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“Quilting as a Literacy of Love and Social Justice”

By Elizabeth Stelle



Description of the Artwork:

As a young child, I was fascinated by quilts. Laying under the quilts that my grandmother and her mother created before her, I would search each piece of fabric for their worn histories and memories. A scrap left over from my father's christening gown, or another from his sister's graduation dress. Each piece reminds me of where I came from. Our family histories are lovingly pieced together one stitch at a time.

Quilts offer warmth, security, sometimes shelter and community. These are all qualities that educators should aspire to create in their classroom cultures. One such way to foster these important qualities is through the literature that we choose to share with our students. This quilt is inspired by challenging traditional literacy methods as an early childhood educator/director now turned doctoral student/teacher educator. I want this work to inspire others to push boundaries of what is acceptable practice in literacy education to move the field out of a gridlock of tradition, colonialism, sexism, racism, and Eurocentric whiteness among other issues preventing educational equity. Each piece of fabric or book cover art was chosen deliberately to create a disruption of the status quo reminding our students of their rich cultures and histories.

This quilt was created to center the use of children's literature to create safe, equitable spaces for students to grow, build positive identities and learn. My work echoes the work of scholars who have paved the way before me. These scholars include Rudine Bishop-Simms, Gloria Ladson-Billings, Bell Hooks, Paulo Freire and Gholdy Muhammed to name a few. This work also serves as a love story created for all students who have been misunderstood, silenced, forgotten, or erased by curriculum and policies of the past and present in education.

1	2	3
4	5	6
7	8	9

1. On the square at the top left corner, the background fabric used is a traditional African wax cloth. The name of this wax cloth pattern is *Aniwa* which is the Akan word for eye. Its meaning is to be mindful of your actions. I have disrupted the African fabric with a reproduction of a 1930s fabric showing a traditional colonial nursery rhyme setting, white children playing games. On top of this fabric, I have created a mirror referencing Rudine Bishop-Sims's (1990) idea of books as mirrors, windows and sliding glass doors. In that mirror, we see the faces of children taken from the cover art of picture books giving accurate portrayals of Black culture. This square represents how these picture books allow Black children to see themselves in this literature.

Picture Books Used:

Byers, G. (2018). *I Am Enough* (K.A. Bobo, Illus.). Balzer + Bray.

Charles, T (2020). *All Because You Matter* (B. Collier). Orchard Books

Joy, A. (2020). *Black is a Rainbow Color* (E. Holmes, illus.). Roaring Brook Press.

Mbalia, K. (2021). *Black Boy Joy* (K. Nelson, Illus.). Delacorte Press.

Tarpley, N.A. (2001). *I Love My Hair* (E. B. Lewis, Illus.). Little Brown Books for Young Readers.

2. The next square represents Asian American Pacific Islander (AAPI) cultures. The square deliberately looks as if you are looking through a window, again referencing Bishop-Simms (1990).

The window allows students to investigate the lives that are different than their own experienced culture. The flowers that we see through the window are various lotus flowers. In Asian cultures the lotus flower is a sacred plant that has great symbolism and represents a wide range of virtues including peace, purity and spiritual enlightenment. The book cover illustrations are taken from books that represent AAPI experiences. These books disrupt stereotypes and create conversations that eliminate bias. In the corners we see two origami butterflies that are created using fabric that has an issue of The Heart Mountain Sentinel printed on it. The Heart Mountain Sentinel was a newspaper printed from a Japanese internment camp in Wyoming from 1942-1946. The newspaper represents the need for anti-bias education to avoid repeating mistakes of the past.

Picture Books Used:

Choi, Y. (2001). *The Name Jar*. Knopf Books for Young Readers.

Ho, J. (2021). *Eyes that Kiss in the Corners* (D. Ho, Illus.). Harper Collins.

Le, M. (2018). *Drawn Together* (D. Santat, Illus.). Little Brown Books for Young Readers

Muhamed, I., Ali, S.K. (2019). *The Proudest Blue A Story of Hijab and Family* (H. Aly, Illus.). Little Brown Books for Young Readers

3. On the next square, we see rainbow fabric mimicking the fabric of a pride flag representing LGBTQ+ lives. On the fabric, we see 5 manilla folders stamped with the word “BANNED” on them. Inside each folder is the cover art of books portraying the lives of LGBTQ+ characters. These banned books are placed then over a black and white photo of the AIDS quilt displayed at the National Mall in 1985. This quilt was created in memory of the thousands of people who lost their lives to AIDS, most of those being from the gay community. This square reminds us of the inequities and prejudice that took place in health care which cut short the lives of so many who were a part of the LGBTQ+ community.

Picture Books Used:

Ewert, M., (2008). *10,000 Dresses* (Ray, R. Illus.). Triangle Square.

Love, J. (2018) *Julian is a Mermaid*. Candlewick.

Lukoff, K. (2019). *Call Me Max* (Lozano, L. Illus.). Reycraft Books.

Lukoff, K. (2019). *When Aidan Became a Brother* (Juanita, K. Illus.). Lee & Low Books

Schiffer, M.B. (2015). *Stelle Brings the Family* (Clifton-Brown, H. Illus.). Chronical Books

4. On this square, the blue batiked background fabrics represent the sky and the sea that surround many of the Afro-Caribbean and Latine homelands. Flying across the sky we see the Papel Picado, or punched paper banners that you see marking celebrations in the Mexican culture. On each of the banners you will see the cover art of books representing Latine and Afro-Caribbean lives. Behind the banners, you will see embroidered loops of silver thread in rows. These silver loops represent the razor wire that serves as an unwelcome site for border crossers and barriers for the many refugees that attempt to seek asylum in the United States from the Latin, Caribbean and Central American countries to the south of the United States. The books hanging on the Papel Picado disrupt hateful rhetoric by sharing these rich and fascinating cultures with our students.

Picture Books Used:

Denise, A.A. (2019). *Planting Stories: The life of Librarian and Storyteller Pura Belpre* (Escobar, P. Illus.) HarperCollins.

Diaz, J. (2018). *Islandborn* (Espinoza, L. Illus.). Dial Books.

Martinez-Neil, J. (2018). *Alma and How She Got Her Name*. Candlewick.

Mendez, Y.S. (2019). *Where Are You From?* (Kim, J. Illus.). Harper Collins.

Morales, Y. (2018). *Dreamers*. Neil Porter Books

5. The middle square represents the heart of the quilt, quite literally. You see a large heart spreading over fabric that is adorned with books from the traditional canon. On this heart, you see a three-dimensional book and on each page of this book, you can read quotes from the scholars that inform my work. The heart is a symbol of the words of these scholars and their research disrupting the lack of representation in the traditional canon.

References:

- Bishop, R.S. (1990). Mirrors, windows, and sliding glass doors. *Perspectives* 6(3): ix-xi.
- Hooks, B. *All About Love: New Visions*. Harper Perennial, 2000.
- Kaur, V. (2020). *See No Stranger: A Memoir and Manifesto of Revolutionary Love*. One World.
- Muhamed, G. *Cultivating genius: An equity framework for culturally and historically responsive literacy*. Scholastic, 2020.
- Wynter-Hoyte, K., Braden, E., Myers, M., Rodriguez, S.C., & Thornton, N. *Revolutionary love: Creating a culturally inclusive classroom*. Scholastic, 2022

6. This square contains the cover art of books that impart the importance of food as a part of sharing culture. The background fabric is a remnant of a vintage tablecloth from the 1940s. The table is set in Americana red, white and blue and the books included disrupt the white hegemonic representations of a meal in America with new perspectives from other cultures.

Picture Books Used:

- Charles, T. (2019). *Freedom Soup* (Alcántara, J. Illus.). Candlewick.
- Maillard, K. N. (2019). *Fry Bread: A Native American Family Story* (Martinez-Neil, J. Illus.). Roaring Brook Press.
- Mora, O. (2018). *Thank You Omu*. Little Brown Books for Young Readers.
- Park, L.S. (2008). *Bee-bim Bop!* (Lee, H.B. Illus.). Clarion Books.
- Stein, J.D. (2022). *Lunch From Home* (Li, J. Illus.). Rise x Penguin Workshop.

7. This square is representative of Indigenous cultures. The background fabric is a traditional Native American inspired fabric. On top of that fabric are three handmade fabric feathers. In indigenous cultures feathers are considered sacred, so I felt that the use of real feathers would be disrespectful to Indigenous cultures. These three feathers represent honor power and trust, all three virtues that the colonizers disrespected when they tried to erase indigenous cultures through dispossession and forced assimilation. On top of the three feathers is a box made of fabric with four books about Indigenous culture on the outside. Inside the box, you will find a photograph of Indigenous children at a Native American Boarding school and a map showing the original Native American territories. The books shed light on the Indigenous culture working to reclaim and share the lost traditions of indigenous people in the Americas.

Picture Books Used:

- Harjo, J. (2023). *Remember* (Goade, M. Illus.). Random House Studio.
- Lindstrom, L. (2020). *We Are the Water Protectors* (Goade, M. Illus.). Roaring Brook Press.
- Robertson, D.A. (2016). *When We Were Alone* (Flett, J. Illus.). HighWater Press.
- Sorell, T. (2020). *We Are Grateful* (Lessac, F. Illus.). Scholastic.

8. This square represents children as advocates. The picture books chosen are books that center student voices in activism and are displayed as signs in a picket line. This square reinforces children's epistemic rights and children's power to make change.

Picture Books Used:

Allen, T. (2020). *Sometimes People March*. Balzer + Bray.

Levinson, C. (2017). *The Youngest Marcher* (Brantley-Newton, V. Illus.). Atheneum Books for Young Readers

Paul, M. (2020). *Speak Up* (Glenn, E. Illus.). Clarion Books.

Sanders, R. (2018). *Peaceful Fights for Equal Rights* (Schorr, J. A. Illus.). Simon & Schuster Books for Young Readers.

9. The final square contains picture book cover art that provides a look into the many diverse representations of family. The square itself is structured like a home and as you peek in through the door and windows you see books sharing those different representations. The disruption occurs when the traditional nuclear family structure is outside of the home and in the lawn portrayed by traditional picture book illustrations from a series of readers that were published and used from 1930 – 1965.

Picture Books Used:

Combs, B. (2012). *ABC A Family Alphabet Book* (Rappa, D. & Rappa, B. Illus.). Two Lives Publishing.

Gray, W.S. (2003). *Storybook Treasury of Dick and Jane and Friends*. Grosset & Dunlap.

Hegarty, P. (2017). *We Are Family* (Wheatcroft, R. Illus.). Tiger Tales.

O’Leary, S. (2016). *A Family is a Family is a Family* (Leng, Q. Illus.). Groundwood Books.

Parr, T. (2010). *The Family Book*. Little Brown Books for Young Readers.

Meyers, S. (2001). *Everywhere Babies* (Frazee, M. Illus.). Clarion Books

About Elizabeth Stelle



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