Fiber Celebrations of Joy

Lesson Overview
This lesson incorporates both the Nebraska Reading/Writing Standards and National Art Standards. Students determine a personally significant time of joy in their lives and use fibers to celebrate that emotion. Students view contemporary textile artist Robert Hillestad’s exemplars: “Conversations with Maida,” “Solanum Pomiferum Textrina,” and “Celebrations in Fiber.” Students explore symbolic meanings attached to colors and express personal meaning through narrative writing. Students learn technical fiber skills and create fiber art in celebration of a time of joy.

Art Exemplars

Conversations with Maida
Artist: Robert Hillestad
69”H X 24”W X10”D
Linen, rayon, & assorted fibers
2006
Photo: John Nollendorfs

Solanum Pomiferum Textrina
Artist: Robert Hillestad
18”H X 16”W
Silk and assorted fibers
2005
Photo: John Nollendorfs

Celebrations in Fiber
Artist: Robert Hillestad
70”H X 34”W X 10”D
Wool, cotton & fibers
2003
Photo: John Nollendorfs
Objectives

• The students will investigate the art of internationally renowned contemporary textile artist Robert Hillestad examining the use of color, texture, rhythm, and movement.
• The students will develop ideas for celebrating a personal time of joy.
• The students will learn fiber art techniques of tassel making, twisting, dyeing, stitching, felting and layering.
• The students will recognize and communicate in writing and in the fiber medium a personal celebration of a remembered time of delight in their lives.
• The students will examine their completed fiber art pieces, reflecting on the expression of their concepts and how the ensuing processes contributed to the end results. They will make personal judgments determining the communication of their intended meaning toward the success of the projects, using written documentation to record their thoughts.

Standards and Assessments

• Nebraska Reading/Writing STARS: 1.1.1, 1.1.4, 1.1.7, 4.1.3, 4.1.4, 4.1.7, 4.2.3, 8.1.1, 8.1.2, 8.1.5, 8.3.2, 12.1.1, 12.1.2, 12.1.6, 12.3.2
• National Visual Arts: 1, 2, 3, 5, 6
• Rubric generators
Vocabulary

Celebration - to praise publicly, honor
Color – hue
Complex - involved, intricate, interconnected, interwoven
Contemporary - belonging to the current time period, modern
Dyeing - changing the color of fabric with dye
Embellish - to make beautiful by adding fanciful or ornamentation details
Felting - making a fabric of compressed wool fibers using warm water, a little soap, and agitation
Fiber berries – a name invented by Robert Hillestad for textural fiber balls made by putting cotton stuffing on fabric, pulling the fabric up around the stuffing to enclose it inside the fabric and tying the fabric to keep the cotton stuffing trapped inside
Fibers - a natural or synthetic filament like cotton or nylon that can be spun into yarn and any materials made from filaments
Fibersicle – a name invented by Robert Hillestad for ropes made by twisting yarns together that are looped and draped on an art piece
Joy - great pleasure, happiness, delight
Layering - putting one thickness of fibers on top of another, then another on top of the first two and another on top of all the thicknesses, repeating as many times as desired
Process - the activity of doing a series of techniques to produce an art project
Rhythm and Movement – repeating the use of the same kind of lines, colors, shapes, textures and values in more than one place in a composition causing the viewers’ eyes to look from one similar element to the next, to the next, moving around the composition
Stitching - sewing with needle and thread by hand or by sewing machine
Symbolize - to use an image or icon to express ideas and emotions; an inventive way of revealing or suggesting intangible truths or states
Tassel - a group of loose yarns or threads bound at one end and hanging free at the other
Textile - a woven, knit, felted cloth; a fiber, a filament or yarn used in making cloth
Texture - the appearance and feel of a fabric resulting from the arrangement of its fibers and yarns
Twisting - a process of making rope that binds two or more yarns together in a continuous strand
Introduction

• Introduce and develop the meanings of celebration and joy.
• Tell the students they are going to be creating a celebration project inspired by the work of contemporary textile artist Robert Hillestad.
• Research websites listed in Resources to find out about Robert Hillestad and his art.
  (For younger students this can be teacher directed and verbally discussed; older students can work independently on a prepared worksheet with a class discussion following.)

Suggested Research Questions:

• Who is Robert Hillestad?
• Where does he live?
• What art media does he use?
• What techniques are used to create his art?
• How does the artist use dance to describe his work?
• What makes his color combinations really effective?
• What inspires the artist to make his art?
• What is captivating about Robert Hillestad’s work?
• What other important discoveries did you make about Robert Hillestad or his art?

Suggested Drawings from Research:

• Older students make a drawing, write a description and state the appealing qualities of two of their favorite Hillestad pieces in writing, sharing one verbally with the class.
• Younger students make a drawing of one Hillestad piece and verbally describe it noting the reason it was chosen.

Presentation of Students’ Research and Drawings to Class

Suggested Discussion Questions and Topics during Presentation:

• What is unique about Robert Hillestad’s art?
• With which of your five senses does the art connect primarily?
• Discuss the use of color and texture in the selected art.
• How has the artist created rhythm and movement?
• How can an artist be influenced by the materials used?
• Can artists also be inspired by the process?

Share the Monograph Entitled Robert Hillestad: A Textiles Journey

• Read selections and display the images.
**Procedure:**
- Students write a narrative about a personally significant time of joy in their lives.
- Students consider fiber colors and textures to symbolize a celebration of joy.
- Teach and demonstrate fiber art techniques appropriate for grade level.
- Students create Celebration of Joy Projects using fiber art materials and techniques stipulated for each grade level. Time lengths will vary according to the student age, the instructor’s ability, the project minutes allotted per day, and the classroom set up.

**Techniques According to Grade Level**
- Lower Elementary: Tassels
- Upper Elementary: Tassels and Twisting
- Middle School: Tassels, Twisting, and Stitching
- High School: Tassels, Twisting, Stitching, Felting, and Dye-painting

**Projects:**
- Lower Elementary: Each student makes a Celebration of Joy tassel.
- Upper Elementary: Each student makes a Celebration of Joy tassel and a twisted rope, attaching the two together.
- Middle School: Each student makes a layered Celebration of Joy wall hanging with twisted ropes and tassels attached to a piece of cotton fabric that is embellished with stitching.
- High School: Each student makes a complex layered Celebration of Joy wall hanging or wearable or sculptural piece using the techniques of tassel making, twisting, dye-painting on fabric, nuno felting and stitching.

**Materials**
- Cotton fabric
- Cheesecloth
- Fabric scraps
- Wool fibers & wool yarns
- Yarns, twine, string, raffia, threads - sewing, embroidery
- Cold water dyes for cotton
- Textile paints
- Mat Board

*Check the Basic Steps for a specific fiber technique to determine the materials needed for each process from the list above.*
Basic Steps for Fiber Art Techniques:

- **Tassels**
  1. Cut a rectangular piece of sturdy cardboard or foam board based on the length of tassel you want to make. Wrap yarn around and around the board in one direction. Tie the ends of the yarn together and trim the excess yarn.

     Slip an 8” length of yarn or cord under the wrapped yarn and pull it up to the top edge of the cardboard. Tie once to secure strands. Slip yarn off of the board, then pull the tying cord as tight as possible and complete the knot.

  2. Pull all of the strands straight down from the tie on top and cut through the bottom loops.

  3. Take a new piece of 12-24” yarn and tie it around the tassel near the top to make a neck that will hold all the strands in place. Keep wrapping without overlapping. Tie a knot with the last 6” of yarn. Trim the excess yarn ends.

  4. Tassels can be one color or mixed colors and textures of yarns.

On-line References:

http://www.nezumiworld.com/crochet_057.htm
Easy directions w/ visual slides - http://www.mahalo.com/How_to_Make_Tassels
Twisting (to make fibersicles, also called ropes or cords)

1. Version 1: Cut strands of yarn, string, raffia, embroidery floss three to four times longer than the finished twisted rope will be. Tie the strands together at each end.

   Version 2: Clamp two L-brackets a distance apart on a sturdy surface. Tie the end of the yarn to one clamp, then loop the yarn around and around the two L-brackets until you have the fullness you want. Untie the start of the yarn on the clamp and tie it in a knot with the end of the yarn.

2. Version 1: Pair up with a partner. Each person slips a dowel/pencil/paintbrush handle into the strands near the knot, pulling the strands of yarn slightly tight between them.

   Version 2: Pair up with a partner. Each person slips a dowel into the end of the loop near the L-bracket and slides the strands of yarns off the bracket, holding the yarn taut between them.

3. Both Versions 1 and 2: Each partner twists the strands of yarn the same direction either clockwise or counter-clockwise until the yarn is good and tight and starts kinking. Then each person keeps holding the twisted yarns taut with tension so they won’t untwist. One person will be holding their twisted end and at the same time should stretch and reach and take hold the center of the twisted strands (ask third person to help if the length is too long). Next the second person keeps the tension in the twisted yarns hands their twisted end to the first person. The first person will now hold both ends together in one hand & release the hand holding the middle letting the two halves naturally twist together into a rope.

4. Version 1: Keep holding both ends until a new strand of yarn has been tied around both knots to secure them together to prevent untwisting; trim the ends.

   Version 2: Holding the loop ends together, insert a new length of yarn into each loop and tie the loops together to keep the twist of the rope from coming undone.

On-line References (Twisting):

http://www.serve.com/marbeth/twisted_cord.html
http://www.knittingatnoon.com/twcord.html
http://www.lindahendrickson.com/cordmaking-instructions.html
• Stitching

1. Hand stitching is done with a needle and thread. The basic basting stitch looks like a dotted line and is made by inserting the needle into the fabric from the top to the underside and from the underside to the top. Repeat two or three times, gathering the stitches on the needle in an in-out or over-under fashion. This stitch can be used to create straight or curvy lines using any kind of strand that can be threaded through the eye of a needle.

2. Gathers in fabric can be made by making parallel lines of baste stitches side-by-side with a knot at the end of the thread at the start of the lines. Pulling the end threads will cause the fabric to scrunch up into gathers.

3. Any kind of embroidery stitches can also be made by hand with needle and thread.

4. Machine stitching can be applied directly onto the fabric using a straight stitch in a variety of colors of thread. Machine stitching can also be sewn onto dissolvable interfacing in a random design with many multiple layers of multiple colors of threads. When the dissolvable interfacing is washed out, the stitching that is left is doily-like in appearance and can be stitched by hand or machine onto the project.

5. Make fiber berries by putting a small ball of cotton stuffing on fabric, pull the fabric up around the stuffing to enclose it inside the fabric, take thread and wrap around the enclosure several times before tying it in a knot to keep the cotton stuffing trapped inside.

On-line References:

http://www.thecraftstudio.com/qwc/handsew.htm
• **Nuno Felting**

  1. First put a towel on the work surface, and on it spread a layer of bubble wrap with the bubbles facing up. On top of the bubble wrap put a layer of cheesecloth. Pull very thin wisps of wool fibers from wool roving and lay the wisps in rows in one direction on top of the cheesecloth overlapping the rows of wisps like shingles on a roof on the whole front. Lay wool yarns in designs over the wool fibers. If using synthetic or cotton fibers, make sure to put wisps of wool fibers over them. Other colors of wool can be added to the design. Sprinkle the whole design with warm soapy water. Cover with bubble wrap with the bubbles down facing the project. Put a little soapy water on top of the bubble wrap. Gently rub the bubble wrap to compress all the fibers in the design. Make sure all the fibers are wet. Add more water if needed. Rub with a little more pressure for two minutes.

  2. Take a hold of one side of the wet project (both bubble wraps with the felting in progress between) as if it were a sandwich and turn it over. Carefully peel away the layer of bubble wrap that is now on top to expose the cheesecloth on backside of the felting piece. Pull very thin wisps of wool from roving and lay them perpendicular to the direction of the first layer of wisps of wool on the front side in rows. Again overlap the rows of wisps like shingles on the whole back side. Sprinkle the whole design with warm soapy water. Cover with bubble wrap with the bubbles down facing the project. Put a little soapy water on top of the bubble wrap. Gently rub the bubble wrap to compress all the fibers in the design. Make sure all the fibers are wet. Add more water if needed. Rub with a little more pressure for two minutes.

  3. Starting at one side, roll the “sandwich” up like you are in the process of making cinnamon rolls with flattened bread dough and secure it with two rubber bands. Roll the project like a log back and forth under your hands on the work surface for two minutes. Unroll and then re-roll from the opposite side, roll back and forth for two minutes. Repeat for the other two sides. Turn it over and do the same thing on all four sides of the back.

  4. Do the pinch test to see if the fibers are felting. Pinch the fibers and see if they can be pulled up from the cheesecloth. If the fibers are loose, continue felting by rolling and rubbing with warm soapy water until they are secure. Take away the bubble wrap. First gently tossing the project onto the work surface for a minute, then throw the project onto the work surface with force for two minutes. Rinse soap out of felted piece, towel dry and lay flat to air dry.

  **On-line References:**

  [http://www.peak.org/~spark/Bubble-wrapFelting.html](http://www.peak.org/~spark/Bubble-wrapFelting.html)
  [http://www.peak.org/~spark/feltscarf.html](http://www.peak.org/~spark/feltscarf.html)
• **Dyeing and Painting**

1. The teacher should mix dye solutions according to the directions. Students should wear aprons and gloves.

2. Fabric can be immersed into a dye bath for an overall change of color. If portions of the fabric are hand dipped into the dyes a value scale of a color can be developed by dipping a shorter time for light areas and longer lengths of time for dark areas. When the dyed fabric is dry, it can be over-dyed in another color. Uneven dyeing can be achieved by scrunching up dry fabric into a ball held with a couple of rubber bands before it is put in the dye bath.

3. Applying the dyes onto the fabric with brushes will produce a painterly effect, especially if more than one color is used.

4. Brushing textile paints onto fabric is another way to add color to the surface.

5. Most dyes and textile paints need to be heat set to make them permanent on fabric. Dyes will be permanently set on fabric if the fabric is put in a simmering dye bath on a hot plate or the dye bath and fabric are heated in a microwave safe bowl in the microwave. Note: Any kitchen utensils used in the dyeing process should not be used for cooking. Textile paints can be set with an iron and sometimes in the clothes dryer.

**On-line References:**
http://www.prochemical.com/directions.htm
http://www.dylon.co.uk/help.html
Conclusion

Suggested Written Response Questions for Students

(Teachers will choose selected questions for students to address.)

• How does Robert Hillestad make fiber berries?
• In what ways do fiber berries enhance Robert Hillestad’s art?
• What are the most important elements in his work?
• How would you define Robert Hillestad as an artist?
• How do color and texture affect art?
• What are the pros and the cons of working with fibers as a medium?
• Explain the choice of colors used in this project and how the colors relate to the joy you are celebrating.
• How do the materials and the process of creating inspire art?
• What are you most pleased with and what would you do differently in a similar project?
• Name the fiber art techniques used in your celebration project.
• If I could own a Hillestad piece, I would choose__________, because ____________.
• Compare the art that Robert Hillestad creates to the art of a painter or a sculptor. How is the art the same and how is it different?
• Determine if Robert Hillestad’s art is complex, giving reasons for your answer.
• My favorite fiber art technique is__________, because________________________.

Class Presentation

• Have a celebration in class where students present their projects, and have a chance to tell about the joy that relates to each project or share some of their written responses or talk about what was successful or their favorite part about creating the project. The other students can be given the opportunity to tell the presenter/student artist what they like about the project, what elements are working together the best, what areas make the composition strong, where the point of emphasis is located, or what elements are repeated causing the viewer’s eye to move around the whole composition.

Student Art Exhibition

• Lower & Upper Elementary: Combine the projects of a class together into a layered exhibit.
• Middle School and High School: Exhibit each project individually.

Document Student Art

• Take digital photos to print, put in album, share with students or parents, put on website, and/or project on flat screen TV.
Related Activities

Interview
Correspond with the artist: Robert Hillestad: Rhillestad@inebraska.com

Exhibitions
Visit the Robert Hillestad Textiles Gallery, a part of the Textiles, Clothing and Design Department, College of Education and Human Sciences, located in the Home Economics Building on 35th Street north of East Campus Loop, Lincoln, Nebraska. Exhibitions include work by internationally known textile artists, work from University of Nebraska clothing and textile students and examples of historic quilts and costumes. Hours are 8:30 a.m. - 4:00 p.m. Monday-Friday and by appointment. Admission is free. The gallery will be closed for renovation in summer of 2009. For more information, call (402) 472-2911. Visit http://textilegallery.unl.edu/ to learn about current and upcoming exhibitions and events.

Monograph
The Friends of the Robert Hillestad Textiles Gallery released a monograph titled Robert Hillestad: A Textiles Journey, which showcases the artist's work and career, with a personal narrative by the artist, illustrations, essays written by Beverly Gordon and Jo Ann Stabb, and poetry by Mary Logue. The monograph is available for purchase at the University of Nebraska Press: http://www.nebraskapress.unl.edu.
**Resources:**
Robert Hillestad: The Artist and his Art

http://modernartsmidwest.com/collection/RobertHillestad

http://artscene.org/about_us/projects/public_art/
(Stories of Home Documentary Clip: Rob Hillestad)

http://textilegallery.unl.edu/Mission.html

http://www.artscene.org/includes/downloads/1_image_famsktch.pdf

http://hill.lps.org/student-artHillestad2.html


http://www.netnebraska.org/extras/statewide/pers/Hillestad.html

http://newsroom.unl.edu/releases/2008/04/24/Hillestad


**Credits**
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