



Installation view of *Coulter Fussell: The Raw Materials of Escape*

About this Teaching Resource:

This packet features artwork from the exhibition *Coulter Fussell: The Raw Materials of Escape* which was featured at the Halsey Contemporary Institute of Art at the College of Charleston from January 17 to February 29, 2020. It is intended as a tool to help you look at art with your children/students. You can prepare for your inquiry-based discussions by reviewing the background information provided. Then use the Questions for Viewing below and full-page reproductions to look closely, think critically, and respond to the art together. Extend your investigations with one or more of the suggested activity ideas. In general, questions for younger audiences are listed first followed by progressively more complex ideas. Feel free to adapt the suggested activities according to the age group you are working with.

Share your teaching stories with us! If you use these materials, let us know by email at halsey@cofc.edu

About the Artist:

Coulter Fussell is a textile artist and painter living and working in Water Valley, Mississippi, a small town in the Hill Country region of north Mississippi. Born and raised in Columbus, Georgia, Coulter got her BFA from The University of Mississippi in 2000 and naturally went on to be a diner waitress for the next seven years. In 2010 she opened Yalo Studio, a painting studio and gallery, and then later, YaloRUN Textiles, an experimental textile workshop and fabric store with friends Susan Cianciolo and Kiva Motnyk.

Learn more about Coulter Fussell [here](#).



About the Exhibition:

Quilter Coulter Fussell's early-developed artview perceives craft and other arts as indistinguishable from one another. Painting, sculpture, and textile work are one solitary entity in her mind. From youth, the combination developed into an unintentional mash-up, resulting in quilts and textile works that defy expectations of the medium. Fussell relies on the no-holds-barred nature of contemporary painting rules to free her compositions from the constraints of pattern. In turn, she simultaneously relies on the strict discipline of traditional craftwork to act as a self-editing tool.

Fussell learned to sew by watching her mother, Cathy Fussell, who is herself a renowned quiltmaker. She was determined to be an artist, which—in her young mind—meant that she should be a painter. All through her twenties, Fussell's focus was painting. However, in a series of firsts, this focus shifted when the birth of her first child prompted her to create her first quilt. She found the issues she had attempted to explore through painting were better addressed with fabric. For Fussell, fabric's limitations in palette and material offered an infinite amount of freedom in their strictures. Fussell's work, unlike traditional quilts, does not adhere to a predetermined pattern. Instead, her work retains the wholeness of a quilt while utilizing techniques one would expect to find in painting. For instance, foreground and background are established with the purposeful balance of light and dark materials. In this way, Fussell's work blurs the lines between art and craft, positing that both practices have an element of functionality and non-functionality.

Conventional quilts are anchored by their wholeness, most often achieved through geometric pattern. Fussell's work breaks with this traditional fabrication to instead produce quilts that are painterly in composition while retaining the conceptual wholeness of a quilt. Fussell follows no patterns and does not sketch before she begins composing her work. She paints in textiles, positioning small squares of silk and bolts of antique fabrics on the floor of her studio, moving and layering pieces until she is satisfied with their relationship. The result is an object that reverently heeds the quilting process that has been passed down from generation to generation in Fussell's family and in families across the globe. The result is also an object that confronts this tradition, challenging the viewer to find room for quilts that are paintings and paintings that are quilts.

You can see images of the exhibition in the galleries [here](#)!

Questions for Viewing:

We have included reproductions on the last pages of this PDF that can be used to complete the following exercises.

Are there any skills that you learned from your parents or grandparents?

Are there any that you would like to learn?

When you become an adult and possibly have children, what would you like to teach your kids?

Look at *Red and White*.

What colors and printed fabric do you see?

What materials are what you think of as “art materials” and which are not?

Why was this combination of fabrics chosen?

How do you think Coulter Fussell made this quilt?

Could you sleep comfortably under this quilt?

Why does she call this a ‘quilt’?

Look at *Washrag*.

What materials do you see?

What materials are what you think of as “art materials” and which are not?

Why do you think these materials were chosen?

How would the quilt be different if it had used different materials?

Could you sleep comfortably under this quilt?

Why does she call this a ‘quilt’?

Look at *Focal Point*.

How do you think the fabrics inform its use?

What materials are what you think of as “art materials” and which are not?

Think about the quilt’s texture—does it look soft or stiff?

What are the main figures or objects in this quilt? What are they doing? Where else have you seen this kind of imagery?

Could you sleep comfortably under this quilt?

Why does she call this a ‘quilt’?

Related Readings available at Charleston County Public Library:

The Quilt Walk by Sandra Dallas (also available as an e-book on the smartphone app Overdrive)

The Quilt by Ann Jonas

Tar Beach by Faith Ringgold

The Kindness Quilt by Nancy Elizabeth Wallace

Suggested Activities:

Describe It

Choose one quilt. Can you write a description of the quilt for someone who cannot see it?

Short Story

Choose one section from any of the quilts. Write a short story about the life of that section of quilt. What is it? Where did it come from? Who was this for? How did they use it?

Picture Writing

Working with a family member, each choose one of Coulter Fussell's quilts. List every detail you see (or do not see) in the work. Write a short description of the work so that another person could instantly recognize it.

Share your descriptions. What details do you remember from their descriptions? Write a story about their work.

Math Quilts

Introduction:

In this lesson, students will examine geometric quilt patterns. They will slide, flip and turn geometric shapes to create a map quilt.

Students will do the following:

- examine how geometric shapes turn, flip and slide to create patterns
- identify and use key mathematical terms when discussing quilt patterns
- design a quilt top using slides, flips and turns
- analyze the role quilts might have played in helping slaves escape to freedom
- examine the role of math in the creation of arts and crafts

Materials:

- six inch squares of multiple colored construction paper or fabric (each student will need at least 12 squares)
- one piece of large plain paper for each student
- glue

Procedures:

1. Give each student at least twelve 6-inch squares of multiple colored construction paper or different colored/designed fabric, glue, and a large piece of plain paper.
2. Tell students that they are to use the paper or fabrics to design a patchwork quilt top.
3. Ask students to cut the construction paper squares into shapes such as squares, triangles and rectangles. Explain to students that they will slide, flip and turn these pieces to create the pattern.

Reflection:

Write a brief summary of how geometry is used in the creation of quilts. List three ways that math is used in the creation of arts and crafts.

Glossary:

Textiles: A type of cloth or woven fabric.

Quilt: A bedcover with three layers (top, filler, and backing) held together with stitches or with yarn knots.

Function: An activity or purpose natural to or intended for a person or thing.

Composition: The placement or arrangement of visual elements or 'ingredients' in a work of art



Red and White and detail image, 2019. Hand pieced and hand stitched of various discarded textiles.



Washrag and detail image, 2019.
Hand pieced and hand stitched
of various discarded textiles.





Focal Point and detail image, 2019. Hand pieced and hand stitched of various discarded textiles.

