

Teaching *Documents of Democracy*

Overview

Students will first view images of The Declaration of Independence and the *Freedom* quilt and address questions about them. Students will then view the videos from the DEMOCRACY episode. Students then complete Worksheet #1, which asks them to compare the works again and consider them more deeply. Worksheet #2 has students choose a direction for their own work, to be created in the students' choice of calligraphy or embroidery. Worksheet #3 encourages students to curate their work as a cooperative practice.

Before Viewing

Introduce the scope of the lesson to students, sharing the key concepts, critical questions, and objectives. At this point it can be helpful for students to work in pairs or small groups to increase discussion and sharing viewpoints.

Have students examine the artworks. Three questions may be helpful for the class to think about:

1. What do you think each work represents?
2. What do you think the quilt represents?
3. Who do you think might have made the quilt? Why might it have been made?

Have students view the segments in the Craft in America DEMOCRACY episode.

After Viewing

You may want to ask for students' general responses to the segments. Note: Students may be curious to know additional information about the quilt. In the 1960s, Jessie B. Telfair was fired from her job as an elementary school cafeteria worker in Parrott, Georgia when her employers found out that she had registered to vote. In the 1970s she created the *Freedom* quilt as a response to what had happened to her. She later stitched two additional Freedom quilts, however the two later quilts have an additional line, repeating the word "FREEDOM" seven times instead of six.

Distribute Worksheet #1: *Looking at Crafts: Comparing and Contrasting American Experiences*. Students may wish to work alone, with a partner, or in small teams so they can discuss their responses. Responses will likely be based on a supported speculation rather than a single correct answer. After students respond individually or with others, hold a large group discussion in which students share their ideas.



CRAFT IN AMERICA

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Studio Investigations

Distribute Worksheet #2: *Crafting as a Democratic Practice*. This worksheet leads students towards their own design. They look closely (again) at the lettering on the artworks. They think about what they want to say that documents an event or commemorates an ideal about the United States in their studio project, and then plan their project.

Inform students that they will have the opportunity to create their own text-based artwork to document an event or commemorate an ideal about the United States. Explain that Worksheet #2: *Crafting and as a Democratic Practice*, will assist them in thinking about and planning their artwork.

Studio Production

(two or more 45 minute class periods)

Help students make decisions and refine their ideas. A demonstration of basic calligraphy and of basic embroidery would be helpful for students; they also can find interesting tutorials on YouTube for either approach. It may be useful to spend some time as a whole class practicing both techniques. This will allow students to get a feel for both, and to choose the one they find workable.



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For calligraphy, students should grid their paper with very light pencil, making lines on which to place the lettering. They can achieve better results if they also very lightly draw their letters in pencil before inking or painting them.

For embroidery, separating 6-strand floss into 3 strands works well as a thread thickness. Students can draw their work out first on paper, and then use a light table to trace the letters lightly on the fabric. Show them how to stretch their fabric in the hoop. Backstitch, chain stitch, or running stitch all work well for lettering.

Finished embroidery may be lightly pressed on the wrong side. It may be carefully wrapped neatly around a suitable size of mat board. The raw edges can be taped to the back of the board.

Reflection and Display

Distribute Worksheet #3, *Curating as a Democratic Practice*. Allow students to examine each other's artworks. With the worksheet, students consider curating and how a work they create could be part of a museum exhibit.

Ask the class to imagine an exhibition of all their works at a Smithsonian museum: Do they see certain works having a big impact on viewers? Why or why not? Ask the class to imagine themselves fifty years from now. How old will they be? What do they imagine about the importance of the works in that time? Might they be more or less important or relevant? What will the works say about this moment in time? Have the class work together to curate a show of the projects. As they arrange the works, do some works seem to complement each other? Are some in opposition to each other? What do they want the show to be titled?