



CRAFT IN AMERICA

DOCUMENTS OF DEMOCRACY EDUCATION GUIDE

"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.

About the Artworks

This lesson focuses on two important American artworks that serve as documents; that is, actual recorded material or responses to events:

- The original engrossed Declaration of Independence (and a contemporary artist's recreation of a line from the document). It is believed that The Declaration of Independence was drafted by Thomas Jefferson and then finally engrossed by Timothy Matlack, a Philadelphia brewer and an assistant to the Secretary of the Congress: [archives.gov/founding-docs/declaration/how-was-it-made](https://www.archives.gov/founding-docs/declaration/how-was-it-made)
- A patchwork quilt spelling the word "FREEDOM" made by an individual with a response to a personal life event: 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.

Key Concepts:

- Crafts can provide a glimpse into the history of the United States.
- 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.
- Provide an example of an individual using craft as a means of political expression.
- Create an artwork that documents a time or event.

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.

Interdisciplinary Connections

- **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 handwritten 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.

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. View the full episode at craftinamerica.org/episode/democracy or at pbs.org/craft-in-america/tv-series/democracy.

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. View this segment at craftinamerica.org/short/michael-a-cummings-segment or pbs.org/craft-in-america/tv-series/quilts.