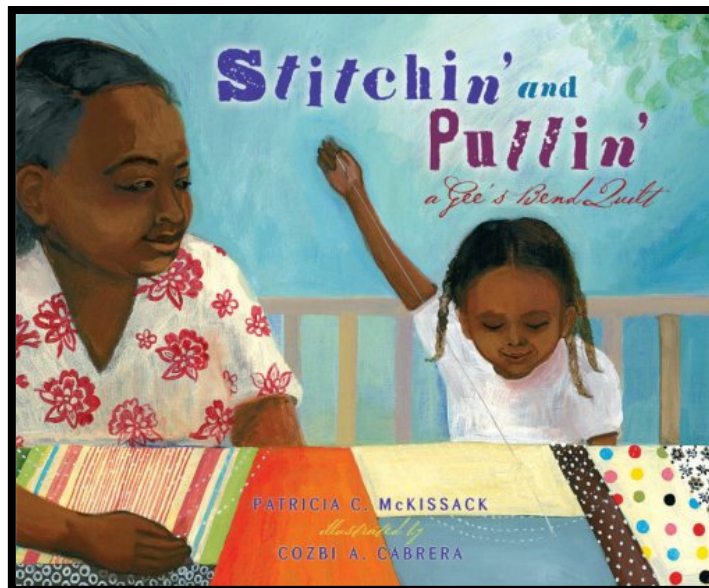


Stitchin' and Pullin': A Gee's Bend Quilt

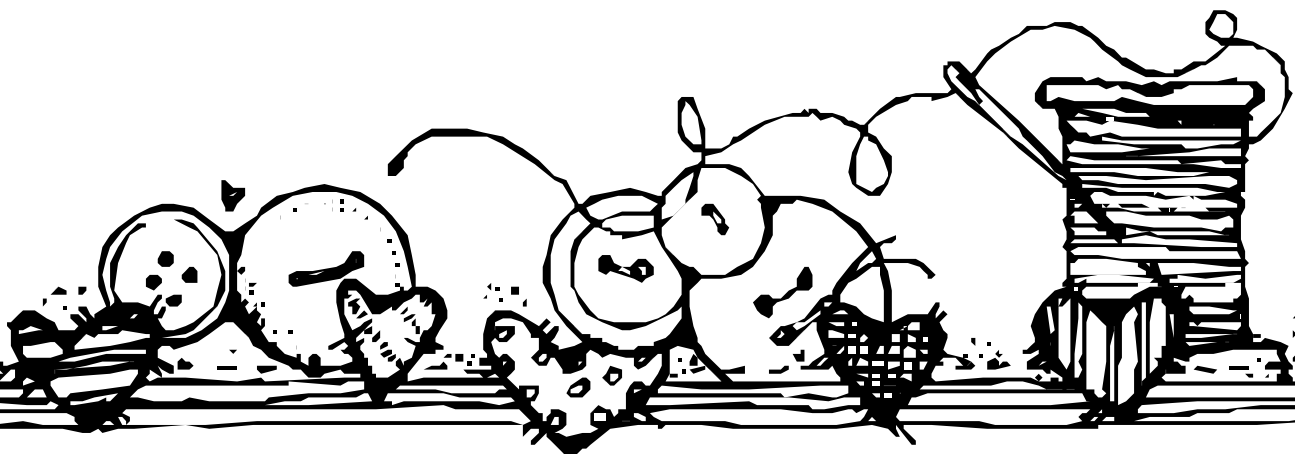
By Patricia McKissack

Illustrated by Cozbi A. Cabrera



Readers Guide

By Jennifer Garich



Bibliography

McKissack, Patricia C. 2008. *Stitchin' and Pullin': A Gee's Bend Quilt*. Ill. by Cozbi A. Cabrera. New York: Random House. ISBN 978-0-375-83163-8

Recommended Age Levels 6-12

Summary of Book

In this breathtakingly beautiful collection of twenty-two poems, the reader is introduced to the cultural traditions of the residents who live in an isolated, rural Alabama community called Gee's Bend through the eyes of a young African American girl. Throughout her life Baby Girl has grown watching her mother, grandmother, and great-grandmother as they lovingly created quilts out of colorful scraps of cloth that are bursting with significance to their lives and the lives of the ancestors who lived before them. As Baby Girl watches her relatives and listens to their stories, she discovers the meaning behind this special tradition and waits patiently for the time when she will be allowed to piece together a quilt of her own. When it is finally her turn, the reader is taken on a journey as Baby Girl learns how to gather pieces of cloth that are meaningful to her life and combine them together in a way that conveys the story she is hoping to share with others. While she is stitchin' and pullin' her first quilt, the history of her family, community, and the struggle for freedom in Gee's Bend gradually unfolds and seamlessly captures the incredible strength, perseverance, and determination of African Americans as they overcame overwhelming obstacles in their fight for equal rights. The value of family found within the stories that are passed down throughout generations is flawlessly portrayed through McKissack's memorable word choice, while Cabrera's stunning paintings reflect the warmth and love that the women of Gee's Bend pour into each and every stitch of their famous quilts.

Review Excerpts

"Cabrera's acrylic paintings depict the richness of tradition and strength of characters as connections are made between fabric and history. Readers will enjoy the slow cadence of verse as they pause to consider history through the eyes of the people who lived it and the legacy that is passed on to the next generation."

– *School Library Journal*

"McKissack's series of poems tells the story of and honors the history of the women quilters of Gee's Bend, Alabama...Cabrera's vibrant paintings incorporate collage elements in both somber and vibrant colors that reflect struggles for freedom along with the collaborative warmth of quilting parties. An outstanding way to introduce aspects of African-American history and explore the power of community."

– *Kirkus Reviews*

"Both words and images glow with the love, creativity, and strength that are shared among the generations, and an author's note and an introduction by an art historian fill in more specifics about the rare community and its rich tradition."

– *Booklist*

Awards/Honors Received

- * Lee Bennett Hopkins Poetry Award, Honor Book 2009
- * Kid's Indie Next List "Inspired Recommendations for Kids from Indie Booksellers" Winner, 2008
- * Starred Review, Kirkus Reviews, September 15, 2008
- * Cooperative Children's Book Center Choices, 2009

Questions to Ask Before Reading

Invite children to discuss the following questions prior to reading aloud *Stitchin' and Pullin': A Gee's Bend Quilt*.

- * Before showing children the cover of the book, ask *What images do you think of when you hear words like stitchin' and pullin'?* After several responses are shared, show children the cover and ask *What clues on the cover prove whether our predictions were correct?*

- * *Have you ever had any experiences with sewing a quilt? Do you know anyone who sews quilts? How long do you think it might take to sew a quilt? Why do you think so?*
- * *Prior to asking this question, provide children with a map or atlas to look at. Can you find where Boykin, Alabama is on the map? Does it appear to be a small community or a large one? What significance do you think the location of this community will have to the characters in this story?*
- * *Imagine what life was like for African Americans prior to earning their freedom. What do you think you would miss the most if you lost your freedom and were forced to become a slave? How do you think African Americans felt when they finally earned the same rights as other people?*
- * *Do you share special memories with anyone in your family? What are some ways that your family remembers special times that they've shared?*
- * *What is a tradition? What traditions do we have at school? Can you think of any traditions that your parents learned from your grandparents? What traditions have been handed down to you in your family?*

Suggestions for Reading Poems Aloud

- * "Gee's Bend Women" – Invite all children to participate in a choral reading by having them read the beginning line of each stanza ("Gee's Bend women are") as a repeated refrain while the teacher reads the remainder of the poem aloud. This strategy would also work well with the poem "Remembering" by having children read the line "I hope" in unison.
- * "Colors" – Have children brainstorm motions to go along with each line, and then invite eleven volunteers to read one line each while acting out the motion that accompanies it. For example, while reading the line "Blue cools" a child can clasp his/her arms together and pretend to shiver. The entire group can read the final stanza together at the end. Try this same strategy with the poem "Who Would Have Thought" by inviting six children to read each line and perform what they read through some sort of motion. The whole group can shrug their shoulders while reading the final line of the poem altogether.
- * "Remembering" – Divide the group of children into four small groups, so that each group can read one of the four poem stanzas. Using this approach, the children can read the beginning and ending lines altogether. Another option that would work well with this particular poem is to divide the whole group into two smaller groups so that they can take turns reading the stanzas back and forth to each other.

Follow Up Activities

Writing

- * As the women in Gee's Bend stitched their quilts, they shared stories of their lives and the lives of their ancestors. They also gathered various pieces of fabric that represented special memories. Have children think of a special item that was given to them by someone in their family. Once they have thought of something special, they can write a story about where the item originally came from and why it is meaningful to them. For a fun twist, children can write a story about the history of their item from the perspective of the object. These stories can then be published into a class book.
- * In this poetry collection, Baby Girl learns how to sew her own quilt from observing her mother, grandmother, and other relatives. Ask children to think about what types of things they have seen adults around them make that they would like to learn how to create on their own. Children can then interview an older relative or a person from their community to learn about what they do or make. Afterwards, they can write a report that includes step-by-step instructions for how to do or make what they learned about.

- * Quiltmaking is a tradition that has been passed down from one generation to the next among the women in Gee's Bend. Discuss the meaning of traditions with children and ask them to think about what traditions they have in their own families. Have children write about a family tradition that has passed down through the generations, making sure to include information about when the tradition began, how it feels to be a part of that tradition, and what makes the tradition special to them.

Math

- * After reading the poem *Puzzling the Pieces*, discuss geometric shapes with children and ask children whether the shapes on the quilts are two-dimensional polygons or three-dimensional solid figures. Children can then explore the process that quiltmakers use in creating the perfect arrangement of geometric shapes for a quilt using pattern blocks or tangram puzzles (see <http://math.about.com/library/tangramsm.pdf> for a tangram puzzle pattern you can use).
- * Discuss the many different types of symmetry that can be seen in traditional quilt patterns. Children can draw their own symmetrical quilt pattern on graph paper, or they can create an interactive quilt pattern by going to the following website: http://www.learner.org/teacherslab/math/geometry/shape/quilts/quilts_1.html.
- * Discuss the concepts of ratio and proportion and how these concepts are related to quilt patterns. Have children draw a quilt design on a 6 inch x 6 inch piece of grid paper, and then transfer the same design to a 12 inch x 12 inch piece of grid paper. Have students determine what calculations were necessary in order to transfer the original design of their quilt to a new type of grid paper.

Science

- * One of the primary purposes of quilts is to keep us warm. Discuss with children the type of properties that make things like quilts, coats, and scarves retain more heat than other types of clothing. Read the fifth paragraph of the *Author's Note* at the end of the book, which explains the three different layers that are used to create a quilt. Compare and contrast the way quilts are assembled with how other types of clothing are manufactured.
- * After reading the poem *Nothing Wasted*, discuss with children that quilts are often made from discarded fabric scraps and other pieces of clothing that are no longer wearable. Incorporate this process into a unit of study on recycling. Have children research the effects of recycling pieces of cloth on the environment. What positive ecological effects are associated with the recycling involved in quilting?
- * Tessellations are continuous patterns of interlocking shapes with no spaces between them. Quilts use tessellations, but they are also found in nature (some examples include honeycombs, eyes of insects, and tree bark). Ask children to think of other tessellations they have seen in nature, as well as tessellations that are manmade (such as ice cube trays, sidewalks, and chocolate bar squares). Here are two websites that include explanations about what a tessellation is, along with several examples.
<http://www.coolmath4kids.com/tesspag1.html>
<http://www.shodor.org/interactivate/activities/Tessellate/>

Social Studies

- * Have children find the geographical location of Gee's Bend on a map of Alabama. Discuss how this community's geographical location might isolate the people who live there. Brainstorm ways in which isolation might affect a community's culture, language, art, and traditions.
- * Children can begin a unit of study on slavery and research the history of slavery in the United States by listening to interviews of former slaves on the Library of Congress website: <http://memory.loc.gov/ammem/collections/voices/index.html>. After recording notes from these interviews, children can synthesize what they've learned by creating a diary to share the information they've learned through a slave's point of view.

- * During the Civil Rights Movement, many people who lived in Gee's Bend marched with Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. in 1965 to register to vote in Camden, Alabama. After reading the poem *The Right to Vote*, discuss with children how the ferry was closed to try to discourage African Americans from voting. Have children listen to Dr. Martin Luther King's famous "I Have a Dream" speech (see <http://www.milkonline.net/dream.html>) and record their thoughts about the importance in having the right to vote. Why was this something African Americans fought so hard for during the Civil Rights Movement?

Art

- * Give children construction paper and large paper frames and have them create original quilt designs of their own. They can choose their own colors and cut out a variety of shapes to add to their design. When they are finished, have them compare and contrast their design with images of actual Gee's Bend quilts to see how the designs are similar and how they are different.
- * Ask children to begin collecting fabric scraps and pieces of old clothing they find at home. If possible, have them choose scraps from clothing that had some type of special meaning for them because of a special event or something they did while wearing the clothing. Once they have collected enough scraps, allow children to cut the pieces into shapes and arrange them into a small quilt design. While working in small groups, children can bring their design to combine with others while taking turns telling the stories of the pieces in the quilt. After each small group has assembled their quilt designs, the teacher can collect each design and assemble them all together to create a class quilt.
- * Children can work together to create a Reader's Theater that would correspond with the characters found within this poetry collection. Once a script has been developed, the parts of the characters can be divided up and children can gather any necessary props that will make the show more authentic (a quilt, needles with thread, a table with a quilt laying on top to represent a "quilting frame", fabric scraps, etc.) Allow children plenty of time to rehearse until they are ready to perform in front of an audience!

Related Web Sites

The Quilts of Gee's Bend

<http://www.quiltsofgeesbend.com/>

[Check out this website to learn more about the history of Gee's Bend and find information about the quilts and the quiltmakers from this famous community.]

TinWood Media

<http://www.tinwoodmedia.com/>

[Look at this interactive website for information on books, music, and film related to African American art. You can also find images of actual Gee's Bend Quilts and information about museum exhibits.]

The Quilts of Gee's Bend in Context

<http://www.auburn.edu/academic/other/geesbend/home.html>

[Explore this educational website created by Auburn University for additional information about the history of the quilts of Gee's Bend, images of all the quilts in the collection, and curriculum connections that can be used within the classroom.]

African American Quilting Traditions

<http://xroads.virginia.edu/~UG97/quilt/atrad.html>

[Check out this website to find extensive information about the history behind African American quilting traditions and symbols.]

Stitchin' and Pullin' a Gee's Quilt Teacher's Guide

http://www.randomhouse.com/catalog/teachers_guides/9780375831638.pdf

[Look here for an in-depth interview with author Patricia McKissack on the making of *Stitchin' and Pullin': A Gee's Bend Quilt*, as well as research tips she shares for kids.]

Audio Clip of Patricia McKissack Interview for *Stitchin' and Pullin': A Gee's Bend Quilt*
http://198.234.121.108/aroundcincinnati/020109_PatriciaMcKissack.mp3

[Listen to an interview with Patricia McKissack in which she discusses the research behind her award-winning poetry book and reads two of the poems aloud.]

Related Books

Fiction Children's Literature about Quilts

Flournoy, Valerie. 1985. *The Patchwork Quilt*. Ill. by Jerry Pinkney. Penguin Group.

Hegamin, Tonya. 2009. *Most Loved in All the World*. Ill. by Cozbi A. Cabrera. Houghton Mifflin Harcourt.

Hopkinson, Deborah. 1995. *Sweet Clara and the Freedom Quilt*. Ill. by James Ransome. Dragonfly Books.

Howard, Ellen. 1996. *The Log Cabin Quilt*. Ill. by Ronald Himler. Holiday House.

Root, Phyllis. 2003. *The Name Quilt*. Ill. by Margot Apple. Farrar, Straus, and Giroux.

Stroud, Bettye. 2005. *The Patchwork Path: A Quilt Map to Freedom*. Ill. by Erin Susanne Bennett. Candlewick.

Woodson, Jacqueline. 2005. *Show Way*. Ill. by Hudson Talbott. Putnam Juvenile.

Nonfiction Literature Related to African American History

Arnett, William. 2002. *The Quilts of Gee's Bend: Masterpieces from a Lost Place*. Tinwood Books.

Bullard, Sara. 1994. *Free At Last: A History of the Civil Rights Movement and Those Who Died in the Struggle*. Ill. by Julian Bond. Oxford University Press.

Levine, Ellen. 1993. *Freedom's Children: Young Civil Rights Activists Tell Their Own Stories*. Putnam Juvenile.

Meltzer, Milton. 2002. *There Comes a Time: The Struggle for Civil Rights*. Random House Books for Young Readers.

Rappaport, Doreen. 2006. *Free at Last!: Stories and Songs of Emancipation*. Ill. by Shane W. Evans. Candlewick.

Rochelle, Belinda. 1997. *Witnesses to Freedom: Young People Who Fought for Civil Rights*. Puffin.

Poetry Related to African American History and Ethnic Heritage

Lewis, J. Patrick. 2000. *Freedom Like Sunlight: Praisesongs for Black Americans*. Ill. by John Thompson. Creative Editions.

Nelson, Marilyn. 2008. *The Freedom Business*. Ill. by Deborah Muirhead. Front Street Press.

Thomas, Joyce Carol. 2008. *The Blacher the Berry*. Ill. by Floyd Cooper. Amistad.

About the Author

*"To me, reading is like breathing; both are essential to life."
- Patricia C. McKissack*

To get a feel for the quilters' lives, Patricia C. McKissack traveled to Gee's Bend, learned about its history, and got a quilting lesson. She is the author of the Caldecott Honor Book *Mirandy and Brother Wind* and the Newbery Honor Book *The Dark-Thirty*. Patricia and her husband, Fred, have written over 100 books about the African American experience. She has also received the Regina Medal for lifetime achievement in children's books and the Virginia Hamilton Award. She lives in St. Louis, Missouri.



About the Illustrator

A quilter herself, Cozbi A. Cabrera finds inspiration in the story of the women of Gee's Bend. She is the illustrator of the picture books *Thanks a Million*, *A Windy Day*, and *Beauty, Her Basket*. You can visit her Web site at www.cozbi.com. She lives in Brooklyn, New York.

