



“South Fork of the Oregon Trail” and Patricia Hubbard’s other story-telling quilts are filled with appliqué, embroidery, and traditional quilting techniques. Photo by Georgia Wier.

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Audio



Video



Lesson Plan

Quilts Across Cultures

Description: Information on quilts from many cultures. Drama, discussion and writing projects. Students design and make a quilt.

Grades: K – 12

Author: Angelique Acevedo

Materials Included: Step by step instructions. Discussion questions. Writing activities. Video segment #6 from *“Just Plain Art”* (available on this site or in vhs. See Resources Section for ordering information.)

Materials Needed: Fabric and sewing supplies. Drawing materials. Quilts or photos of quilts from many cultures. Copies of *“The Diary of Ann Frank”* for students to read.

Standards: This activity can be used to address these Colorado Model Content Standards:

Geography: 1, 2, 5

History: 3, 4, 5, 6

Math: 1, 4, 5

Reading and Writing: 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6

Visual Arts: 1, 2, 3, 4, 5

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Background Essay

Quilting is an ancient craft that dates back to Egyptian times and was introduced into Europe at the end of the eleventh century. The craft flourished in the United States during colonial times, as immigrants practiced the skills they had brought over from Europe. Quilts from this era were born of necessity, as the blankets brought over by the colonists wore out. Because fabric was scarce, women would stitch scraps of fabric over worn spots. These scraps of fabric, salvaged from worn-out clothes, old curtains, and beloved blankets, were sorted and arranged to create decorative patterns. Often, women would come together to sew at social gatherings called “quilting bees.” These gatherings provided the women a social outlet, and at the same time, sped up the production of the quilts. So began the early art of patchwork.

During the mid-1800s, when fabric became easier to obtain, quilting developed into an art form. Quilts from this era showed off a wide variety of fabrics and colors. “Album quilts,” which bore verses, quotations and personal stories, were given as gifts of remembrance for family or friends who were moving west. Traditional “patchwork” patterns, such as Double Wedding Ring, Log Cabin and Bear Paw, were designed and named to commemorate events in our country’s history. “Crazy quilts” (consisting of pieces of silk of various colors, shapes, and sizes) were sewn together in random patterns. Made for warmth and beauty, many quilts from the past and present have become valued keepsakes. As in colonial times, the colorful designs and brilliant patterns of quilts are still popular today. Today’s quilters have a wide variety of materials and techniques available to them, allowing them a wide range of creative expression in an age-old art. Traditionally, quilting has provided social, artistic, and economic opportunities for women. Quilters

got together for quilting bees, which provided a place to socialize as well as to help each other with their quilts. Basting a quilt top is easier to do in a group, and covering the expanse of a king-sized quilt with tiny stitches is more fun when shared with others. Quilters traded with each other to acquire the variety of fabrics or the exact colors they wanted in their quilts. Equally important, quilting bees provided an important social outlet for women whose days were full of hard work and whose homes might be distant from each other. In a time when women were not encouraged to speak out, quilting bees provided a safe environment for the exchange of ideas. It’s not surprising, then, that Susan B. Anthony first spoke out in favor of women’s suffrage at a meeting of quilters.

“Actually, I don’t even have one on my bed, because we have two cats. In fact we don’t have any on any of our beds unless we know company is coming.” Helen Hoskins, Master/Apprentice: Colorado Folk Arts and Artists, 1986-1990.

A quilt is a three-layered blanket or bed cover, most often two outer layers of cloth stuffed with an insulating material called “batting.” Quilts are often made from many smaller pieces of fabric, cut from old clothing to recycle the material. For centuries pioneers recycled their goods out of necessity and sometimes sewed old clothing into quilts, both expressing their creativity and creating needed warmth. Among different quilt-making cultures, traditional patterns emerged which had names from the Bible, from the work people did, from the Depression, and other sources. Quilts could even be used to tell a history or story in a culture that had few books and fewer writers. A modern dramatic example of a quilt that tells a story is the quilt created by the NAMES project, a giant art quilt depicting the names and stories of people who have died from AIDS.

We often think of quilts as utilitarian bed coverings, made of whatever materials were at hand, a necessity during cold winters in prairie homes poorly protected from harsh winters. From the beginning, however, there were also quilts valued for their beauty and rarely used. These quilts might be made using fabrics imported from Europe, fabrics which were hoarded for their decorative uses, not their practical ones. Even in prairie homes, quilts became artistic expressions of their makers. Why spend so much time to create something that doesn't thrill the soul as well as cover the bed? Quilts told family stories, honored loved ones, stood as mute political opinion, recorded history. Women competed to create new designs and put "humility" blocks into their quilts to counteract their pride in their work.



"South Fork of the Oregon Trail" and Patricia Hubbard's other storytelling quilts are filled with appliqué, embroidery, and traditional quilting techniques. Note Hubbard's extraordinary use of crewel embroidery. The Greeley quiltmaker received an Artist Fellowship in Folk Arts from the Colorado Council on the Arts for her lifetime of achievements in quilting. "South Fork" is now part of the collection of the Rocky Mountain Quilt Museum. Photo by Georgia Wier (NE Colorado CCA Folklorist Collection at City of Greeley Museums).

Quilting as a phenomenon transcends ethnic and geographic boundaries and sometimes combines them. Historic Odawa quilts combine European appliqué techniques learned from missionary wives, with floral designs clearly inspired by their own

distinctive Woodlands Indian beadwork. Traditional motifs can have special significance. The star, for instance, used in Amish and German-American as well as Plains Indian and Ute quilts, symbolizes the morning star rising, or new life.

The history of African American women in quilting is almost as old as the history of America. Black slave women were needed for spinning, weaving, sewing and quilting on plantations and in other wealthy households. Although the quilt fabrics and patterns used were those of upper class whites, many black women became highly skilled in creating these quilts. Little time was left in the day for these slave women to do their own sewing. Recent research, much of it done by folklorist Dr. Gladys-Marie Fry, has resulted in publications and exhibits that showcase many quilts made by slaves and their stories. For a slave lesson plan, Internet and printed resources, see "Slave Quilts: Stitched from the Soul" at ptamerica.com/quilts/htm.

After the Civil War, many African American women went to work in households as domestics while others helped out on small farms. It was still a difficult life of working from dawn to dusk. Quilts were made for everyday use out of necessity. Scraps, discarded clothing, and feed sacks were the materials used. We have few examples today because of the heavy use these quilts received. We do know that many were made with strips of fabric, often called "string" quilts. This method of sewing strips of scraps together was a highly efficient way of using fabric and was fairly quick as well.

During the 1920s, more and more African Americans began to move into the northern cities. One contributing factor was the boll weevil infestation that destroyed many farms. Also, industrialization created new opportunities for employment in the north. Some women found they had little time to quilt after a long day at their factory jobs.

Later, when they retired, many re-discovered quilting. The city brought new opportunities for quilting through church, the workplace and senior centers. Magazine patterns were also more available in the city. As times improved African American women had more and more opportunities to enjoy quilting for pleasure rather than necessity. Some intriguing theories were proposed in the 1980s that link African American women's quilting to their African roots. Strip construction, large scale designs, strong contrasting colors and variations from symmetrical patterns all appear to reflect textile patterns found in parts of Africa.

The technique of creating a story with appliqué has been handed down through the generations. One example, a biblical story quilt, was made by Harriet Powers who was born a slave in 1837. Story quilts are still made by African American women today. It is also important to note that there is a great deal of overlapping in popular quilting styles among different communities and cultures.



See section 6 of the video *Just Plain Art* for a view of how two African American women from Denver approach quilting.

Many Native American quilters are interested in reconfiguring traditional motifs, turning log cabins into arrowheads or incorporating Hopi cornstalks into Irish chain quilts. One Navajo woman makes quilts that mirror 19th-century geometric Navajo "chief" blankets. Another quilter, whose background is Navajo and Seminole, merges her identities by blending Seminole patchwork and Navajo designs. She spices her quilts by adapting decoration from Blackfeet Indian boys' shirts and Mimbres pottery. Among the Lakota Sioux, quilts are traditionally used as highly esteemed giveaway items, to wrap babies' cradle boards and to drape across the coffin when someone dies. Among the Hopi, quilts mark the beginning of life. Upon the

birth of a baby, infant and mother spend 20 days together in seclusion; then, before dawn on the final morning, female family members, each bearing a quilt, gather together at home for a baby-naming ceremony. They wash and bless the child, say prayers, and then the paternal grandmother wraps the infant with a quilt. If many women are present, the baby almost disappears under a mountain of quilts, before being carried to the eastern edge of the village to greet the rising sun. At springtime on Nelson Island, about 600 miles east of Anchorage on the Bering Sea, coastal Yupik women celebrate their husband's first bearded-seal catch of the season by giving away to other village women strips of cloth, along with store-bought goods. The cloth will reappear at wintertime dances as finished patchwork quilts.

The quilt has flourished as functional artwork throughout American history, offering everyone an outlet for creative expression. Using inexpensive materials to imbue a necessary staple of shelter with character and beauty, the quilt has become an art form. The quilt reflects the lifestyles and the traditions of the maker, placing it in the realm of folk art as well as historical document.

Comparing Types of Needlework

Hmong story cloths, called Pan' dau, are elaborate appliqué embroideries, much like some quilt tops but usually without the two additional full layers that would make them quilts. They do provide an interesting comparison to quilts, however, and some students may enjoy finding, and reporting on, similarities and differences among quilts, Hmong storycloths, and the revival of Spanish colonial colcha embroidery in the San Luis Valley. (See [Master/Apprentice: Colorado Folk Arts and Artists, 1986-1990](#), see Resources Section for ordering



information). Also, see Colcha Embroidery and Hmong **Lesson Plans** for comparison.

Pa'ndau are the traditional vehicle by which the Hmong people record their collective experience. Generations of women have created similar textile pieces to document different time periods of their collective lives: Hmong life and customs in agrarian China; their expulsion from the ancestral lands; and their long trek south, during the nineteenth century, to the mountains of Laos, Thailand, Cambodia, and Vietnam. They maintained that documentary embroidery tradition during the Vietnam War, when Hmong guerrilla units assisted the American CIA in fighting the Communists.

After the war, during which between 10,000 and 20,000 Hmong men, women, and children were killed, more than 100,000 fled to Thai refugee camps. The Hmong embroiderer, Pang Xiong, served as a teacher for four years in the camps, instructing over 350 women on everything from language to sewing in preparation for possible relocation to the U.S. Her story cloths document the Killing Fields, the journey from Cambodia to Laos, and her resettlement in Upper Darby in 1979. The precision and color of Pang Xiong's embroideries belie the pain and seriousness of her subject matter: the horrors of armed invasion, Cambodian

displacement, and escape to a new country. The Hmong story cloth is a history book of the Hmong lifestyle. See Coloradan Dia Cha's books on this subject and her Hmong lesson plan and the video *Just Plain Art*.



A catalog of Colorado artists who received Master and Apprentice Awards from the Colorado Council on the Arts features quilters who work in several traditions, traditions that often intersect. Helen Hoskins comes from Swedish and German ancestry but learned to quilt from a woman in Michigan. Renée Helms (Navajo and Anglo) and Ella Louise Weaver (Southern Ute) studied with Helen Hoskins. Ava Brackett served an apprenticeship on African-American quilts that tell stories with Rose Ship. Also in the catalog, the folklorist Marsha MacDowell explores the meaning of quilting in American communities. (See Resources Section for ordering information.)

Note: For more information about Native American, African-American, and Euro-American quilts, see the essay "Front Range Cultures" on this website.

Classroom Activities

Learning from Quilts

- In this lesson plan so far, you've learned that people from many different cultures make quilts. You can find lots of books about quilts to learn more. Also, check out the "Quilts Around the World" website for photographs and information about quilts made by Amish, Hawaiian and Native American people and people in China, Hawaii, Japan, Haiti, and the country of India. Look at Amish, Native American, Hawaiian, and Indian kantha quilts on the Website or in your books. Using a map or globe, find where each of those groups of people live. Can you find quilts that have patterns using geometric shapes? Who made those quilts? What shapes did they use? Whose quilts feature flowers or other images from nature? Do any of the quilts you see include a combination of geometric shapes and flower-like patterns? (VA1, VA4, VA5; RW1, RW5; G1; Ma4)

- Why do you think so many people around the world make quilts? (Think about warmth, beauty, social interaction, etc.) What are practical reasons for making quilts with scraps of cloth? Under what circumstances do you think people might purchase cloth rather than using scraps? Why do you think that someone might choose to not use a quilt on the bed every night (this can be an essay-writing assignment as well as a class discussion)? (H3, H4; VA4; RW2, RW4)

- Some people, like the Hmong Americans and like Pat Hubbard (see page 164), tell historical stories about their region or their cultural group with appliqué and stitching on their quilts. By seeing the video and pictures of Hmong embroidery and by looking at photographs of Pat Hubbard's quilts, can you tell something about the landscapes in the stories the artists tell? Can you guess how the artists feel about the land, the people, animals, and

other items on the quilts? What do you like or not like about the story quilts? Why? Do you have a story you'd like to tell in a quilt? What story would you tell? What would be the setting for your story quilt? (Related Activity: On a large piece of white paper, make a drawing of that story and add color with paints or markers.) (RW3, RW4, RW5; G2, G5; VA1, VA2, VA4, VA5)

- Faith Ringgold is an artist who uses a combination of painting and quilting techniques to tell stories about contemporary culture. Learn about this African American artist and her story quilts by exploring the Faithringgold.com website. Compare Ringgold's and Hubbard's storytelling and artistic styles. Do you have memories that get stirred up by seeing either Ringgold's or Hubbard's quilts? Do you think that this was accidental or part of a skilled story teller's technique? (H3, RW4, VA3, VA4, VA5)

- Given what you've learned so far about the people of the many cultures who have made them, which groups had the most controversy in the stories that their quilts told? Why? What political issues in America might be in story quilts today? Why? What other groups of people elsewhere in the world today might have stories that could be expressed well in a story quilt? (H3, H5, H6, RW4, VA4, VA5)

- Discuss the political and social implications of people in society today making story quilts that express feelings of alienation or of oppression. Do you think that there could be discomfort or danger in making story quilts expressing points of view different from those in the majority or in power? (H3, H6, RW4)

- After discussing the ideas of personal history and personal narrative, hold a class discussion in which the students defend personal points of view.

Compare the worth of the individual in comparison to the worth of the group. Discuss the relative value of the individual and the group according to different types of political and social systems you have studied (like Communism, democracy, and slavery). How did the ancient Greeks and Romans view the worth of the individual and the group? (H3, H5, H6, RW4, VA4, VA5)

- After looking at migration patterns in the United States since the 1950s, discuss with the class any changes they have seen personally in their neighborhoods. What do they see as changing demographics? How does this compare to historical migrations? (H3, RW4)
- Have the class write down their observations on the change in their community's or the country's demographics and present them in class. Encourage a discussion and emphasize universal themes like search for freedom, peace, harmony and trust. Ask students whether they think that studying the folk arts of people from different cultures helps in understanding people from those cultures and if so how. (H3, RW4, VA4, VA5).

Detail of another portion of "South Fork of the Oregon Trail," a storytelling quilt by Patricia Hubbard. Photo by Georgia Wier.



Pat Hubbard

Patricia Hubbard, a quilter from Greeley, creates "story-telling" quilts to depict the stories of her family's long history in the West.

Hubbard was raised in a Colorado ranching family. Her love of quilt making originated when she was four years old and began watching and working with her great-grandmother. The older woman taught the little girl family history at the same time she taught how to thread needles and put quilt blocks together.

"South Fork of the Oregon Trail"

When Pat Hubbard was a young girl, she sat and watched her grandmother quilt and listened as the older woman told stories of pioneer life.

Hubbard remembered those stories and much later created a story-telling quilt to depict her grandparents' journey from the eastern part of the continent to the Colorado Territory. "South Fork of the Oregon Trail" shows the life of both the white pioneers and the Sioux Indians. Using cloth, needle, and thread, Pat uses her quilt to display her belief that both groups contributed greatly to her family's and her own life. You see two views of the very large quilt.

To make the quilt come alive and to show the beauty and danger the prairie held for the pioneers, Hubbard used the middle section of the quilt to depict the plants and animals alive during the time of prairie schooner travel. Among the figures Hubbard has stitched into "South Fork of the Oregon Trail" are those of an antelope, a coyote, rabbits, prairie weasels, prairie chickens, a Russian thistle, soap weed, rabbit brush, a sunflower, three women, three children, and 15 men. How many of figures can you find?

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Story Quilt: Design on Paper Project

Standards addressed:

Math 1 & 5;

History 3, 5, & 6;

Reading and Writing 4 & 6;

Visual Arts 1, 2, 3, 4, & 5

Preparation

All read *The Diary of Anne Frank*. Discuss the reasons for Anne Frank’s family being forced to hide, including the persecution of Jews and other people by those following Nazi philosophies and practice.

Supplies

4-5 pieces of plain paper, about 8 in. x 11 in.; colored poster board (one for every group of 4 or 5 students); drawing pencils; paints or markers; one glue stick for each group

Procedures

1. Divide the class into groups of four or five. On blank pieces of paper, each student sketches three or four pictures that tell parts of Frank’s story.
2. Using paints or markers, add color to two of the sketches.
3. Students in each group each place their favorite one or two drawings on their group’s poster paper. Students take turns moving the drawings around

on the poster paper until there is a chronological thread and until they are pleased with the way the whole poster looks. Students then each glue their own drawings to the poster board.

4. If the group wishes, one student uses marker pens to create a border around the story created on the poster.

5. Place the groups’ posters around the room. As a class, discuss how different groups have told different parts of the story. Discuss which posters were effective in giving the feeling of personal and historical significance to Anne Frank’s story. Point out drawings showing special care and skill. Find design elements that students have used well (contrast, texture, balance).

6. Discuss how these posters could be produced as story quilts. What supplies and materials would be needed? (plain colored cloth for backing, multi-colored pieces of cloth to appliqué as designs, embroidery floss or yarn for design, needles, thread, scissors)

7. Fabric frequently comes in bolts that are 45 inches wide. What length of cloth would be needed for the backing for the quilt of each group? What length of that cloth must be bought for all the quilts in the class? If the cloth cost \$3.50 per yard, how much would the cloth for the backing cost for the class?

Note: It would be wonderful if you can locate a quilter or quilters in your community to come help with this project. They could also bring in some of their own work to show the students.

Making a Quilt—Individual or Class Quilts

Supplies

1. Backing fabric—muslin or other cotton or cotton blend cloth, cut into pieces about 24 in. x 24 in. for each student
2. Pieces of fabric for patterns, gathered from throughout the community or sold as “ends” in a fabric store
3. Thread, needles, safety pins (younger students) or straight pins, and scissors, distributed according to students’ abilities
4. Plain paper, 22 in. x 22 in.
5. Pencils and colored markers
6. Colored chalk

Procedures

(All helping to meet Visual Arts Standards 2 & 3; other Standards noted separately)

1. A quilt is made from many pieces of cloth. Some come from old clothes that belong to families and are recycled into quilts. To begin, collect pieces of cloth and scraps of fabric. It would be good to collect these scraps from every member in your household.
2. Each student may make their own mini-quilt made up of no more than 20 pieces. Younger children will make simple designs and older students will construct more complex patterns. Plan your design for a simple pattern of your choice after looking at books on quilts. These patterns may be one of a kind or of a repeated design. Draw the pattern you want to use onto a piece of paper.

3. Lay your backing fabric flat on a table or desk. Transfer your design to the cloth using colored chalk. Think of the fabric surface as a kind of landscape on which all the pieces will come together into one big design.

4. Cut the multi-colored fabric scraps you have chosen into shapes to fit into your design. (You will be turning in the edges of the pieces of cloth; therefore, each piece of cloth will need to be cut larger than it is in the design. It will take some time—and mistakes—to master this concept).

5. Using straight pins or safety pins, carefully pin down the pieces. Keep in mind all the things that we have studied about the quilts of other times and places. Think about which ones you liked best and if they are influencing you as you work. (VA4)

6. Carefully fold under the edges of each piece. Pin them down with straight pins. Once secured, you are ready to sew. Thread your needles and use the simple under/over stitch. Make each stitch even. Take this slow, you want to do a good job. Quality is very important here. (VA4, VA5)

7. Looking at the quilt you are making, what is starting to happen to the design? Are you repeating designs? Are you putting dark colored fabric next to light colored fabric to create contrast? What if you put transparent fabric over solid fabric? What would happen then? Is your quilt starting to look a little like those from one of the cultures we have been studying? Is this influence an accident or do you want it to resemble that culture? (H3, RW4, VA4, VA5)

8. How many class quilts will it take to blanket the entire floor surface of the classroom? How many to do the entire school? (Ma1)

9. After revisiting the classroom quilts in progress, make some class estimate of the total number of stitches it will take to complete one quilt. How many to complete five quilts, ten quilts, all of the quilts? (Ma1).

10. Hold a class critique and discuss the class quilts. Examine the technical and construction elements of each quilt. Which quilts were more practical and which were more decorative? Which show particularly good use of color, shapes, and overall design? Which are symmetrical? Asymmetrical? Are there any that display cultural influences? What are those influences? Each student should present his or her quilt to the class. Afterwards, the other students evaluate both the piece and the presentation of the piece by its maker. (Ma1, H3, RW4, VA4, VA5)

Quilters

Contact a local quilting club or guild to get in touch with Colorado quilters in your area, or visit a county or state fair to see the work of many! The Colorado Quilting Council has an annual summer exhibit at the State Capitol. Many fabric shops post flyers of upcoming guild meetings and quilt shows. Today's quilts are as likely to adorn a wall as to cover a bed. Contemporary quilters like Colorado's Judith Trager often combine traditional and modern methods and ideas. Another contemporary Colorado quilter, Kathy Emmel, has created several quilting lesson plans that she uses in her 5th grade class. A visit to Rocky Mountain Quilt Museum in Golden is a great way to get familiar with Colorado's quilt heritage. Quilts can reveal a lot about the history of a region. The volunteer Colorado Quilt Council is documenting quilts as part of an effort to record state history and the voices of women who stitched the quilts. State residents bring their family quilts to monthly Colorado Quilt Council meetings held in various towns so everyone involved can learn more. One family quilt brought to the council was

made in 1909 by Elizabeth Blades for her daughter. The quilt is now in the care of Blades' great-great-granddaughter. Another quilt brought to the council was sewn as a political statement from the 1880s, before women were given the right to vote.

Native American Quilters

Quilting bridges many cultural boundaries in America, and the quilts themselves can be looked on as windows to those cultures. People of all backgrounds have adopted the craft, and they use it to meet traditional needs, raise funds, or tell their own stories. A Lakota mother and daughter team from Arvada make star quilts for family giveaways. A master quilter from the Lakota Sioux tribe in the Black Hills of South Dakota and descendent of the legendary Chief Red Cloud stitches Lakota symbols into her quilts so that each one tells a story of the Lakota culture.

Community Quilters

Quilting heritage has been passed for generations from mother to daughter. Quilters also pass the quilting legacy on to their communities. Women have quilted together in "quilting bees," guilds, and clubs for centuries. The volunteer ABC Quilt Group in Denver embraces this practice, making and distributing more than 1,000 quilts each year to community children.

A group of African-American women in Denver follow this community quilting tradition with their WaShonaji (African phrase meaning "people who sew") quilting group. Members meet both to quilt and to enjoy time with each other. They work to preserve the legacy of African-American quilting and sponsor educational events throughout their area.

TIES THAT BIND

Folk Arts Lesson Plan - Quilts Across Cultures

Pre-Assessment of Existing Knowledge

- Identify grade appropriate vocabulary which focus on the idea of what a story or personal narrative is.
- Are there differences between stories, folk tales, myths, and fables?
- Discuss preconceived notions involving words and actions, cultures, immigration, and freedom.
- Discuss preconceived notions of personal feelings and bias regarding what is art, what good art is, and what bad art is.
- Discuss attitudes about being different, not speaking English, or being afraid.

Quilt groups exist all over Colorado—in plains towns like Holyoke; in cities like Boulder. Many of the groups have members who like to share their quilting enthusiasm with young people. Get in touch and invite them to your school!

Instructional Strategies

Modeling, group discussion, collaboration, independent work and individual research, brainstorming and small group work. Key questions: What do you notice about the attitudes and commitment aspects of the task? What do you notice about the idea of “quality and craftsmanship?” How do you think a story can be told by a quilt?

Star quilts “are used in ceremonies, raffles and as prized items for giveaways, which are common among many tribes. Generosity is a highly-valued virtue, and the giveaway—public gift-giving on special occasions or to honor someone—is a traditional way to demonstrate one’s generosity and ties to the tribal community.” Master/Apprentice: Colorado Folk Arts and Artists, 1986-1990.