



Lesson Plan: Middle School

VISIONQUILT

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History and Context:

The librarian at Ashland Middle School invited Vision Quilt to hang 80 Vision Quilt panels in the school library for five weeks. As a result of this exhibition, the health education teacher, invited Cathy DeForest, the founder of Vision Quilt, to talk to her four Leadership Classes about social activism and the Vision Quilt's grass roots efforts. The Leadership Class is a required class for all middle school students. The classes are designed so that students who have strong leadership skills are mixed with students who need to develop leadership skills or are at-risk students. Cathy and Vision Quilt Volunteer Cory Ross facilitated the discussions that are related in the lesson plans outlined below.

After the class sessions, the teacher asked the students to critique the Vision Quilt project. One of the most creative suggestions was that Vision Quilt should find an app developer to develop an app for the iPad and other similar devices. The app would allow users to touch the image of each of the Vision Quilt panels on their website and then the written story behind the panel would be revealed. The students were obviously fascinated by the stories behind the panels as well as the panels.

A rather remarkable outcome came as a result of these Leadership Classes and their astute teacher. During the class visits, Cathy circulated a photograph of the AIDS quilt on the Washington, D.C. Mall in 1987. Cathy stated that it is one of the project's dreams to take the Vision Quilt to D.C. When the teacher heard that, she explained that she was taking 23 students to D.C. in a month. She then asked those students and their parents if they would like to take 23 panels to D.C. on their trip. Permission was granted.

Cathy contacted both U.S. Senators from Oregon and the Congressman who represented the school's district. Congress was not in session, but staff members from Senator Merkley, Senator Wyden and Congressman Walden met the students on the Capitol steps. The students wore and held Vision Quilt panels and asked the staff what the legislators were doing to prevent gun violence. The students also delivered a blank Vision Quilt panel for each legislator. They asked the staff members to give it to their bosses so they and their families could make a panel for the Vision Quilt. For these students, social activism was no longer a theory, it was a real life experience.

Expected outcomes for students as they engage with the Vision Quilt Project:

Students will:

- Reflect on questions related to social activism and how the Vision Quilt addresses those questions
- View Vision Quilt panels made by a variety of people and reflect on the impact of gun violence on their personal lives and in their communities

Workshop Plan:

Setting the stage: 10 minutes

Pass out handout on social activism (see handout).

Ask students what kind of issues they are interested in: animal rights, the environment, poverty, etc. Tell them how the Vision Quilt began and how it fits aspects of social activism. Tell them that the first panels were made by gun owners and that the purpose of the Vision Quilt is to create dialogue among diverse views and to collectively share visions of how to prevent gun violence.

Engaging with the project: 20 minutes

Ask the students to go to the library to see the 80 Vision Quilt panels hanging from the ceiling. Invite the students to stand beneath a panel they like, dislike or one that speaks to them. Ask individual students to comment on the panel they have chosen.

Delving deeper: 8 minutes

Where appropriate, have Vision Quilt volunteers tell the story behind each panel a student selects. Make sure all students' opinions are appreciated and heard. Emphasize that the goal of the project is to hear diverse views and share visions about how gun violence can be prevented. If a student shares a story about a personal gun violence situation, make sure other students are respectful and the student is supported.

Ask group: What is the power of these panels?

Tell the students that a special Vision Quilt panel has been made with their school logo on it along with the Vision Quilt logo. Invite students to sign their names and leave messages on the panel if they so desire. Tell them that this panel will now become part of Vision Quilt and shown in exhibitions, rallies and vigils.

Reflection: 8 minutes

Ask students if they have any questions, comments or suggestions about the Vision Quilt. .

Give the students the present of Kim Stafford's poem, "Proclamation", which has become the anthem of our project. Tell them it was set with metal type and letterpress printed on an antique printing press. Ask each person (who wants to) to read one line aloud until the whole poem is read.

Thank the students for their participation and attention. Urge them to work on social causes that mean a lot to them.