** students will create a quilting design based on local history and landmarks, thus understanding how quilters incorporated their environment into their quilt designs as they understand the process and skill of quilting.



*Celery in OPA quilt*

**Grade Levels:** 5-8

**Time Required:** one period to research and draw design to scale; free time to sew it onto a pre-made quilt block or quilt.

**Motivation:** Bertha Stenge was an artistic quilter who not only adapted designs she saw on rugs and dishes into her quilting designs, but also took ideas from events and locales around her to create quilting designs for her quilts. We are going to look around our town, county or state to find motifs to quilt onto a whole cloth quilt background or small blocks. Bertha's designs included stalks of celery, Chicago buildings, flowers, and musical notations. Make a list of local landmarks, objects, living things, and even people that you could stylize as a design motif. Is there a local park with a gazebo? How about a lake or river with wildlife? Are there beautiful Victorian houses? A tower? Horses or other farm animals, farm buildings?

**Materials:**

Pencil  
Paper  
Dressmaker's Carbon paper  
Eraser  
Needles  
Quilting thread  
Scissors



*crown from Canada quilt*

(Here is where a volunteer sewer or quilter can be invaluable) Pre-made 9" finished quilt blocks (3 layers), one for each student OR  
Several small finished quilts of 3 layers for group work (see directions below)

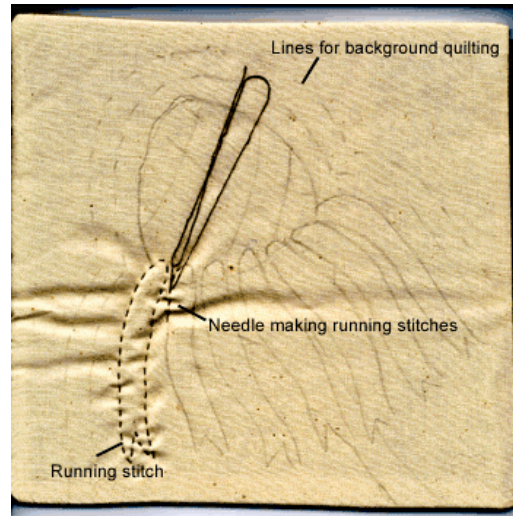
**Procedure:**

Look at the ISM Bertha Stenge quilts online and their descriptions. Talk about the quilting motifs she used in her designs. Discuss how they fit the theme of the quilt. Whole cloth quilts use the quilting lines as their design. They do not have patchwork in color. So they quilting lines are detailed and yet somewhat stylized or simplified.

Brainstorm motifs that could represent your town. Motifs could focus on an event (like the County Fair), on a place, like the town square buildings, on people and what they do, or on the natural beauty of the area like trees, flowers, and birds. Make a list as you go. Some will be eliminated. Each person can choose a different motif or if working in groups on a wall quilt, the motif can be repeated along the edges and several can be placed in the center area of the quilt top.

Each student will choose a motif and draw a sketch of it at a specified size. Photographs or other images of local sites will help if students cannot draw them from life. Several sketches may be needed to achieve the effect wanted.

Once the motif is drawn, students will transfer it with carbon paper to the quilt top by placing the carbon paper face down on the quilt, then placing the sketch face up and drawing over the lines again with a hard pencil. Place the motif and carbon paper centrally in the individual block or according to a predetermined pattern on a larger quilt. The carbon ink will come off onto the quilt top. This will fade later as the quilt is handled and it can be washed out by hand.



Students will thread their needle (or get help with this task), tie a knot in one end, and start a running stitch along the lines of the design. Practice on a scrap cloth will help students achieve an even stitch. Running stitch can be made by working the needle several times down and up through the layers along the stitching line (which takes practice, too), or it can be done by plunging the needle down and pulling it and the thread all the way through for one stitch and then poking the needle up 1/8" along the line and pulling it through to complete the stitch. When the thread gets less than 4" long, students should tie off by making three tiny stitches in one place on the back of the block right on the stitching line.

Extension: For older students or those more experienced with needlework: they can thread lengths of matched color yarn from the back side between their quilting lines to create Trapunto, a three-dimensional effect.



*Word from Four Freedoms quilt*

See [http://www.museum.state.il.us/muslink/art/htmls/ks\\_tech\\_t.html](http://www.museum.state.il.us/muslink/art/htmls/ks_tech_t.html) for technique.

#### **Assessment:**

Quilt block designs should represent or symbolize the chosen theme.  
Sewing should reflect an attempt to make running stitches even and follow the lines.  
Motif should reflect thought in stylizing the original image.  
Block and sewing should be sturdy and clean.

#### **Illinois State Board of Education Goals Addressed:**

##### **Visual Arts:**

##### **Late Elementary:**

**26.A.2e** Describe the relationships among media, tools/technology and processes.

**26.A.3e** Describe how the choices of tools/technologies and processes are used to create specific effects in the arts.

**Middle School:**

**27.B.2** Identify and describe how the arts communicate the similarities and differences among various people, places and times.

**Social Studies: Social Systems:**

**Late Elementary:**

**18.A.2** Explain ways in which language, stories, folk tales, music, media and artistic creations serve as expressions of culture.

**Middle School:**

**18.A.3** Explain how language, literature, the arts, architecture and traditions contribute to the development and transmission of culture.