

**- PRETEND
- FORAGING
----- IN
-- SLEEVED
BLANKETS**

**-----
GRACE WIRZBA
-----**



Grace Wirzba
Rub Tight (detail)
2021
Pencil crayon on bristol board



Your space is full to the brim of bright gold light, of pink hued forms,

I'm held by you, held by this vibration that softens each blow

A path walked every day to fill the small holes that crop up nearby

Board the bus, right up front, pull up my collar to my chin and hold fast

To the height of each, to the width of each, tumble through

Somersault onto wide, clean mattresses, spilled bounces

And canned peaches

What more could this be than a crescent shaped belly?

Spooned in, lapped up, sweetened condensed milk with small drops of red food colouring

Sleeves for hiking up, ridges in my skin, each pocket a single acorn

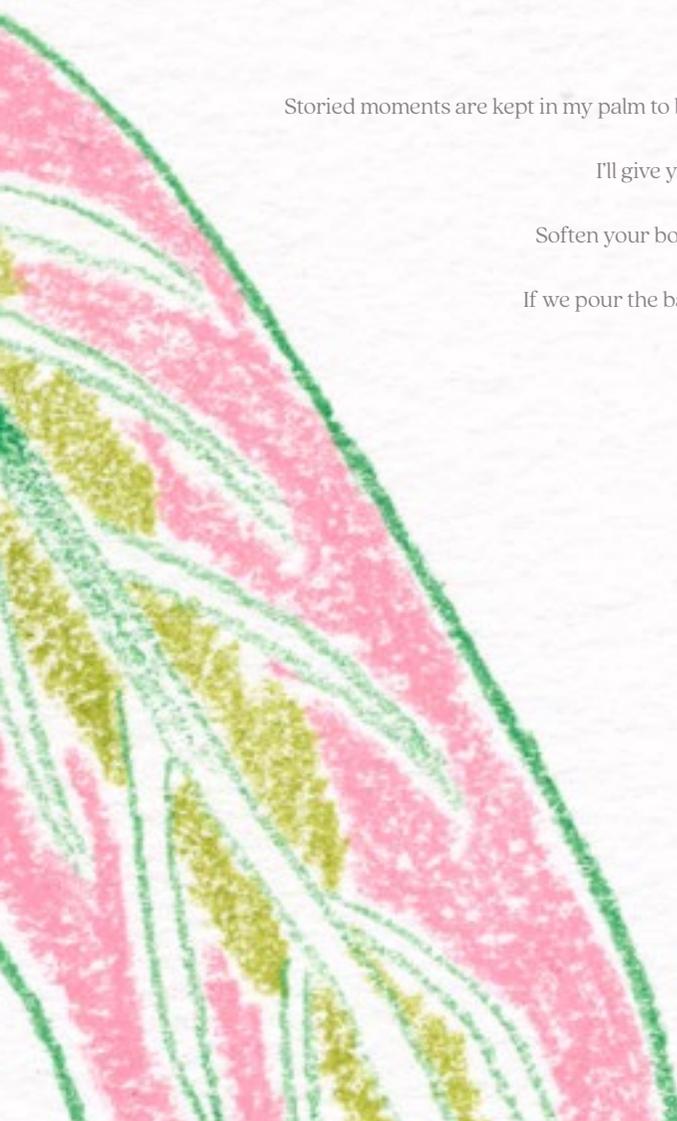
Storied moments are kept in my palm to be given out, divvied, if you are curious

I'll give you one or two to hold, but not for keeps

Soften your borders, bring up your raspberry loaf tin

If we pour the batter we might just peak over the edges

Poem by Grace Wirzba







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**Alberta Foundation for the Arts
Travelling Exhibition Program**
Interpretive Catalogue
& Education Guide

Curated by
Genevieve Farrell,
Esplanade Arts & Heritage Centre,
TREX Southeast

Grace Wirzba
Tweed Pocket Square
2022
Cotton and found fabric
photo credit
Angeline Simon



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left
Grace Wirzba
Gilded Jam Jar
2022
Cotton and found fabric
photo credit
Angeline Simon



middle
Grace Wirzba
Egg Salad Pathway
2021
Pencil crayon on bristol board



ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

THE ALBERTA FOUNDATION for the Arts and the Travelling Exhibition Program (Trex) acknowledge that the artistic activity we support takes place on the territories of Treaty 6, 7 and 8. We acknowledge the many First Nations, Métis and Inuit who have lived on and cared for these lands for generations, and we are grateful for the traditional Knowledge Keepers, Elders and those who have gone before us. We make this acknowledgment as an act of reconciliation and gratitude to those whose territory we reside on. We reaffirm our commitment to strengthening our relationships with Indigenous communities and growing our shared knowledge and understanding.

This publication was produced in conjunction with the Trex Southeast exhibition *Pretend Foraging in Sleeved Blankets*. The exhibition will tour throughout Alberta to non-traditional gallery spaces from September 2022 to February 2025.

For more information on the program and locations of each travelling exhibition, visit trexsoutheast.ca.

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ABOUT

THE ALBERTA FOUNDATION FOR THE ARTS

THE ALBERTA FOUNDATION for the Arts (AFA) has supported a provincial Travelling Exhibition program (TREX) since 1980. The mandate of the AFA TREX program is to provide every Albertan with the opportunity to enjoy visual art exhibitions in their community. Three regional galleries and one arts organization coordinate the program for the AFA:

TREX Northwest – Art Gallery of Grande Prairie, Grande Prairie

TREX Northeast and North Central – Art Gallery of Alberta, Edmonton

TREX Southwest – Alberta Society of Artists, Calgary

TREX Southeast – Esplanade Arts & Heritage Centre, Medicine Hat

Each year, more than 300,000 Albertans enjoy many exhibitions in communities ranging from High Level in the north to Milk River in the south and virtually everywhere in between. The TREX program also offers educational support materials to help educators integrate the visual arts into the school curriculum.

Exhibitions for the TREX program are curated from a variety of sources, including private and public collections. A major part of the program assists in making the AFA's extensive art collection available to Albertans. This growing art collection consists of over 9,000 artworks showcasing the creative talents of more than 2,000 artists. As the only provincial art collection in Alberta, the AFA collection reflects the development of the vibrant visual arts community in the province and has become an important cultural legacy for all Albertans.



ESPLANADE ARTS & HERITAGE CENTRE



THE ESPLANADE ARTS & Heritage Centre is where the stories of our great collective culture are told through music and dance, painting and sculpture, plays and concerts, exhibitions and installations, artifacts and art, education programs and private events. The Esplanade opened in celebration of Alberta's centennial in 2005 and ever since, Medicine Hat has welcomed a steady procession of artists and audiences, storytellers and story-lovers from around the region and around the globe. The celebration continues today.

Grace Wirzba
Holding Hands in the Portal (detail)
2021
Pencil crayon on bristol board

CURATORIAL STATEMENT

TALES FROM THE PATCHWORK PRAIRIES: A GLIMPSE INTO THE ARTISTIC PRACTISE OF GRACE WIRZBA

I FIRST MET Grace Wirzba for a studio visit in her Lethbridge home in 2021. She made me a cup of tea and led me outside, past a little garden, down a few steps and into a semi-basement which might have been cold storage at one point in time. Inside the shallow cement room, a welcoming loveseat positioned to the left wall, a desk scattered with drawing materials and laptop to the right and in front of me, a low-lying bookshelf brimming with folded fabrics. Finding myself couched between the blanketed wall, a stack of colorful pencil crayon drawings and Wirzba herself, time rolled by with ease as we fell into conversation, and it became clear I was in the company of someone well practiced in the art of contentment.

Wirzba grew up in rural Manitoba where her parents owned a quilting store. Growing up surrounded by fibres of every imaginable color, pattern and texture, her mother taught her how to sew and quilt from a young age. Wirzba carried this skill set into her artistic and research practise as an art student at the University of Lethbridge, where she graduated with a BFA in 2018. Today, Wirzba works on collaborative and solitary art projects in-between her day job with Lethbridge Family Services where she is employed as a Coordinator of Care for Newcomer Children. Her espousal for the charms of small

centre living and interest in the histories found in prairie communities carries through both her personal and professional life.

When we met, Wirzba had been spending time scouring the Galt Museum & Archives collection, digging up mundane objects of unexpected beauty: a vintage Galt Museum volunteer pin from 1985, a coral hair comb dating to the 1920's, a shallow 1950's soap dish made of stone and glass and dozens of patchwork quilts, often unattributed to any maker (see images 1, 2, 3, 4 & 5). With an interest in the domestic objects and landscapes that shape the stories we live and die by, Wirzba had been sharing images of these objects with friends and other members of the community as she endeavored in a game of myth making and folk tale creation.

Wirzba's solo exhibition *Pretend Foraging in Sleeved Blankets* represents the coming together of this research and co-creation which unfolded between 2021 and 2022 during which time social distancing, public closures and quarantines were on-again off-again as the COVID-19 pandemic kept daily routines unpredictable. Endeavoring in a long game of telestrations (where a player is given an image or word



img. 1

img. 1: *Hair comb*, 1923–1924, coral. Collection of the Galt Museum & Archives.



img. 2

img. 2: *Sir Alexander Galt Museum Pin*, 1985, brass and enamel. Collection of the Galt Museum & Archives.



img. 3

img. 3: *Dish*, 1940–1950, glass and stone. Collection of the Galt Museum & Archives.

prompt to begin sketching before passing their sketch to the next player, who must guess what has been drawn and in turn draw what they have interpreted — and so on and so forth) the artworks in this show, as is the case for so many good stories, have evolved far from their original points of reference. The resulting collection of myths in this exhibition include one audio composition and digital image created between Grace and her friend Andy Martin, fourteen pencil crayon drawings and eight miniature quilts.

Within each fun-sized quilt, each just large enough to cover a house mouse or protect a table's surface from the heat of five warm beverages, one can find fabrics sourced from old tablecloths, vintage clothing, pillowcases, curtains and more. Fragments of inconsequential histories — torn apart and hand stitched back together — recall aerial views of rural prairie landscapes. As the eye travels across bits of gingham, seersucker, crepe and floral patterned fabrics, one might recall the generations of prairie women who have gathered in quilting circles over the years to share resources and gossip



img. 4

img. 4: *Patchwork Quilt*, 1900–1910, cotton. Collection of the Galt Museum & Archives.

img. 5: *Patchwork Quilt*, 1946, wool and cotton. Collection of the Galt Museum & Archives.

img. 6: Grace Wirzba, *Paper and Secrets and Popcorn*, 2022, cotton and found fabric quilt



img. 5



img. 6

as they created these important objects of domestic comfort and legacy.

In Wirzba's drawing *Egg Salad Pathway* (image 7) a snaking flower stem grows threatening thistles amid what I imagine to be a fantastical kitchen setting — each item spread out for dissection and assembly. In *Silk Soap Dish* (image 8) the words TEETH – FRUITCAKE – JELLY – LASAGNA fill the page in spaghetti western fonts. The colours as mismatched as the quilts that accompany them. Words and text are an important aspect of Wirzba's world building and creative practise — the food, fantasy, comfort and old western architectures enforced by each work's epithet.

At the end of my studio visit with Wirzba, she gifted me a copy of *A Wizard of Earthsea*, a fantasy novel by the famed sci-fi writer Ursula K. Le Guin whose novels exploring gender alternate planets have become popular points of reference in contemporary re-thinking around gender identities. The nature of "truth" — who tells what stories and how they influence societal values and beliefs — bounce around playfully in *Pretend Foraging in Sleeved Blankets* — an optimistic concoction of works carrying a multiplicity of truths and deceptions.

Text by Genevieve Farrell, Esplanade Art & Heritage Centre, TREC Southeast



img. 7

img. 7: Grace Wirzba, *Egg Salad Pathway*, 2021, pencil crayon on bristol board



img. 8

img. 8: Grace Wirzba, *Silk Soap Dish*, 2022, pencil crayon on bristol board

GRACE



photo credit
Angeline Simon

ARTIST STATEMENT

BASED IN A multi-disciplinary material practice, my work explores translations — the sweetness and mythology that eeks out when an object, story, or memory is translated into something other. Personal and shared memory are important resources to my practice, and I seek to explore recollection and nostalgia as big feelings. My practice is deeply rooted in examining architecture, space, histories and our intuitive interactions with each other. Often, my work examines the subtleties of the home and the domestic and explores textiles as forms of both resistance and comfort.

BIO

GRACE WIRZBA IS an interdisciplinary artist originally from rural Manitoba, and currently based in Lethbridge, Alberta. Her material focus falls on soft sculpture, textiles and printmaking. She received her undergraduate degree with honours in Studio Arts from the University of Lethbridge in 2018. Wirzba has participated in residencies at Medalta's Shaw International Centre for Contemporary Ceramics and CASA Lethbridge. Wirzba has upcoming shows at the Southern Alberta Art Gallery and CASA Lethbridge in 2022. Her work regularly centers on themes of the home, gender and community histories.

gwirzba.wixsite.com

LIST OF WORKS

all drawings

Grace Wirzba

Pencil crayon on bristol board

Collection of the artist



*left to right
top to bottom*

*Cupboard with
Small Kinks
2022*

*Dough Soup
2022*

*Bend Close
2021*



left to right
top to bottom

Egg Salad Pathway
2021

Peter Pan Soup and Salad
2021

Put me in Your Container
2021



left to right
top to bottom

Ribena Shower Curtain
2022

Silk Soap Dish
2022

Rub Tight
2021

*not travelling with exhibition

Holding Hands in the Portal
2021

*not travelling with exhibition





top to bottom

Enviro Fleet
2021

Irma's First Stop
2021

Pup Fish in Bean Bags
2021

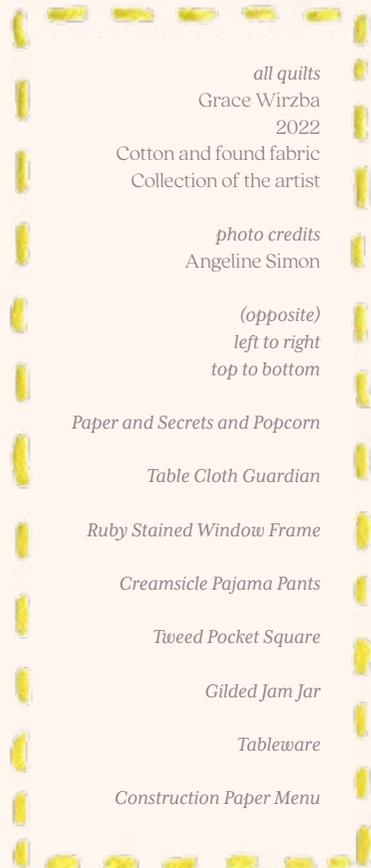




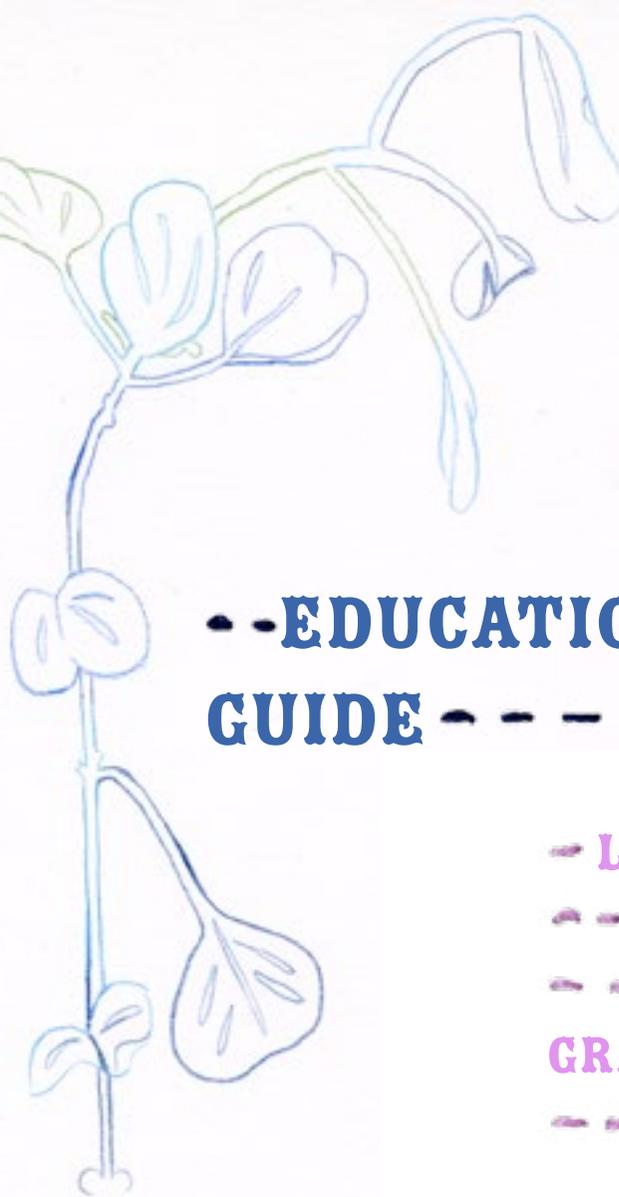
Hold Your Cheek
2021



image: Grace Wirzba & Andy Martin
accompanying audio: Andy Martin, *original audio composition for flute*, 2021–2022



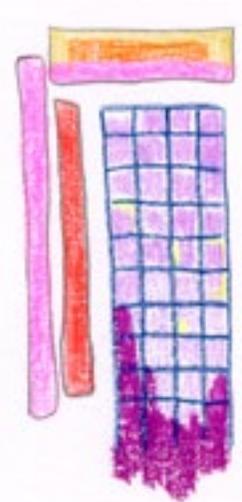




EDUCATION GUIDE



LESSON
PLANS
BY
GRACE
WIRZBA



Grace Wirzba
Peter Pan Soup and Salad (detail)
2021
Pencil crayon on bristol board

Telestrations



OVERVIEW

In the exhibition *Pretend Foraging in Sleeved Blankets*, artist Grace Wirzba played a big game of telestrations with people from her community. Wirzba wanted to create a way of storytelling that would become silly, free formed and maybe not so true! In this activity, participants will respond to historic artifacts to create stories and myths of their own.

OBJECTIVES

Participants will:

- Use word and image recognition and apply language skills.
- Work together with classmates and peers to tell a story.
- Practice analyzing and describing images.
- Use their imaginations to create new and fun stories.

MATERIALS

- Paper (any type, scrap paper is good)
- Pencil and eraser
- Markers, pencil crayons and crayons
- Drawing prompts (attached on pages 22–26)
- Printer (optional, can also project on screen for the class)

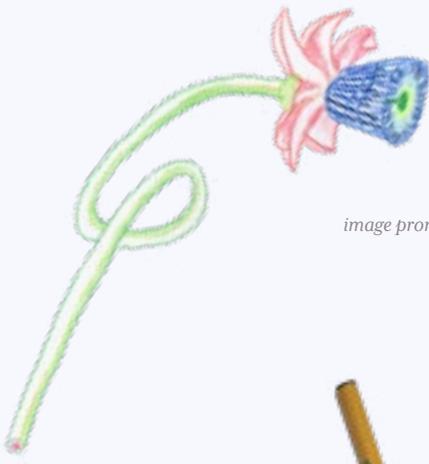
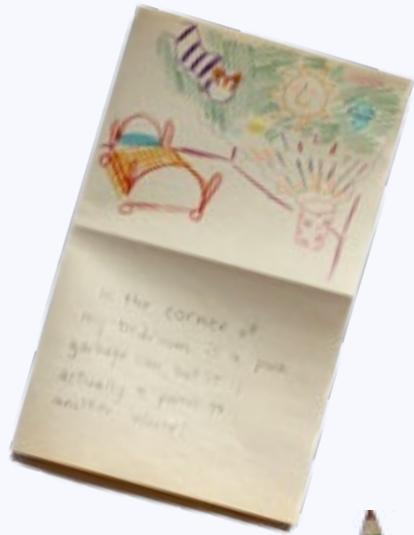
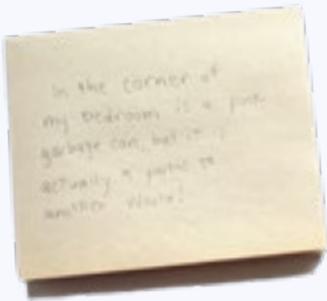


image prompt

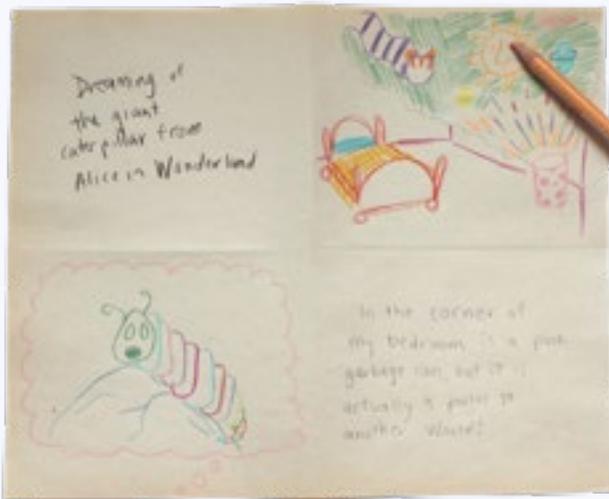


left

Step Three: responding to prompts with a few sentences

right

Step Four: exchanging responses and responding with a drawing



STEP ONE

Gather materials, print and cut out image prompts and hand out one prompt to each participant.

STEP TWO

Guide participants in a discussion about storytelling and myths. What is a myth? What is a story? What is history? Participants can share stories from their own memories, stories they've been told by family members or friends or even stories from movies or books they've read.

Reflection Activity:

- Ask two or three people if they can each write a quick recollection of a moment they shared together. This could be a memory of a field trip, something that happened at recess, or a lesson they all learned in class. This could also be done as a whole group if there is a shared event for everyone.
- Once they've written down their stories, ask them to read them out loud and identify the differences in each story.
- Are all of the stories the same? Do the details vary? Is each person's perspective the same? Some might be very similar, some might be totally different!

STEP THREE

Once the prompts have been handed out, ask participants to respond to the image with a few sentences, a short story or a drawing.

What does the image make them think of? How does it make them feel? Who do they think owned the object? What was it used for? How did it fit in to daily life? Is it magical? Does it belong to a child? An animal? A wizard?

To move the process along and keep it simple, you may want to put a time limit on each response. This could vary based on how deeply you want participants to think about this process. It could be a quick, one minute response to encourage spontaneity and silliness, or five to ten minutes for more thoughtful responses.

This will vary based on age and skill level. Keep it light and have each individual respond in a way that suits them!

STEP FOUR

Once the participants are finished with their responses have them place their papers face down and collect them. Mix up the papers and hand them out again. Ask people to respond in the opposite way to the last person (if they receive a drawing, they should write a story and vice versa). Repeat this process as many times as you'd like.

STEP FIVE

Share the responses! What was the original image and how did it end up? What kind of stories were created? Did it become silly? Did it resemble the original prompt?

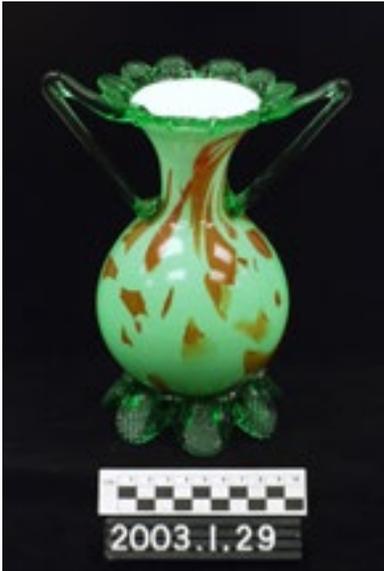
DRAWING PROMPTS
FOR TELESTRATIONS
LESSON PLAN

Educators, photocopy from pages 22–26 or print from pdf one set of drawing prompts for the group (alternatively, prompts could be displayed on screen).

You may also select additional prompts from the Esplanade's online collection database at archives.esplanade.ca/artifacts.

all images: Collection of the Esplanade Arts & Heritage Centre





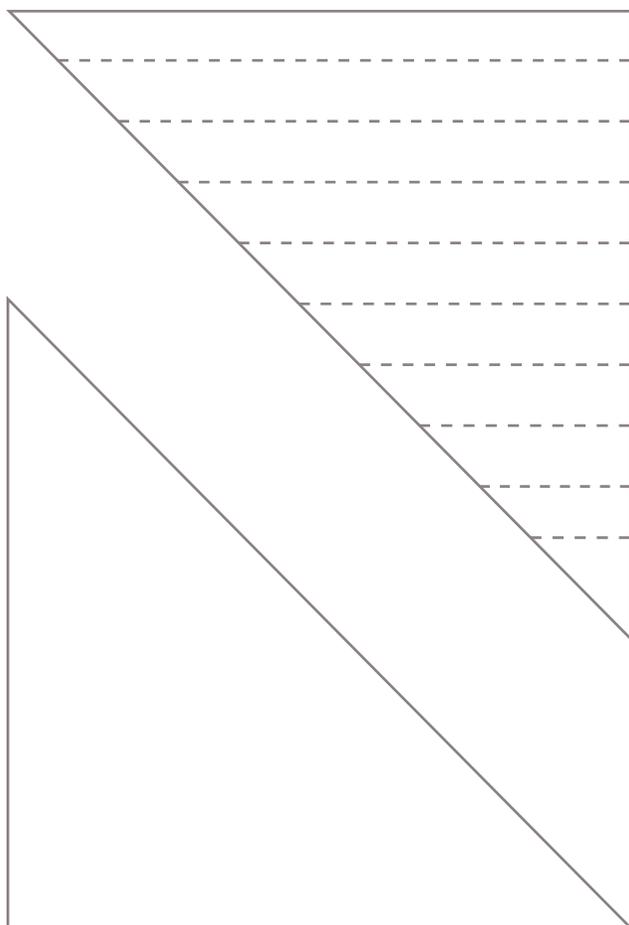






**TRIANGLE STENCILS FOR
PINWHEEL QUILT BLOCK
LESSON PLAN**

*Educators, photocopy from this page or print from pdf
enough stencils for each participant.*



Pinwheel Quilt Block



materials

OVERVIEW

Artist Grace Wirzba focused a large part of the exhibition *Pretend Foraging in Sleeved Blankets* on small, hand-pieced quilts inspired by the artists and quilters of Gee's Bend. The history of Gee's Bend, Alabama, begins with the slavery of African American peoples in the United States of America. Once a cotton plantation, many of the enslaved people moved away from this small town in the bend of the Alabama River, but many remained. During the Civil Rights Movement, the women of Gee's Bend gained recognition for their beautiful folk quilts. In this piece of history, we see quilting and craft as an avenue for women to gather and create safe spaces.¹

OBJECTIVES

Participants will:

- Learn about the history of Gee's Bend quilts in the United States.
- Use and develop fine motor skills to hand sew a basic quilt block.
- Cut, pin and iron using fine and gross motor skills.

MATERIALS

- Stencils (attached on page 27)
- Cotton fabric (old sheets, pillowcases, clothes)
- Quilting needles
- Scissors
- Thread
- Pins
- Iron
- Printer / photocopier

¹ <https://www.widewalls.ch/magazine/gees-bend-quilts>

STEP ONE

Print or photocopy stencils and hand out to participants.

STEP TWO

Have everyone select two fabrics, these could be solids, florals, patterns or a combination. The selected fabrics will make up the two varying triangles for the pinwheel quilt.

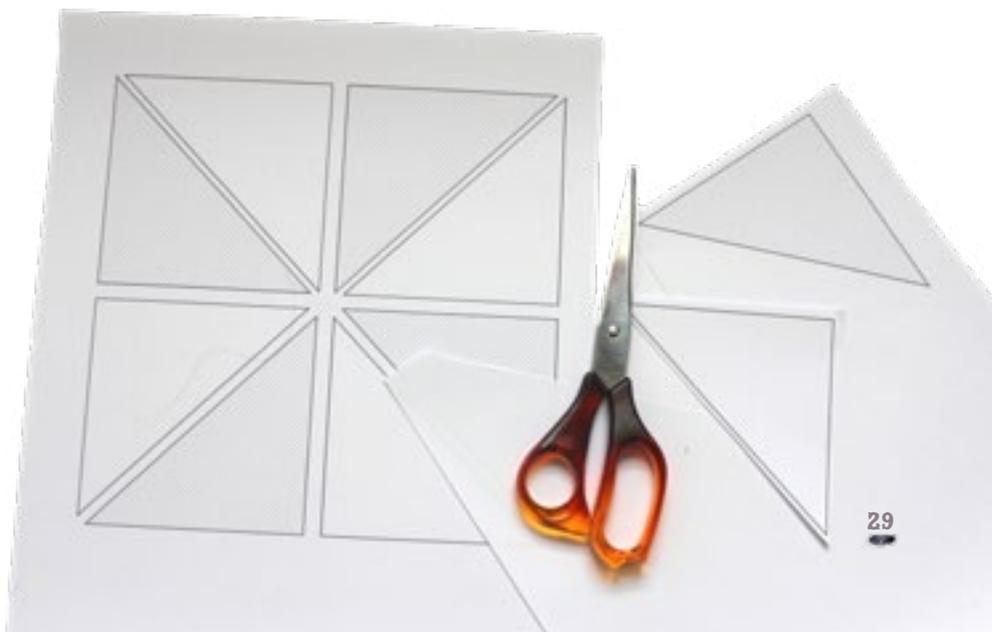
STEP THREE

Cut out the two stencils. Pin the dashed triangle to one fabric and the solid triangle to the other selected fabric.

STEP FOUR

Use the stencils to cut triangles out of the fabrics. Repeat this step four times with each fabric. Each person should have eight triangles in total, four of each fabric.

*Step Three:
cutting out triangle stencils*



STEP FIVE

Take two opposite fabric triangles and place "right sides together." Right sides together is a common quilting phrase that means place the fabrics one on top of the other, with the brighter, clearer side of the fabrics face to face. Once sewn these will be opened up and the vibrant side of the fabrics will face outwards again.



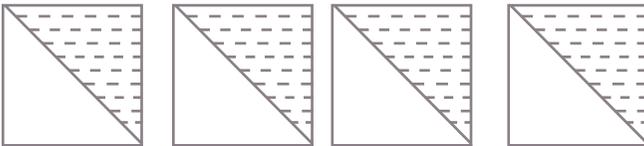
placing fabric triangles right sides together and sewing along red seam

STEP SIX

Sew a 'seam' about a pencil or pinkie width from the edge of the fabric using a simple over and under stitch with a thread and needle.

STEP SEVEN

Open up the seam and iron flat. **Repeat steps five and six four times.** Participants should now have four small blocks that look like the ones below.



*Step Three:
pinning stencils to fabric*



*placing fabric triangles in the
pattern of the pinwheel quilt block*



STEP EIGHT

Sew along the seam as shown by the red dashed lines in *Diagram 1*.
Then sew along the seam as shown by the red dashed line in *Diagram 2*.

Diagram 1

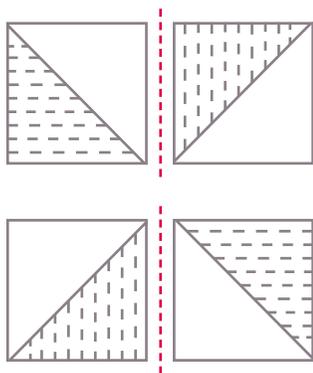
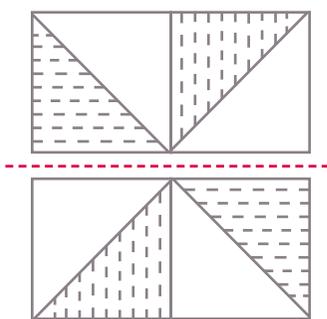


Diagram 2



You now have your finished pinwheel quilt block!

EXTENDED PROJECT OPTION

As a group project, you may decide to collect and sew together all of the participant's blocks to make a large quilt!

Grace Wirzba
Enviro Fleet
2021
Pencil crayon on bristol board

cover image
Grace Wirzba
Hold Your Cheek
2021
Pencil crayon on bristol board



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