



Piecing Together the Past: Gee's Bend Quilts and the Story of the African Diaspora

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The goals of this poster session are to:

- Demonstrate how Gee's Bend quilting traditions reflect African cultural retentions and diasporic continuities.
- Situate Gee's Bend in larger historical narratives of slavery, Reconstruction, civil rights, and Black landownership.
- Provide classroom approaches that use art, oral history, and place-based learning to engage students in historical thinking.

Compelling Question: How did the women, past and present, of Gee's Bend demonstrate resilience and impact their community and beyond?

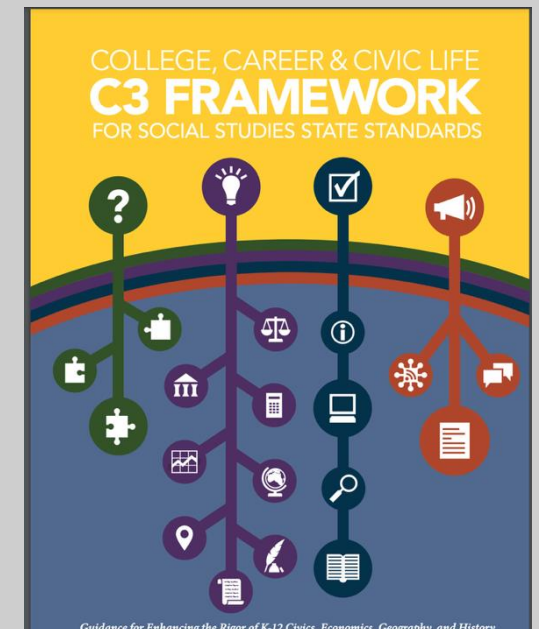


Plummer T. Pettway

1918–1993

Using Inquiry in the History Classroom

- Inquiry-based instruction provides students with the opportunity to construct their own knowledge from the school curriculum into their lives through investigation, analysis, and experiential connections (Sprocken-Smith, Walker, Batchelor, O'Steen, & Angelo, 2011).
- Five significant stages to inquiry-based learning (Carin, Bass, & Contant (2005):
 - Engagement
 - Exploration
 - Explanation
 - Elaboration
 - Evaluation
- Inquiry Design Model (IDM) (C3 Teachers, 2016) provides teachers and students with a framework for teaching and learning about informed social action through inquiry-based instruction.
 - Disciplinary questioning
 - Academic exploration
 - Performance task understanding
 - Developing skills needed to defend ideas (NCSS, 2013).



NCHE's History's Habits of the Mind

- Grasp the significance of the past in shaping the present
- Perceive past events and issues as they might have been experienced by the people of the time, with historical empathy rather than present-mindedness
- Read critically, to discern differences between evidence and assertion and to frame useful and appropriate questions about the past
- Interrogate texts and artifacts, posing questions about the past that foster informed discussion, reasoned debate and evidence-based interpretation
- Recognize that history is an evolving narrative constructed from available sources, cogent inferences and changing interpretations
- Appreciate the diversity of cultures and variety of historical contexts, as well as to distinguish elements of our shared humanity
- Understand the impact made by individuals, groups and institutions at local, national and global levels both in effecting change and in ensuring continuity
- Realize that all individuals are decision makers, but that personal and public choices are often restricted by time, place and circumstance
- Negotiate a complex, often uncertain and ambiguous world, equipped with the appreciation for multiple perspectives
- Engage in patient reflection and constant reexamination of the past and present.

<https://ncheteach.org/resources/historys-habits-of-mind/>



Background

How do quilts share our histories?

- “Quilts tell stories. They depict times and places, the lives of the people who make them, and capture slices of life” (Lavalley, 2016)
- "We Americans have adopted quilts as a symbol of what we value about ourselves and our national history.” (Horton, 1999).
- “The multigenerational aspect of quilting, with techniques typically taught to younger women by their elders, allows the legacy of a family, community and/or culture to be preserved. Thus, to look at a quilt today is to behold history” (Vaughn-Manley, 2023).

What is the significance of quilts?

- Express identity
- Make political statements
- Stimulate economic empowerment
- Preserve family history
- Reflect cultural diversity
- Document history



Elizabeth Welsh. *Medallion Quilt*, c. 1830.



Minnie Sue Coleman
<https://www.soulsgrowndeeper.org/gees-bend-quiltmakers>



<https://www.soulsgrounddeep.org/gees-bend-quiltmakers>

- “Though the origins of quilting within Black American culture was born out of necessity, their utilitarian purposes also extended into a performative ritual that covered the range of the Black American experience — particularly the ways in which these experiences have been represented and perceived by Black American women” (Vaughn-Manley, 2023).
- “The designing, creating and multi-stepped process of quilting has been...[a] ritualistic, communal act for Black women...to overcome oppression, loss, misrepresentation and invisibility” (Vaughn-Manley, 2023).

Examine Boykin's location. Why is it called Gee's Bend?



Sources: https://legacyweb.philamuseum.org/doc_downloads/education/ex_resources/geesBend.pdf

Google Earth

Supporting Question 1: How did the quilts and the quilters of Gee's Bend serve as tools to fight injustice?

“I come over here to Gee’s Bend tonight to tell you that you are somebody! I come over here tonight to tell you that you are God’s children. And that every man from a bass black to a treble white is significant on God’s keyboard. Don’t let anybody make you feel that you don’t count ... I want you to know that you are somebody, and you are as good as any white person in Wilcox County!”

Martin Luther King Jr.
February 16, 1965

Aligned to NCHE’s Habits of the Mind:

Past Shapes the Present

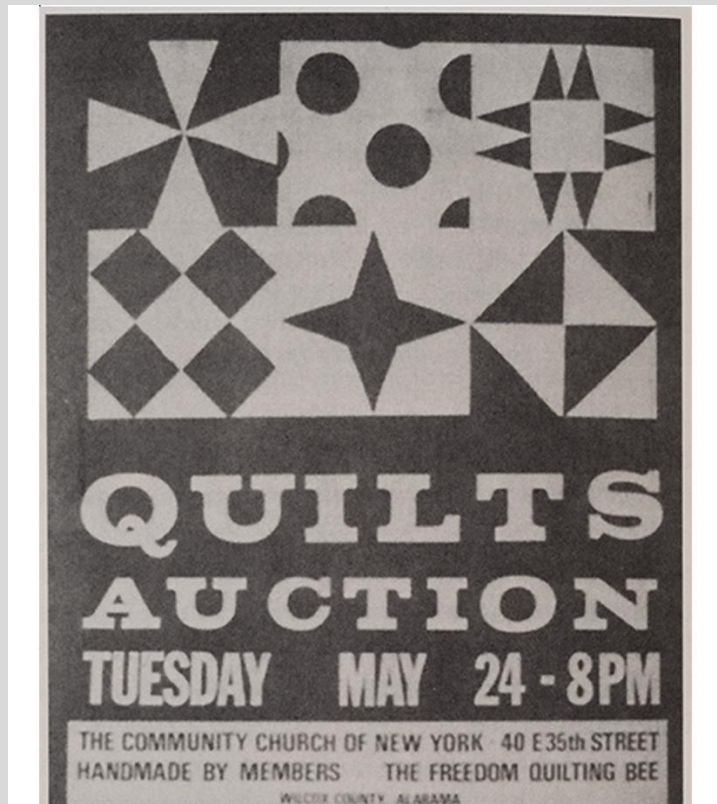
Historical Empathy

Critical Reading

Interrogating Sources

Understanding Impact

Fact/event	Details that stand out	What do you think about it?	Why do you feel that way?

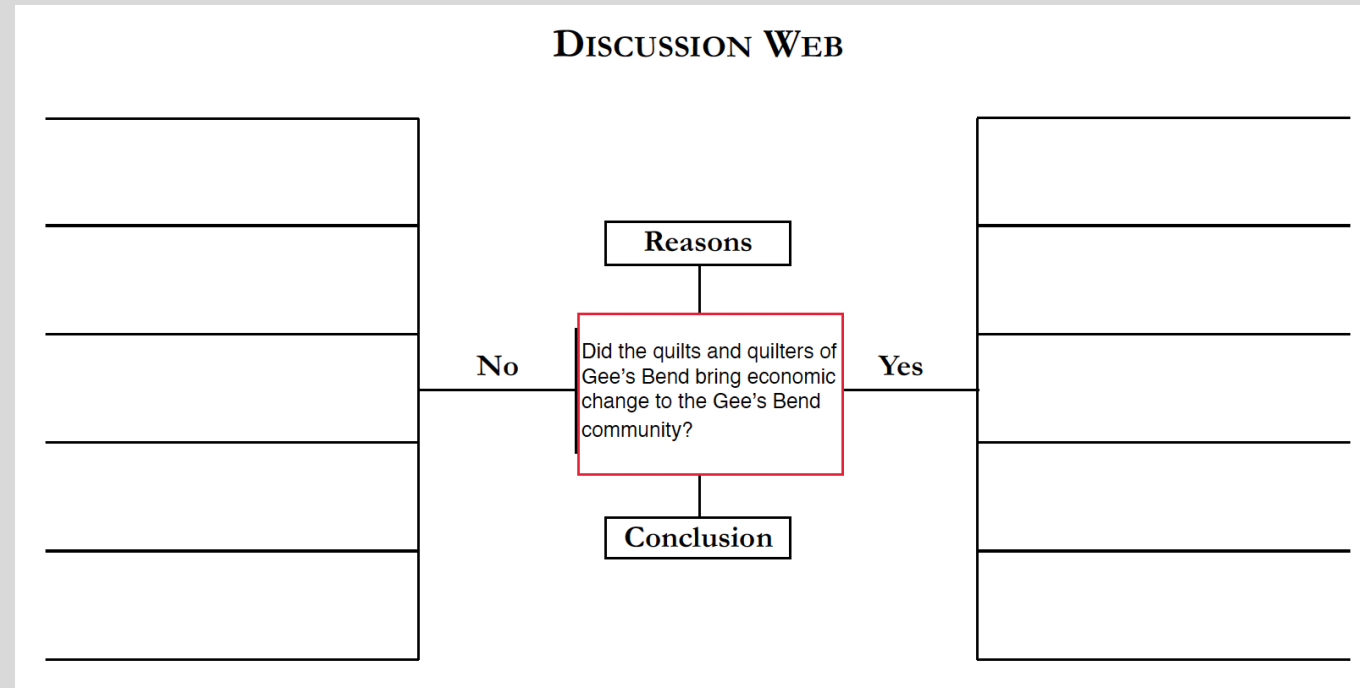


<https://www.geesbend.org/history-of-gees-bend>

Supporting Question 2: How did geography and politics intertwine to impact the residents of Gee's Bend?

How did geography and politics impact the people of Gee's Bend?	
Geographic Factors	Political Factors/Events
Outcomes	

Supporting Question 3: Did the women and the quilts of Gee's Bend provide economic empowerment to the community?



Aligned to NCHE's Habits of the Mind:

Past Shapes the Present
Historical Empathy
Critical Reading
Interrogating Sources

Evolving Narrative
Complex Narrative
Understanding Impact
Patient Reflection

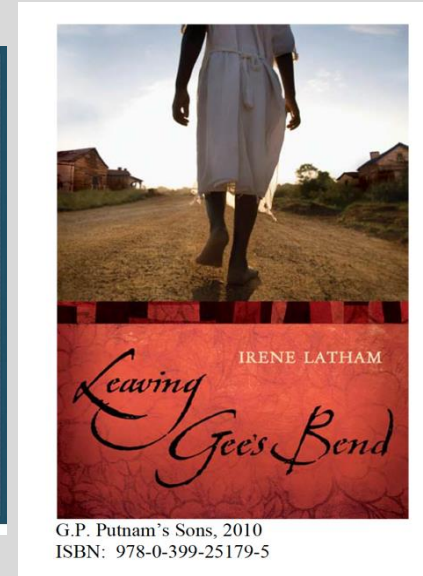
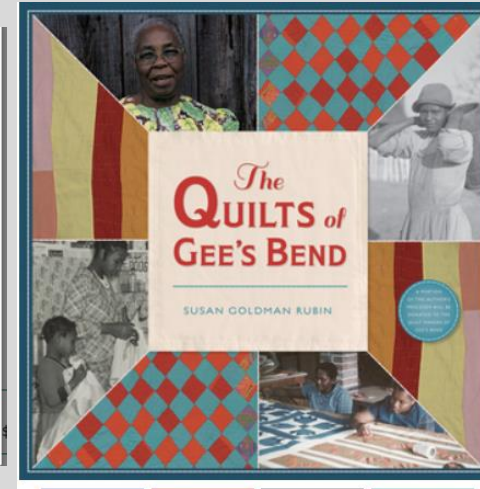
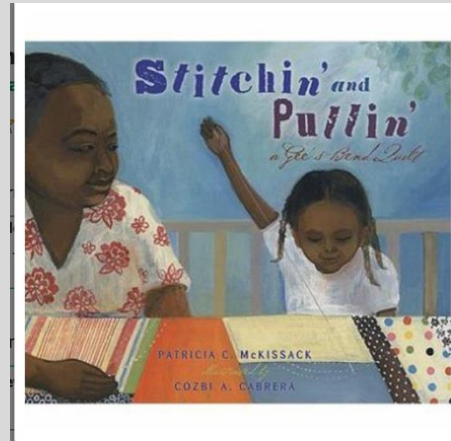
Taking Action:

After learning about the voter suppression of the Gee's Bend residents, students can organize activities to promote voter participation (e.g., a voter forum, voter registration drive)



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Extensions Books:



Quilt Making:

- Paper or cloth quilt squares for classroom mural
- Digital quilts

