



CRAFT IN AMERICA

EDUCATION GUIDE

Documents of Democracy

"Feeling that connection to those times is a wonderful way to appreciate our history; our democracy."
– Sammy Little



LESSON OVERVIEW

In this lesson, students view two segments from the Craft In America DEMOCRACY episode. Students watch calligrapher Sammy Little inscribe a quote from the Declaration of Independence and curator Joanne Hyppolite, Ph.D., of the National Museum of African American History and Culture shows a patchwork-lettered quilt, one of many museum objects that help to educate citizens about the history of African Americans and the past and present of racism in the United States. After considering the meaning and making of these works, students create a text-based work in calligraphy or stitched lettering that documents an event or commemorates an ideal about the United States.

Grade Level: 8–12

Estimated Time: three or more 45 minute class periods

Craft In America Theme/Episode: DEMOCRACY

Background Information

This episode contains numerous segments featuring various artists, curators, representatives of arts organizations, and viewers of artworks. The names listed here are featured in the lesson.

- Joanne Hyppolite, Ph.D., Curator of the National Museum of African American History and Culture
- Sammy Little, Artist (calligraphy)
- Robert L. Lynch, President, Americans for the Arts
- Timothy Matlack, Engrosser (1736–1829)
- Jessie B. Telfair, Artist (quilt) (1913–1986)

Key Concepts

- The history of the United States can be learned through its crafts.
- Artists can use craft as a means of political expression.
- Artworks can be documents of times and events.

Critical Questions

- How can crafts teach us about the history of the United States?
- How do artists use craft as a means of political expression?
- Why are some artworks documents of times and events?

Objectives

Students will:

- Describe a facet of United States history using a crafted item as evidence.
- Give an example of an individual using craft as a means of political expression.
- Create an artwork that documents a time or event.

Vocabulary

Democracy, juxtapose, document, illuminate, curate, letterform, engross, font, calligraphy, parchment, vellum.

Interdisciplinary Connection

- Social Studies: This lesson looks at how handcrafted artworks can become documents of times and events, and how political messages may take different forms. It specifically examines the Declaration of Independence.
- Language Arts: This lesson encourages: Examination of historic hand written documents, comparing and contrasting texts, comparing and contrasting the expressive qualities of fonts, various ways of crafting a powerful message, and articulating a point of view.

National Standards for Visual Arts Education

- Visual Arts/Creating #VA:Cr3.1.8a
Process Component: Reflect Refine Continue
Anchor Standard: Refine and complete artistic work.
- Visual Arts/Presenting #VA:Pr6.1.1a
Process Component: Share
Anchor Standard: Convey meaning through the presentation of artistic work.
- Visual Arts/Responding #VA:Re7.2.11a
Process Component: Perceive
Anchor Standard: Visual imagery influences understanding of and responses to the world.
- Visual Arts/Connecting #VA:Cn11.1.1a
Process Component: Relate
Anchor Standard: Relate artistic ideas and works with societal, cultural, and historical context to deepen understanding.

Resources and Materials for Teaching

Resources

- *Craft in America DEMOCRACY* episode is viewable online at craftinamerica.org/episodes/democracy and pbs.org/craft-in-america/tv-series/democracy
Segment locations (viewed in this order):
 1. Calligrapher Sammy Little
 2. National Museum of African American History and Culture Curator, Joanne Hyppolite, Ph.D.

Multiple images of the following for individual and group work:

- The Declaration of Independence. Look for a close up of the lines, "We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness": archives.gov/founding-docs/declaration
- *Freedom* quilt by artist Jessie B Telfair: nmaahc.si.edu/object/nmaahc_2017.40

Useful websites:

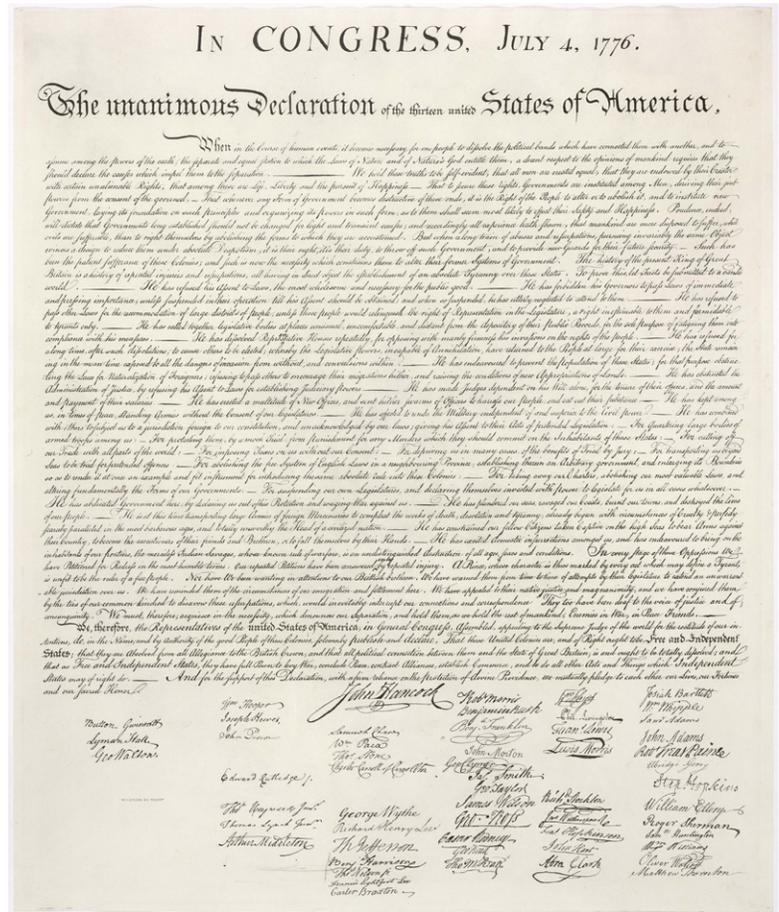
- The National Archives site featuring the Declaration of Independence: archives.gov/founding-docs/declaration
- An online archive of letterforms and calligraphy with collections and essays: letterformarchive.org
- The home page of The National Museum of African American History and Culture website: si.edu/museums/african-american-museum

Worksheets

- #1: Looking at Crafts: Comparing and Contrasting American Experiences
- #2: Crafting as a Democratic Practice
- #3: Curating as a Democratic Practice

Materials

- Paper for sketching
- Pencils, colored pencils, and markers
- 12x18 inch (or larger) paper for calligraphy and lettering work
- Calligraphy markers (chisel pointed)
- Or, pen holders, nibs, and bottles of ink
- Another option: chisel-edged paint brushes used with ink, tempera, or watercolor paints
- Embroidery option: 12" squares (or larger) of sturdy cotton fabrics, embroidery floss, embroidery needles, embroidery hoops for stretching fabric.
- Calligraphy and embroidery booklets with illustrations are helpful for studio work; also helpful are YouTube videos showing these techniques.



INSTRUCTIONAL STRATEGIES

Information for the teacher: This lesson focuses on three important American artworks that serve as documents; that is, actual recorded material or responses to events:

- The original engrossed (calligraphic) Declaration of Independence (and a contemporary artist's recreation of a line from the document)
- A patchwork quilt spelling the word "FREEDOM" and made by an individual with a response to a personal life event.

Each tells students something about American ideals and about American history. All three feature words. The texts are hand written, carved, or formed from patchwork fabric squares. The Declaration records the founding ideals of the government of the United States. A citizen sewed the quilt as a protest against her unequal treatment when she tried to engage in her right to vote. When juxtaposed, these works can provide context for the experiences of Americans and may inform and complicate students' initial response to each work.

First, the students will view images of the works together and address some questions about them. Then students will view the videos. Students can then fill out 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.

(Video and discussion: one 45 minute class period)

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? Students will likely recognize the Declaration. Note: Students may be interested to know who actually hand wrote the Declaration. It is believed that The Declaration of Independence was drafted (hand written) by Thomas Jefferson and then finally engrossed (written in a large, neat hand) by Timothy Matlack, a Philadelphia brewer and an assistant to the Secretary of the Congress: archives.gov/founding-docs/declaration/how-was-it-made
2. The *Freedom* quilt will likely be the least familiar. Ask, What do you think the quilt represents?
3. Who do you think might have made the quilt? Why was it made? (Students will discover this when watching the episode segments.)

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 opinion rather than having a single correct answer. After students respond individually or with others, hold a large group discussion in which students share their ideas.

Studio Investigations

Worksheet #2 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.

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.

CLOSING STRATEGIES

Reflection and Display

Allow students to examine each other's artworks. Introduce students to *Worksheet #3, Curating as a Democratic Practice*. On this worksheet, students consider curating and how a work they create might be part of a museum exhibit someday.

Ask the class to imagine a show 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?

Assessment

In discussions with the class and with individual students throughout the lesson, by examining the student's worksheets, and by witnessing the students' studio proposal, it should be evident that the student:

- Described a facet of United States history using a crafted item as evidence.
- Gave an example of an artist using craft as a means of political expression.
- Created an artwork that documents a time or event.

Extensions

The *DEMOCRACY* episode features more content that students may wish to explore. You may choose to show the entire video for further exploration and inspiration.

The Craft in America *QUILTS* episode features quilter Michael A. Cummings, who creates patched portraits of famous African Americans as a way to document and commemorate their achievements.

Authors:

The Education Guide for *DEMOCRACY* was developed under the direction of Dr. Marilyn Stewart, Professor Emerita of Art Education, Kutztown University of Pennsylvania, Kutztown, PA. Lead author for *Documents of Democracy* is Dr. Amy Albert Bloom, July, 2020.

Worksheet #1: Looking at Crafts: Comparing and Contrasting American Experiences

Thinking about the video you watched, and examining the packet of images, respond to the following questions:

1. A document is a record—a noun. To document also can be a verb, meaning to record. Consider each artwork: Is it a record of something? If so, what? Who does the “recording” for each artwork?
2. To illuminate means to shine a light. It also can mean to decorate or highlight, as in a fancy lettering style. Consider each artwork: Does it shine a light on something? What distinguishes the design of the artwork?
3. Imagine any of the artworks in a different lettering style. Can you imagine a font that would change the feel of the work?
4. To juxtapose means to place things side by side. Juxtapose the image of the *Freedom* quilt next to the engrossed quote beginning “We hold these truths...” Consider the meaning of each viewed individually. How does the meaning shift when the two are placed next to each other?
5. What does each artwork say about democracy? Do you think it might mean something different to different people? Does it say something that can be hard to describe or talk about?

Worksheet #2: *Crafting as a Democratic Practice*

Thinking about Letterforms:

"Sometimes I want to get various edges, and shading. It kind of breathes a different life into the ink, into the letter."
– Sammy Little

In each of the three artworks you examined, the letters were created using a different process and in a different style. One was drawn on parchment and one was stitched together from cloth patches. Look closely at the artworks and sketch one letter from each below:

- A calligraphy letter from the Declaration of Independence, or from Sammy Little's recreation of the line beginning "We hold these truths..."
- A patchwork letter from the *Freedom* quilt (For this, look carefully at the patched letter to find the seams. It is made up of squares and triangles.)

What mood or feeling does the style of letter seem to express?

How does the style of the letter suit or "fit" with the artwork?

What font or lettering style is your favorite—one that you enjoy using? Do you think it would be suitable for the project of a text-based artwork in calligraphy or stitched lettering? Keep in mind that your project is meant to document an event or commemorates an ideal about the United States. How might the style of your lettering affect the impact of your message?

Crafting a work about Democracy:

"In a participatory democracy in my opinion it's a citizen obligation to understand what you value for yourself, your family, your community, and to talk with your elected decision makers because you've got some ideas and input."
– Robert L. Lynch

Imagine an artwork you will create, informed by what you have examined; a crafted document. What will you document? Think about some words, messages, or phrases that you might like to depict. You could be inspired by what you have examined and thought about in this lesson. Maybe a moment in U.S. history interests you. Your words or phrases could be a memorial, or a political expression such as the quilt. Sketch what you might do here and on the back of the paper.

Would you like to use calligraphy or embroidery to create your work? How will your design and letter choices affect or enhance the strength of your document? What meaning are you hoping to convey?

Worksheet #3: Curating as a Democratic Practice

Thinking about curating:

"The National Museum of African American History and Culture is one of the places where we help people grapple with the legacy of race that started with enslavement of black people in this country."

– Joanne Hyppolite, Ph.D.

Curating involves selecting and arranging objects; for example, choosing what to display and how to display it in a gallery or museum, or arranging one of your collections on a bookshelf. It also involves providing context or descriptions for what is displayed. Think about the artwork you are planning. Can you imagine it in a Smithsonian Museum? What might viewers think of your idea fifty years from now?

- Working with your classmates, decide on a title for your exhibit.
- Decide where you would like the exhibit to be: A hallway? The cafeteria? Online?
- Create a form for each work: An index card could work well. Decide on a format, for each artist in the class to use as to fill out their information. You might want to include:
 1. Name of artist
 2. Title of work
 3. Description of materials (for example, Ink and paper; cotton)
 4. Size of work
 5. Date of creation (This is usually just the year.)
 6. Anything else? You could also add an artist's statement.