

American Dream Quilt



**Sharon High School
Sharon, Massachusetts**

Subject Area
Language Arts

Area of Service
Educational

Grade Level
Eleventh

Author of Project
Linda Kay

Designers of Project
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In Brief

Sharon High School's American Dream Quilt is a CSL project in its sixth year. After months of reading, interviewing, writing journals, and reflecting, students create quilt squares that capture the essence of their heritage and serve as a "snapshot" of who they are at this moment in time. The sharing of their stories, the visits to other classrooms and schools, and especially the community celebration at the end of the year, ensure that this project is one of their most memorable high school experiences.

Learner Outcomes

Students learn to:

Be active listeners, readers, and learners through interviews, readings, speeches, and discussions;

Understand the importance of family and to understand the many layers of American society through a study of literature and family; and

Conceptualize diverse elements into a comprehensive work of art.

MASSACHUSETTS CURRICULUM FRAMEWORK CONNECTIONS



This unit is aligned with the Massachusetts Curriculum Frameworks. Listed are the subject areas and the learning strands addressed:

English/Language Arts:

Language strand: 1, 2, 3, 6, 7

Literature strand: 8, 9, 10, 11, 13, 15, 16,

Composition strand: 19, 20, 21, 22, 23, 25

Media strand: 26, 27, 28

OVERVIEW

The actual creation of Sharon High School's American Dream Quilt, a CSL project in its sixth year, occurs after two months of preparational activities. Students learn how to interview family members, to compose extensive journals including reflection pieces, and to assimilate and apply themes from the literature to the experiences of their own families. Ultimately students create a tangible, well orchestrated piece of personalized Americana by designing their own unique quilt squares.

The Need

Initially the quilt project was created by two teachers, Jean Conley and Sandra Dennis, to address the diverse learning styles of a newly created multilevel junior English course. Students learned to appreciate the varying talents of classmates not always apparent in traditional educational practices. Students with stronger artistic intelligences helped fellow classmates; students with mathematical strengths helped with measurement and technical aspects of the project; students who enjoy public speaking helped the more timid of the class become comfortable. The class grew together as a unified team with the quilt as a source of personal recognition and group pride.

The American Dream Quilt is more than a work of art comprised of individual quilt squares sewn together for one year. Originally a multilevel project, the importance of this initiative has been recognized and now all eleventh grade English teachers have elected to include the quilt project in their classrooms, increasing collegiality among teachers and creating a larger sense of unity in the student body.

A CSL Response

The quilt project was originally designed to create a sense of community in a diverse classroom. "Taking the quilt on the road," when each class is ready to go public and tell the stories behind the artistry of their squares, has been a wonderful opportunity to bridge barriers between the town of Sharon and the high school. Students enthusiastically tell their stories to peers, younger students, senior citizens, and parents.



The American Dream Quilt has grown from a small classroom multilevel project to a valued multicultural, community-wide celebration of shared values, visions, and dreams.

Linda Kay, Teacher

Collection of quilt squares.

My grandfather Martin, a refugee from the Armenian Holocaust, came to this country and became a tailor, which makes it extremely meaningful that I am using the tools of his trade, a needle and thread, to quilt the family he founded.

Melissa Adelstein,
Grade 11 Student



Celebration

Each year the service component has been successfully expanded and extended into larger arenas. The first three years the quilt project was enjoyed only by the multilevel classes, but soon the other eleventh grade students also sought the opportunity to experience the project that garnered so much attention in the town. The class quilts are also rotated around the town for public viewing—a testimony to the multicultural advantage of living in Sharon. Breakfast for all juniors and their parents, was provided by a generous parent and hundreds of parents converged in Sharon's cafeteria for a morning of student stories and mutual appreciation.

In 1999, the Quilt Breakfast became the largest celebration in the school year. The gymnasium was transformed into a museum of local heritage as each wall was covered by colorful quilts. Each student prepared a favorite family dish from a recipe previously recorded in their family journals to share with peers and family members. Town officials, the media, and the middle school students taking a tour of the high school, enjoyed and celebrated Sharon's heritage. The Quilt Breakfast 2000 reached even deeper into the community; high school students, and teachers coordinated a townwide celebration affirming diversity as a part of a program with the Anti-Defamation League and the "No Place for Hate" committee.



OUTCOMES

Academic Gains

As a result of a year-long focus on American society through comprehensive interviewing, writing journals, and creating a quilt square, students are able to communicate a new understanding of the importance of their families and community. In addition, students become more effective communicators as a result of large and small discussions based on making connections to their literary readings, formal and informal compositions, and oral presentations.

Societal Gains

Beginning with family interviews, students recognize the importance of the institution of the family and the need for cultural identity and pride. Additionally, students' appreciation of their peer's cultural differences is enhanced. This appreciation also extends beyond the walls of Sharon High School into the community where generational barriers are softening as a result of this project.

Community Partners

Elementary and Middle School students and teachers

Sharon Public Schools' Community Service Office

Parents

Teachers

Town officials

Council on Aging

Anti-Defamation League



TIES TO THE MASSACHUSETTS CURRICULUM FRAMEWORKS

LEARNING STANDARDS/ OUTCOMES	ACTIVITY	ASSESSMENT
English/Language Arts		
LANGUAGE		
Standard 3: Make oral presentations that demonstrate appropriate consideration of audience, purpose and the information to be conveyed.	Students prepare oral presentations about their quilts and present these speeches to as many audiences as time allows. The refinement of their speeches is ongoing with each presentation.	Students are assessed on information presented, consideration and engagement of audience, clarity of speech, and the usual public speaking tools of eye contact, body language and pacing.
Standard 6: Identify and analyze how oral dialects differ from each other in English, and what role standard American English plays in informal and formal communication.	Students are exposed to excerpts of local color and writings which capture the written rhythm of dialect, including such writers as Zora Neale Hurston, Alice Walker, and Amy Tan. Students will record and write one journal entry in the dialect of the person being interviewed.	The journal entry is assessed for its content presented authentically in the voice of an ancestor.
Standard 16: Compare and contrast similar myths and narratives from different cultures and geographic regions.	Students understand the importance of heritage and its archetypal similarities and differences through the completion of their family history survey (see Addendum), the discussions of family narratives and superstitions, and the recording of family myths, superstitions.	Students will be assessed according to the family journal rubric.
COMPOSITION		
Standard 20: Select and use appropriate genres, modes of reasoning and speaking when writing for different audiences and rhetorical purposes.	Students write a minimum of two business letters to organizations requesting space to publicly display the quilt.	Students are assessed on their ability to compose a business letter strong in form and content.

LESSON PLAN The Family Journal

Objective

Students are introduced to the techniques essential to successful interviewing. Using these strategies, students begin the process of interviewing and recording the stories of their families; they are responsible for a minimum of eighteen journal entries which are the result of as many interviews as they are able to obtain. Depending on individual cases, students have obtained as many as fifteen different interviews, while others have only one major source to access. Email and faxes have opened new ways for long distance interviewing. Reflection entries complete a complex finished product.

Learning Standards

Language strands 2,5,6,7

Composition strands 19,20,21,22,23,24

Media strands 26,27

Materials

Rubric for interviewing

Rubric for suggested questions

A journal

Procedure

Part 1

Introduce students to the techniques of interviewing:

eye contact

interest

extending or rephrasing a question

keeping the person being interviewed responding and comfortable

maintaining respect for privacy

politeness

Part 2

Discuss different types of questions and how to turn them into polished journal entries.

For example: Where did you grow up? Describe your hometown, your house, your room, etc. Did you finish high school, go onto college, start a business? What did you hope to become? Have you accomplished what you dreamed of doing?

How did you meet your husband/wife?

Were there any world events that really affected you?

Were you ever involved in a war?

What has been the greatest struggle in your life? What has been your greatest accomplishment?

What is your definition of "success"?

LESSON PLAN continued

What do you think of when you hear the phrase "the American Dream"?

What is your happiest memory?

If possible, community members are brought in to discuss strategies for interviewing, and/or journal writing. Models of excellent journals are examined.

Assessment

Product, performance, presentation, assessment.

Students will submit their journals at three different times for assessment based on a class generated format. Each entry must be dated, numbered, and identified by the person and relationship of the author to the person being interviewed.

Students will take their interviewing skills to a local elementary school and teach the younger students effective strategies which will then be utilized in an elementary family project.

On a volunteer basis, students will orally present favorite entries to the class. Occasionally a student will share an entry on the day of the quilt celebration.

TIMELINE

September

Present overview of quilt project.

Read *Maggie's American Dream*.

Complete American Dream family history (pre-test) questionnaire.

October

Practice interviewing techniques and begin interviewing family members for oral histories.

Display quilt and quilting process in school lobby during Open House.

November-December

Continue gathering oral histories and entering them in journals.

Encourage holiday gatherings as focal points of information.

January

Submit family journals.

Begin designing quilt square.

Invite other quilters and student mentors from the previous class to help with the design of the quilt.

February-March

Work one day per 6-day schedule to complete the quilt squares.

Begin organization of the culminating community quilt celebration in June.

April

Connect quilt squares.

Begin practicing public speaking component.

Write two essays for the quilt booklet.

May

Take the quilt "on the road" for presentation in the community.

Post test: American Dream family history questionnaire.

Gather last year's quilts from arenas of display and return to seniors on class night.

June

Town wide quilt celebration.

Display new quilts in the community.

LESSON PLAN Creation of the American Dream Quilt

Objective

Through large and small group discussions, students will determine the necessary components for each quilt square. They will then synthesize the information gathered from family interviews and personal reflections and create a quilt square symbolizing the uniqueness of each student and his/her family history.

Learning Standards

Art

History

Language strands 1, 2

Materials

Paper and colored pencils

A 24" by 24" piece of background material(a second one for the backing is needed later)

Assorted pieces of material to sew onto the background

Needles, pins, threads, scissors

A sewing machine

Quilting batting

Procedure

Part 1

Students will begin designing their quilt squares by using paper and colored pencils to sketch out their ideas. Initially complicated drawings are analyzed for feasibility and then simplified. Students help each other with art work. Community quilters and student mentors are invited in to help in the design and creation of the new quilt.

Part 2

Students quilt one class period per 6-day cycle for one marking period. At the end of each quilting session, the teacher notes appropriate accountability. Care must be taken with the student who is unable to effectively utilize class time designated for quilting. When students complete the front of their squares, they are shown how to pin the batting and the back of the quilt square together for sewing together with the machine.

Part 3

Students decide the placement of their squares, and the final assembling of the individual squares into the class quilt begins. The final work of art is then prepared for hanging.

LESSON PLAN continued

Assessment

The actual assessment of the quilt is conducted by the team of eleventh grade teachers who are not judging solely on artistic ability. Attention is paid to the following:

- weekly accountability and diligence
- visual integrity/color/placement/overall effect
- an attempt at the required hand stitching
- an object that represents a dream
- a symbol of someone whose story can be told in the first person
- multiple examples of family culture, religion, or heritage

See "Family Quilt Assessment" for complete project criteria (Addendum)

Assessment

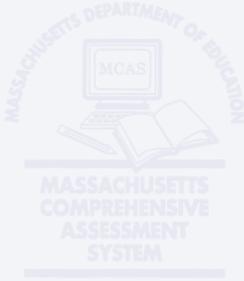
Sharon High School's eleventh grade students all benefit in varying ways from participating in this community service-learning project. In the incipient stages of the project, students respond to a family history questionnaire with minimal information. With the desire to learn more about their ancestors, they enthusiastically begin the interviews and reflections that will ultimately result in a lengthy family journal. Students submit their journals for review three times over a four month period. At the end of the year, students revisit the family history questionnaire to look for improvements. After completing the family journal, students begin creating a meaningful quilt square. Students are assessed weekly on work accomplished during the allotted class time. Students meet for six 75-minute periods during the third marking period of the year. The daily accountability rubric counts for one sixth of the grade. The final quilt square is assessed according to class specifications. For instance, the minimum requirements of one class were:

- a symbol (or representation) depicting the story of an ancestor
- a symbol capturing the essence of a dream
- a symbol showing a journey
- a symbol revealing culture
- a symbol encompassing showing heritage
- overall aesthetic arrangement

Each component was evaluated at five points (total, 30 points).

Finally, students must "go public" with their personal stories to as many audiences as time will allow. Students are assessed according the standard class requirements for public speaking.

CONNECTING TO MCAS: OPEN RESPONSE QUESTION



Compare / Contrast

Write an essay comparing and contrasting the African American quest for the American Dream to that of later immigrants seeking a better life in America.

Challenges

The initial challenge to the quilt project involved maintaining the academic integrity of an English course while taking one out of every four classes (in a six-day cycle) to quilt.

Addressing parental concerns that the learning goals in this course are being maintained.

As a result of student demand, the quilt project expanded to include the entire eleventh grade curriculum. Teachers had to be convinced that the time spent on this project was necessary, but not to be compromised by other teacher-driven distractions (such as concurrent writing conferences or time to makeup work).

Solutions

Once the class enters its quilting phase, outside reading becomes directed to materials being studied in class. Changing to block scheduling created more time for all activities.

At Sharon High School's Open House, parents spend an evening following their children's schedules, sampling lessons, and meeting teachers, in early October. Eleventh grade teachers explain the quilt project, and establish the parameters of this CSL project, communicating that the American Dream Quilt project is not just an arts and crafts activity.

Professional Development time is used to address the importance of the time devoted to the process of creating the quilt squares.

*A piece of fabric?
How could that
represent someone's
life? Well, I'm sure
some people
wonder about this,
and, yes, it is a
piece of fabric,
but a piece of
fabric with many
meanings, hard
work, and emotions
put into it.*

Beth Fitzpatrick,
Grade 11 student

The quilt project turned out to be an extremely important creative effort for me. It was the culmination of a journey into my family's past, through which I was able to investigate my roots and discover my background. The quilt project also represents an introspective exploration.

I examined who I am and who I will be. It was difficult to create my quilt because I wanted it to display the many faces of my character, and I feel that I have succeeded in artistically representing my life as I see it now.

Abby Nickinson,
Grade 11 student

Extending the Vision

The quilt project which began as an intraclass project linked to the American literature curriculum with limited extension has expanded into other town schools and agencies. In time, the project has grown to become a focal point for a school wide celebration of multiculturalism with parents and town agencies joining the annual quilt performance and breakfast. The project continues to expand as the quilts are displayed throughout the community and in neighboring museums. The quilt celebration in May, 2000, was combined with the Anti-Defamation League and community members who have enlisted Sharon as a "Say no to hate community." A townwide celebration revolving around the presentations of the quilts was coupled with a breakfast featuring favorite family recipes and student performances celebrating the cultural diversity in our school and town. The Junior Class has plans to compile a cookbook of family recipes for fundraising purposes. Additionally the celebration and breakfast is scheduled for the day that the eighth graders visit to experience what their lives as ninth graders will be.

IN CONCLUSION: The Quilt Project and the Community

The American Dream Quilt project is more than a collection of brightly decorated squares. The stories and histories of the families who determine the distinct character of this town are to be cherished by all who have created them, enjoyed by those who behold its beauty, and remembered by all who have heard the voices of ancestors recorded lovingly in the quilts.