

# Quilt Blocks Teach Diversity

**Daylene Petersen**

**Q**uilts—those wonderful old symbols of comfort—can be a positive way to teach about student's unique assets and contributions to their world. Because of the familiarity of quilts, they are a symbol easily recognized by students and can be a satisfying work for both beginning and more advanced students. Many quilts are family heirlooms, having been passed down through generations from parent to child. They can emphasize the nurturing and loving part of a family. Quilts can somehow make us feel comfortable like chicken soup or a soft little puppy. This can help students feel free to communicate their ideas in artwork.

Quilts are a symbol of variety and differences since most quilts are pieced together from blocks, which can be as different or similar as the quiltmaker wishes. Recently it has been said that "patchwork quilt" has begun to take the place of "melting pot" as the term used to describe the cultural diversity of American society.

Because fabric paints and crayons are natural and easy to use, they are a good option for creating the individual blocks that will later be combined into a larger quilt. Depending on the objective of the lesson, the blocks can be joined in a variety of ways.

## The Project

Prepare rectangles of inexpensive muslin fabric about 9 x 12" (23 x 30.5 cm) for each student. Tape a large piece of plastic wrap to the table where each student will be working. Use heat-set fabric paint, which can be purchased in most any quilt supply shop. Let students select their colors and with a paintbrush, sponge, or foam brush apply paint to the fabric. The fabric can be worked on dry or dampened with water. Water can be added to the paint to lighten the color or help blend as a color wash.

**The experience of creating something very unique that becomes a part of a bigger whole helps students see the significance, and the importance, of an individual in society.**

When a student has finished painting, let the fabric dry overnight. If the paintings must be moved they can be carried on the plastic wrap without much shifting. When they are dry, heat set the color by ironing the fabric between two lightweight towels. The iron should be set on a cotton setting and ironed for about two minutes. Movement of the iron during this step is preferred to keep from getting an imprint of the iron plate on the fabric.

After discussing the diversity of individuals and what a positive thing each person's uniqueness is, go on to the second part of the pro-

ject. The teacher may want to suggest a theme to give a unity to the quilt. In doing this lesson with second grade students, we talked at length about how our faces are all unique and wonderful and so our suggested theme was a self-portrait.

## Part Two

Use transfer crayons on paper and then iron onto the first block. Drawings need to be done with the

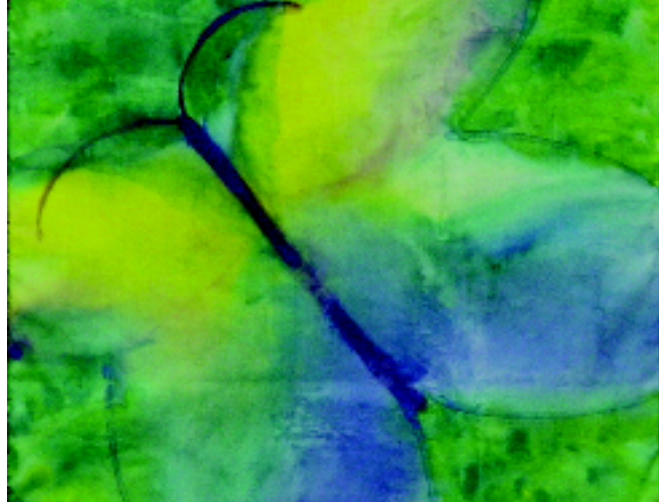
darker colored crayons like blue, purple, and black. Lighter colors are hard to see on a colored background and so my students were given only one dark color to work with and instructed to draw a self-portrait. We had a

good supply of mirrors for students to view themselves and reproduce what they saw. They were told not to write anything because the image would be reversed when transferred.

When the drawings were finished we took them to the ironing board and turned the drawing upside-down on the painted fabric. The iron should once again be on a cotton setting and this time sandwiched between two pieces of paper. The iron plate should be held still on the inverted transfer for approximately one to two minutes. Don't push the iron, but lift and set in new place because the transfer will shift on the fabric giving an out-of-focus effect.

Lift the edge of the paper and peek under to see if the image is being transferred to the fabric.

As the blocks are finished, set them side by side until the quilt begins to form. Have students help arrange the blocks into a pleasing grouping. The



*Student work*

blocks can be sewn together with or without fabric strips in between. They can be taped together with masking tape or stapled to a piece of backing paper for display. Both of the latter methods make it easy to dismantle the individual blocks so students can take their own block home.

## Additional Options

The option for more advanced students can be to simply paint their idea of the theme directly on fabric. Most fabric paints are vibrant and bright colors, but because of their ability to blend with water, they can have an almost translucence appearance and can act almost as watercolors. Older students delight in simply making their own images of the theme.

The experience of creating something very unique that becomes a part of a bigger whole helps students see the significance, and the importance, of an individual in society. Each is different but important to the success of the community. 🌀

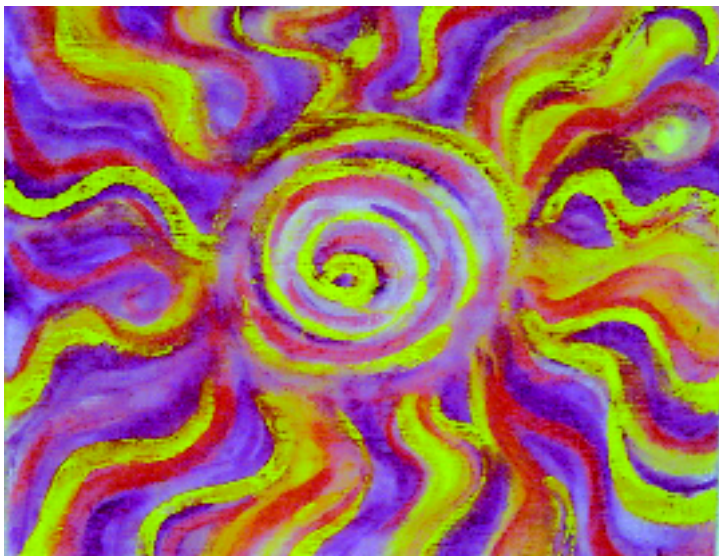
*Daylene Petersen is an art teacher in Notus, Idaho.*

## NATIONAL STANDARD

*Students use subjects, themes, and symbols that demonstrate knowledge of contexts, values, and aesthetics that communicate intended meaning in artworks.*

## WEB LINK

[painting.about.com/library/weekly/aafabrictipsa.htm](http://painting.about.com/library/weekly/aafabrictipsa.htm)



*Student work*