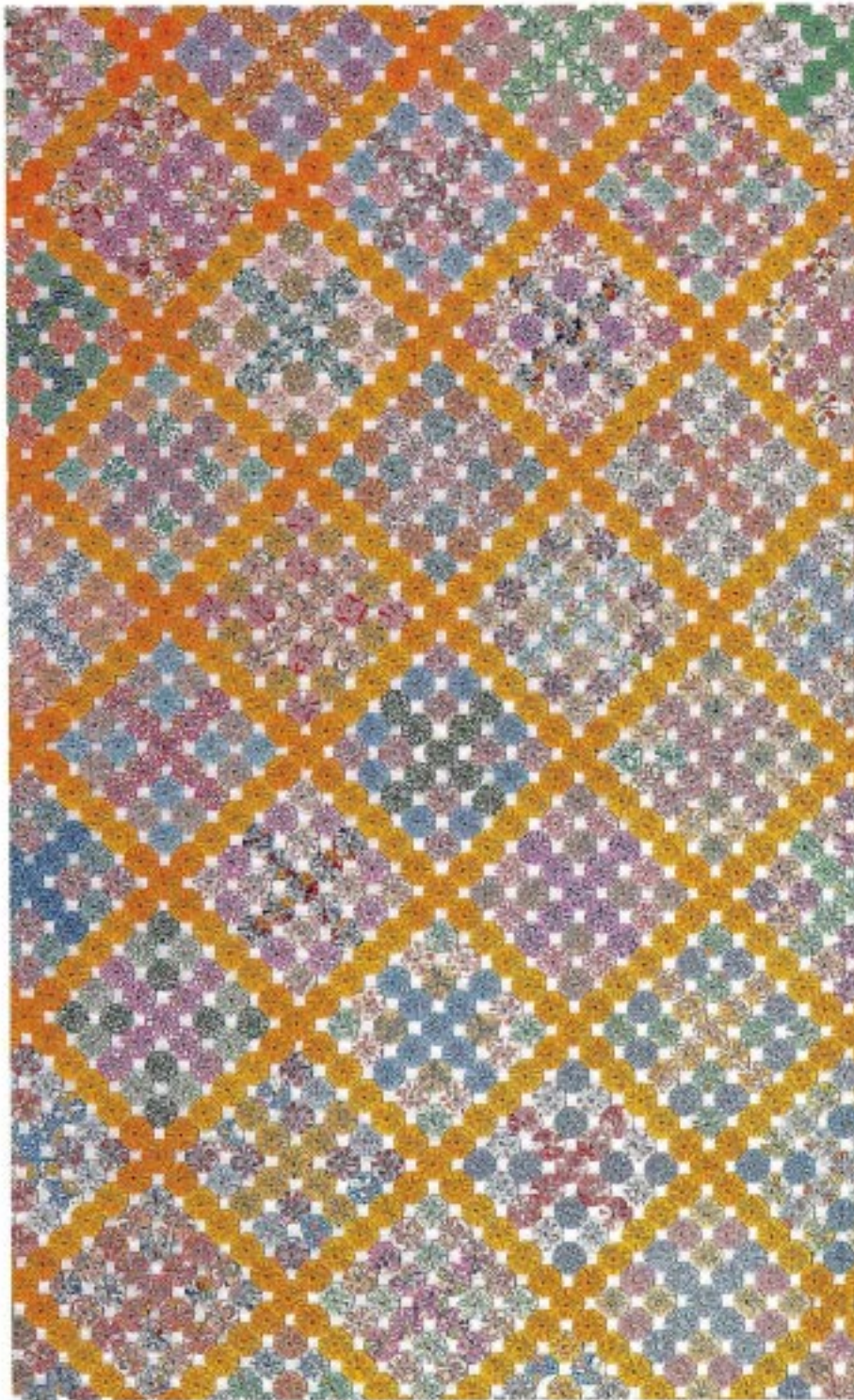


YO-YO QUILTS

Design Elements

The Yo-Yo quilt uses a palette of yellows and sunny, warm colors. The round shapes of the Yo-Yos contrast with the square blocks of this quilt. The maker, Ura Mills, selected a deep solid yellow for the Yo-Yos that form the bold diagonal lines that outline each block.



Visit the Alaska State Museum's website — www.museums.state.ak.us

Historical Context

The Yo-Yo quilt was a popular style of quilt making in America from the 1920-40s. Yo-Yos, or tiny circles of fabric, were gathered up at the edges and sewn together to create a three-dimensional effect. Yo-Yo quilts were popular because women could carry the little circles of fabric with them and make Yo-Yos whenever they had a free moment.

Another way to explain the popularity of the Yo-Yo quilt may be its association with the toy called the Yo-Yo, very popular in the 1930-40s. There are many theories or ideas about how long the Yo-Yo has been in existence. But we know that a wooden toy with a string looped around the center axis was developed in the Philippines over 100 years ago. Some people believe that the Yo-Yo comes from the Filipino word for "come-come" or "return". In the 1920s a man named Pedro Flores brought a Filipino Yo-Yo to the United States. A businessman named Donald Duncan bought the Filipino Yo-Yo Company around 1928. In 1932 Mr. Duncan received a trademark for the word Yo-Yo.

(For more information about the history of the Yo-Yo toy go to: www.spintastics.com/HistoryOfYoYo.asp)

Artists and Origin

The beautiful Yo-Yo quilt from the *Quilts of Alaska* exhibit was made by Ura Birdie (Conkle) Mills in Santa Ana, California, around 1934. The warm colors and circular shapes remind us of the sunny California landscape where Mrs. Mills lived. Quilt artists frequently choose colors and shapes that are meaningful to them. Yo-Yo quilts take determination and perfection because each individual circle must be exactly the same size in order for the quilt to be pieced together correctly. "Leslie Mills Hamilton, a granddaughter of the maker, received the large (88" x 100") Yo-Yo quilt after her marriage. Though far from its original setting in a California farm house, the quilt and the walnut bed for which it was made are still together in Kenai."

(Quilts of Alaska, p. 39)

FIGURE 14: Yo-Yo, c.1934, cotton, 88" x 100"

Compare/Contrast

Pattern and color are very important design elements in quilts. The Yo-Yo quilt (FIGURE 16) uses a circular pattern, a three-dimensional design and warm colors to create a magnificent and pleasing whole.

CIRCULAR PATTERNS

Compare the way circles are used to carry out the design in three different quilts:

Figure 15 – Double Wedding Ring

Figure 17 – Fan

Figure 18 – Rising Sun

FIGURE 16: *Chief Snake*, 1935, 73" x 91"



FIGURE 15: *Double Wedding Ring*, c.1979, 78" x 100"

COLOR

The Yo-Yo quilt gives the viewer a sunny and warm feeling. Compare the feelings you get from the four quilts on this page. Which do you like best? Why?

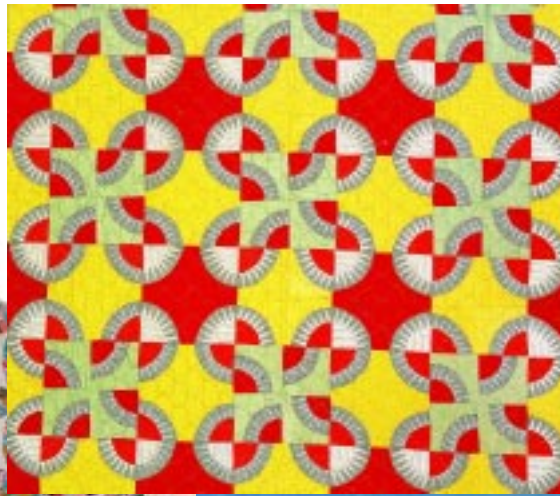


FIGURE 17: *Fan*, 1907-1925, 81" x 82"

THREE-DIMENSIONAL

The Yo-Yo technique actually creates a "puffy" or three-dimensional look. What other quilts in the show use color or pattern to create a three-dimensional look?



FIGURE 18: *Rising Sun*, 1934, 79" x 82"

WEARABLE YO-YOS: CREATING YO-YO QUILT PIECES

Can quilts be toys?

Level: Intermediate (grades 3-5)

Summary

Students learn how to make a simple Yo-Yo piece used in Yo-Yo quilts and create a variety of uses for the versatile pattern. [Option: create a class Yo-Yo quilt]

Estimated Time

30 minutes to learn. 5 minutes per Yo-Yo piece.

Part 1

- View samples of Yo-Yo quilts (See FIGURE 14)
- Discuss the Yo-Yo quilt design and how the maker used the simple Yo-Yo shape for an entire quilt top. How long would it take to make a quilt like this? What do you like about this quilt? How do the colors contribute to the feelings you have about this quilt? What qualities do you think the maker of the quilt needed (color judgment, time, perseverance, etc.)?
- Why do you think they called them Yo-Yos? (See website: www.spintastics.com/HistoryOfYoYo.asp)
Answer: Because it looked like the toy Yo-Yo. In 1916, the Scientific American Supplement published an article titled "Filipino Toys" which showed it and named it a Yo-Yo. This was explained by some as the Filipino word for "come-come" or "to return."

Part Two

- Using any cotton fabric, trace around a circular object, such as a cup, a small glass, or a cardboard template made with a compass. Cut your circle with a diameter twice your planned Yo-Yo size plus 1/4-inch seam allowance. Experiment with several sizes to see what you like, 3, 4 or 5-inch circles.
- Cut out the fabric circle with sharp scissors.
- Thread a needle with any color thread and make a large knot.
- Holding the wrong side of the fabric facing you, turn over approximately 1/4" seam allowance like a hem and baste (a large running stitch) all around the circle.
- Once you have sewn the full circle, gently pull on the end of the thread to gather the edges of the Yo-Yo circle.
- Gather the edges until the center is just a small circular opening.
- Use your fingers to flatten the circle and finger press the edges.
- Take 2-3 stitches at the center opening to hold the Yo-Yo center snugly in place.
- You have completed one Yo-Yo. Make many more!
Note: Teachers may wish to read aloud one of the excellent books about quilts.

Part Three

- Use Yo-Yos to decorate garments or join them together to form a fabric of Yo-Yos.
- Discuss again how long it might take to make enough Yo-Yos to complete a whole quilt. List the skills and talents needed to make it look balanced and symmetric.
- Put your Yo-Yo pieces together and create a variety of different patterns. Display or create a way to give away the pieces.

Assessments

Students should be able to articulate the time commitment it took people to make quilts. Students should be able to demonstrate an ability to make color and design choices when they arrange and re-arrange the Yo-Yo pieces.

Materials

- Scrap pieces of fabric (cotton or similar, easy-to-work fabric)
- Circle templates (compass, or glass)
- Cardboard, paper and pencil
- Scissors
- Thread, needles

Alaska Content Standards

In this activity students will focus on the following:

FINE ARTS

- A.3 Use new and traditional materials, tools, techniques, and processes
- A.4 Demonstrate the creativity and imagination necessary for innovative thinking and problem solving
- C.1 Know the criteria used to evaluate the
- & C.2 arts, examine historical works of art, interpret meaning and artists' intent

Vocabulary

Running stitch — A hand-needlework technique where the needle accumulates several stitches on it before needle and thread are drawn through the cloth. The running stitch is used in both piecing and quilting.

Yo-Yo — a novelty quilting technique in which circles of fabric are gathered into flat pouches and sewn together to make bedspreads or other items. The technique has roots in nineteenth-century handwork, but became very popular in the twentieth century.

Other Resources

- History of the Yo-Yo — www.spintastics.com/HistoryOfYoYo.asp
- Making an Eskimo Yo-Yo — library.thinkquest.org/11313/Crafts/Yo-Yo.html

We highly recommend *Quilts of Alaska: A Textile Album of the Last Frontier* for schools and teachers who plan to use the exhibit or materials from the exhibit in their classrooms. The catalog is extravagantly illustrated with full color pictures of selected quilts and historic photographs. Five chapters provide detailed information about quilting as it applies to Alaska. A full index, appendix, bibliography and endnotes make it a valuable resource for reference and teaching. Ordering information: The Store at the Alaska State Museum, 395 Whittier St., Juneau, Alaska 99801. \$21.95 +\$7 (postage /handling) per book.

Hall, June, Guest Curator. *Quilts of Alaska: A Textile Album of the Last Frontier*. Gastineau Channel Historical Society, 2001 ISBN: 0-9704815-0-0