

# CRAFT IN AMERICA

## HAWAIIAN QUILTS: SPEAKING WITH FABRIC AND THREAD EDUCATION GUIDE

*"That was the mission of my parents, to pass that culture on from generation to generation."  
—Rae Correia*

### LESSON OVERVIEW

In this lesson, students are introduced to the Poakalani Quilters and learn about the story of teachers (and sisters) Cissy Serrao and Rae Correia, who are helping to keep the tradition of Hawaiian appliqué quilts alive. They learn about the history of the Hawaiian quilts, how they compare to other quilts, and see the techniques involved in making them. Students identify images of nature found within the quilts. After looking in their own environment for inspiration, students experiment with creating the radial designs by cutting and shaping folded paper. Finally, they recreate their design in the form of a colorful paper or fabric quilt block, learning some basic sewing stitches to appliqué the design. The blocks can be displayed together in a quilt-like grid, accompanied by information about the tradition of Hawaiian quilts.

Grade Level: 8–12

Estimated Time: four or five 45-minute class periods

Craft In America Theme/Episode: WEST

### Background Information

Cissy Serrao and Rae Correia are prominent figures in the Hawaiian quilting community, continuing the legacy of their parents, master quilters and designers Poakalani and John Serrao. The Poakalani Quilters are a Hawaiian quilt guild established in 1988 by their parents, dedicated to preserving and teaching the traditional art of Hawaiian quilting. Cissy and Rae now carry on the family tradition, offering classes, sharing patterns, and showcasing their exquisite, hand-stitched quilts, many of which feature John Serrao's original designs, at various venues in Hawaii and internationally. Their work not only results in beautiful textile art but also serves to perpetuate Hawaiian culture and history, embedding stories and meaning into each quilt.



### Key Concepts

- Artists can make it a mission to preserve a handcraft or technique.
- As makers, we can draw inspiration from our environment.
- One way to create new art is by making changes to a theme.

### Critical questions

- What are some ways you could preserve a handcraft or technique?
- As makers, how can we draw inspiration from our environment?
- How can we create new art by changing a theme?

### Objectives

Students will:

- explain how the handcraft of Hawaiian quilting is being preserved.
- search for inspiration in their local environment as an aid to choosing subject matter for their own art making.
- practice creating designs by making changes to a theme.

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### Vocabulary

Appliqué, basting, batting, echo quilting, needle turn appliqué, overcast stitch, radial design, running stitch, thimble

### Interdisciplinary connection:

- History and Science: Study the segment following the Poakalani Quilters in the episode WEST, which features the creation and travels of the Hōkūle'a, "a replica of an ancient Polynesian double-hulled voyaging canoe" and the techniques of ancient navigation methods.
- History: Explore the history of Hawaii, including the invasion and takeover of the Kingdom of Hawaii, the imprisonment of Queen Lili'uokalani in 1893, its addition to the U.S. as a state in 1959, and the eventual adoption of 1993 Public Law 103-150, acknowledging the role of the United States in the overthrow of the Kingdom of Hawaii.

### National Standards for Visual Arts Education

This lesson addresses the following standards. The performance standards listed here are directly related to the lesson's goals.

- Creating:  
Anchor Standard 2: Organize and develop artistic ideas and work.  
VA:Cr2.3.8a  
Select, organize, and design images and words to make very clear and compelling presentations.
- Presenting:  
Anchor Standard 4: Select, analyze, and interpret artistic work for presentation  
VA:Pr4.1.1a  
Analyze, select, and curate artifacts and/or artworks for presentation and preservation.
- Responding:  
Anchor Standard 7: Perceive and analyze artistic work.  
VA:Re.7.1.11a  
Recognize and describe personal aesthetic and empathetic responses to the natural world and constructed environments.

### Worksheets

- Worksheet 1: Carrying On Culture
- Worksheet 2: Local Inspirations, Multiple Variations

### Resources

- Craft in America WEST episode, [craftinamerica.org/episode/west](https://craftinamerica.org/episode/west), Poakalani Quilter's segment, and Craft in America's website, [craftinamerica.org](https://craftinamerica.org)
- Poakalani Quilters website, [poakalani.net](https://poakalani.net)
- Post the vocabulary words on the board.
- Post images of Hawaiian quilts in the classroom for student inspiration and reference, including the appliqué style quilts like those shown in the video, the Queen Lili'uokalani Quilt, and some non-Hawaiian traditional patchwork quilts for comparison. The Queen Lili'uokalani Quilt can be found at The Quilt Index, below.
- The Quilt Index, a national digital collection of quilts, features images and information for over 98,000 quilts, [quiltindex.org](https://quiltindex.org)

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### Materials

- Pencils and pens
- Compasses
- Protractors
- Rulers
- Iron, for pressing the creases from paper
- White glue
- Tape
- Scissors
- Copy paper, 8 1/2 by 11-inches for experimenting with cutting quilt designs

### For paper quilt blocks:

- Paper: Card stock weight, 8 1/2 by 11-inches for the quilt background; also copy paper weight (or lighter, so as to be easy to cut) in bright colors for the radial design appliqué.

### For adding stitching to paper or fabric quilt blocks:

- Lined index cards for practicing stitching
- Sewing needles; a variety of sizes, larger eyes are easier to thread. One for each student.
- Thimbles in various sizes
- Spools of sewing thread
- Crochet thread in white and colors, or buttonhole thread: These threads are thicker, and are good for decorative stitching.

### For fabric quilt blocks:

- Fabric: 9-inch squares, 1 each for background fabric and for the appliqué design in a contrasting color.
- Sharp scissors that will cut fabric
- Sewing pins, approximately 10 for each student

### INSTRUCTIONAL STRATEGIES

Note: This lesson provides an introduction to Hawaiian quilts, including the design of radial patterns and learning basic stitches. There are instructions for a paper and a fabric quilt block so that students can choose what works best for them: The paper is stiff and the fabric is drapery and fluid; one material and method may work better for an individual student than another. Additionally, the Poakalani Quilters have three consecutive YouTube videos available that teach the construction of a beautiful cloth 22-inch square Hawaiian quilt design. However, this beginner's quilt is a time-intensive project. You might decide to offer an after-school class for motivated students. Cissy Serrao takes the viewer through each step, and thoroughly explains and shows exactly what to do. You may want to watch these to better understand the process.

- Starting your first 22 by 22-inch Hawaiian quilt, [youtu.be/HHWR-ivn9U8](https://youtu.be/HHWR-ivn9U8)
- Needle turn appliqué, [youtu.be/8ZF9HnymXWw](https://youtu.be/8ZF9HnymXWw)
- Make your first quilt one stitch at a time, [youtu.be/n4qhzpL5\\_7k](https://youtu.be/n4qhzpL5_7k)

### Investigate: Engage and Explore

#### Video, Discussion, and Initial Activities

##### Before viewing

Introduce the scope of the lesson to students, sharing the key concepts, critical questions, and objectives.

Quilt image search: Allow students to work in pairs or small groups, with two laptops (so they can compare images) or with two printout sheets (showing a resulting page of quilts found from

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the following search terms.) Have students search two different terms on google, and select “images”: Traditional Quilts and Hawaiian Quilts.

Begin a discussion about what they find, for example:

- We’re going to be studying Hawaiian quilts. What are some things that these two pages, the traditional quilts search and the Hawaiian quilts search, have in common?”

Possible answers include:

- They’re both quilts.
- They are made from fabric.
- They all have designs on them, either in the fabric or fabric shapes.

Note that “traditional quilts” also applies to Hawaiian quilts, but Hawaiian quilts are a unique and identifiable style. Share that quilts are made from two pieces of fabric, like a sandwich, with a layer of flannel or batting in between. The layers are stitched together, and then quilted, which means sewing the layers together to hold the batting in place. The quilted lines or patterns become decorative in themselves.

Ask students:

- What is different about the Hawaiian quilts?

Possible answers might be:

- The design is kind of like a snowflake that you fold and then cut.
- It’s a big bright design on a plain background.
- Some of the traditional quilts look more geometric.
- The Hawaiian quilt colors are bright.
- Some of them are very complicated and detailed.
- I think there’s pineapples and flowers in that one.

If students don’t at first notice flowers and the like within the Hawaiian quilts, have them search for identifiable images (flowers, waves, dolphins, leaves, vines, etc.) and point to examples. Introduce the video to students, explaining they will be learning about a quilting class in Hawaii, the kinds of quilts they make there, and why they make them.

### After viewing

Hand out Worksheet 1: Carrying on Culture. Go over the worksheet with students. Let them work in small groups to discuss ideas and find answers. When they are finished, use the teacher guide to go over possible answers and to guide a class discussion. The worksheet includes some history of Hawaii and connects it with the pride and love for traditions, home, and culture that is the mission of preserving the quilts and quilting.

After discussion, let students know they will be making a paper or fabric quilt block (the uppermost portion of the quilt “sandwich”) inspired by the style of the Hawaiian quilts.

Investigate: Make Connections  
Studio Production

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### Folding paper the paper pattern

Note: Students are not designing yet, but viewing and then experimenting how to fold and cut the paper. It will be helpful to have examples ready for demonstrating each stage. Tell students you are going to demonstrate how the patterns for the Hawaiian quilts are made so that they can envision the cutting they will do later. This is a good time to ask students to share if they know of other cut paper design traditions. Possible examples include the Chinese version, jianzhi, the Mexican tradition of papel picado, and the Pennsylvania Dutch art of scherenschnitte. Share with students that this last method of folding and cutting paper designs, scherenschnitte, may have come with missionaries from the mainland in the 1800s, and was adopted and adapted by the Hawaiians for their quilts.

Have students follow with their own piece of copy paper as you demonstrate the folding for the patterns. With a student next to you who follows your lead, fold the piece of paper in half, bringing the 8 ½-inch edges together. Fold the paper in half again, bringing the 5 ½-inch edges together. Finally, bring the shorter folded edge to meet the longer folded edge and make a crease. This makes 8 layers. You'll have a triangle, 1/8 of the total design. Point out to students that this is the shape John Serrao used to design quilt patterns, as they saw in the video. Trim the extra paper margin.

Note: 8 layers of paper (or fabric) can be difficult for some students to cut. Therefore, demonstrate a 4-layer version as well. Again, fold the 8 ½ by 11-inch piece of paper in half, bringing the 8 ½-inch edges together. Fold the paper exactly as before, but after trimming the extra paper margin, open up the last fold so that you have a square. Both folded shapes, the 8-layer and the 4-layer, are illustrated on Worksheet 2, which students will use later.

Optional: Designing with protractors: To create a circle with 8 sections (and another way to imagine the quilt design, in full) have students draw a circle with a compass, approximately the same diameter measurement as the straight edge of the protractor. Match the center of the protractor to the center of the circle. Using the protractor, mark a tiny dot every 45 degrees around the edge of the circle. Using a ruler, connect each dot with the adjacent dot to make 8 sections. For the quarter fold option (four sections) make the marks every 90 degrees around the circle.

### Cutting paper designs

Show students how to draw a random design on the folded sheet so that at least some of the paper remains attached along both folded edges. Demonstrate what happens when that is forgotten: the paper falls apart in pieces. Allow some time for students to experiment with cutting random designs and seeing what happens when the paper is unfolded.

Before handing out Worksheet 2, share with students:

"Remember we noticed that many of the Hawaiian quilt designs are nature-based: Flowers, leaves and fruits, oceans, and wildlife. Outside our windows you can likely see some kinds of natural environments. Nature isn't only found in national and state parks, but also in rural areas, suburbs, and cities. Each of these has its own ecosystems, including weather."

To encourage students to think about their own environment, nature, and the living things surrounding them, have two students record a list on the board of different examples of nature that you and the class can think of. Examples include planets, stars, clouds, rain, oceans, lakes, and streams; pebbles and seashells; trees, leaves and weeds; small animals, birds, fish, lizards,

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insects, whales; cows and chickens and sheep, flowers in forests, gardens, or window boxes, farm crops in fields or in the corner store, people, pigeons, squirrels, cats and dogs, etc.

Hand out and go over worksheet 2 with students. Ask them to think about what they appreciate in their environment, referring to the list made on the board. In part one of the worksheet, they will think of a motif or two, such as a leaf, a fish, or a flower (etc.) for a quilt, sketch them, then place them in a 1/8 section of a radial design and in a 1/4 section. It will be helpful to have Hawaiian quilt images to help students imagine the connecting designs to fill out the overall space.

In part 2 of the worksheet, students are encouraged to try even more variations within the shapes. Share with students: Inspiration can also come from taking a design you have already created, and playing with ways to change or vary it. John Serrao gives us an excellent example of how effective this can be. Every one of his approximately 2,000 designs start with paper folded as below, then cut with a botanical or other Hawaiian-inspired design. You've already developed a design. Now try to create two variations of it, sketching them here. You might rearrange the shapes, change the sizes, add something new, or take something away. You might also allow for students to extend their choice of design to other things/ideas with meanings or importance to them.

When students are ready to try their choice of design, hand out paper and tell them the steps: Fold the paper, redraw your design on it, and cut it out. What does it look like? Refine your design or try a different one and rework them until you have one you like. Give students plenty of time to experiment with cutting designs and discovering the results. Encourage them to share their cut design with a partner. Share your design with a partner: What do they think? From all you have tried, choose one for your final quilt block project.

### Introduce Sewing

Ask students if they know the difference between a pin and a needle, then draw a sketch on the board and explain: "the pin has a head, (or cap) to keep it from going all the way through the fabric and thus maybe falling out. Pins are used to temporarily hold pieces together. The needle has an eye (the hole) and the thread is passed through the eye. It is used to sew pieces together."

### Practice sewing

Hand out index cards and a needle to each student. Show them how to unwind and cut about an arm's length of thread from the spools, and then thread the needle, bringing the thread ends together and making a small knot. Students can attach the end of the thread (the knot) to the back of the index card with a piece of tape so it doesn't pop through the paper. (On fabric, they will attach the thread to the back of the fabric with a tiny stitch or two.) Let students practice stitching a dashed running stitch along the lines of the index card. They can also practice an overcast stitch, wrapping the stitches around the edge of the card. Later, when they are making their paper or fabric block, they can create a line of running stitches around the border of the quilt or anywhere they choose, tying off and attaching a new piece of thread from the back of the block when needed.

### Making paper quilt blocks

When students are ready, they can carefully fold the colored paper and trace or redraw their design on it, and cut it out. The cardstock background should be cut to a 9-inch square. Using a



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dry iron on a low setting and on a protected surface, monitor students' use of the iron for carefully pressing the creases from the paper.

Note: Students may choose to carefully stitch the paper design to the paper background instead of gluing. Students can carefully glue (with as little glue as possible) the design to the background. A good method is to add the tiniest dot of glue at several points around the edge of the design. After initial placement on the background, lift and add dots of glue to the remaining unglued edges. When dry, students can add decorative stitching.

### Making fabric quilt blocks

Students will be cutting the design from four or eight layers of fabric, which requires pinning the paper pattern in place. Have students first practice simply placing a pin in the index card so that it won't fall out; poking the pin through the lined side of the card and then pushing the point upwards so that the point comes out on the lined side again. This is a tricky skill to learn as the paper (or fabric) needs to be bent a tiny bit to bring the pin out again. After they cut the fabric design, it can be ironed and pinned to the fabric background. Students can choose to use a running stitch or an overcast stitch to outline the design and attach it to the background. They can also overcast the raw edge of the backing fabric.

## CLOSING STRATEGIES

### Reflection

Allow students to work together to arrange their quilt blocks on a wall in a quilt-like display, side by side, making a large colorful grid. Ask students to imagine what questions others in the school might have about the display. What facts about Hawaiian quilting (and Hawaii) would they like to share with the rest of the school? Allow small groups to create and print informational posters, similar to explanations in a gallery or museum.

After the display has been up for a week, ask students to share their thoughts. Have they gotten any questions or comments about the display? Would they like to make an actual quilt?

### Assessment

Through discussions with individual students, examining worksheets, and checking students' work, it should be evident that the student:

- can explain how the handcraft of Hawaiian quilting is being preserved.
- searched for inspiration in their local environment as an aide to choosing subject matter.
- practiced creating designs by making changes to a theme.

### Extensions

Continue an exploration and study of Hawaiian arts and culture by viewing these additional segments in the WEST episode:

- Marques Hanalei Marzan is a Hawaiian culture bearer who creates complex traditional forms of weaving with natural materials.
- Kawika Lum-Nelmida is an award-winning hulu (feather) artist.
- Learn about a double-hulled voyaging canoe, the Hōkūle'a and its exciting journeys and accomplishments.

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