



Katie Knight's activist art reveals a full heart and conscience. Ethical concerns stir her creative vision and cause her to carefully hone her artistic skills. She transforms socially relevant content into compositions which are ironically beautiful. Political protest events, personal stories, and global conflict zones spill over into her prints, her photographs, her sculptures, and her work on fabric.

What Hangs in the Balance Suspended Homes

Katie Knight asks what we can do to preserve and care for a world which is increasingly impacted by petroleum consumption. *What Hangs in the*

Balance? is her installation of small, temporary dwellings creatively constructed by "settlers" out of discarded materials. The fabric house and boat forms are counterbalanced by chunks of coal and gasoline cans.

This lesson involves basic hand-stitching, the blanket stitch, and structural engineering. You will need to know or be comfortable with threading a needle, the blanket stitch, and how to secure a stitch when finished. The lesson involves building a frame that will become a supporting component of our structure. For assistance, see additional references at the end of this lesson plan.

Materials:

x4 pieces of fabric in various colors and patterns, size must match or be larger than stencil

Embroidery thread, multiple colors

x5 Sticks of 6" or more length

Embroidery needle

Fabric scissors

Classroom prep:

A stencil to use when measuring fabric squares and during the assembly of branches to form the wooden support structure

The stencil can be any size. For the purposes of this lesson plan, our stencil has been cut to 4.5"x4".

Helpful Vocabulary:

Dwelling

A house, apartment, or other place of residence.

Foundation

The base on which something stands.

Temporary

Lasting for only a limited period of time; not permanent.. lasting for only a limited period of time; not permanent.

Mobile

Able to move or be moved freely or easily.

Also, a decorative structure that is suspended so as to turn freely in the air.

Pre-activity reflection:

What are different types of dwellings? What do you think makes a dwelling temporary? Reflecting on your own community experiences, have you been in spaces where there are predominantly dwellings with foundations or dwellings without? How does a dwelling impact day-to-day living? Why do some of Katie's dwellings have open sides? Do you think there is a reason Katie included photographs in her dwellings?

Lesson Plan:

We will be stitching together pieces of fabric in multiple colors and patterns to form “walls” and then tying together sticks or branches to form a “roof” structure that our fabric “walls” will drape over. A blanket stitch will be used to connect fabric pieces together. A basic hand stitch will be used to connect branches to fabric.

At the end of the lesson, students will have a non-foundational fabric dwelling that can be suspended in the manner of a hanging mobile.

To make the walls:

1. Start by cutting 4 pieces of fabric the size of your stencil. These fabric pieces will be stitched together into 1 long strip that will then hang over a “roof” structure and become fabric “walls”.
2. To make the long strip of fabric, begin by placing 2 pieces of fabric together with the long 4.5” sides touching. Use a blanket stitch to connect these sides.
3. Continue lining up the 4.5” sides of your fabric and using a blanket stitch to connect them. As you line up and connect your fabric, alternate the fabric so that different patterns and colors are touching.
4. After all 4 pieces of fabric are connected into one long strip, the next step is to assemble the roof structure.

To make the roof:

5. Place 4 sticks of various lengths along the edges of the stencil, making sure that the sticks overlap to form a square. The sticks must overlap with 1” or more of overhang. This overhang will make it easier to tie and secure the sticks together.
6. Using embroidery thread, tie a knot around 2 sticks at the spot where they overlap. Make sure to leave a long tail to your knot. Using the extra thread of the tail, start to wrap around the sticks, securing them in a “x” position. Continue this at all intersections of the sticks until you have created a square that matches the size of the stencil. This will become your “roof” structure.

Putting it all together:

7. Once the “roof” structure is tied together, we will stitch our fabric “walls” to the “roof”. To start, place the “walls” on top of the “roof”, lining up the middle blanket stitch with the middle of your stencil. There should be a blanket stitch on each side of this middle stitch; for the purposes of our lesson, we will call these stitches the “outside” stitches.
8. Connect the “roof” and “walls” by hand stitching the branches to the spot where your “outside” stitches are in the “walls”.
9. With your “roof” now secured to your “walls”, it is time to suspend the house. To suspend your house, take your 5th branch and place it under the middle stitch. Tie a piece of string on both sides of the branch so that when lifted, the string lifts up your house.

Optional: add further decoration and embellishment using the materials around you. Have extra thread? Like paint, use the thread to add embroidery or even simple stitches to your “walls”. Or drape and tie the thread to the overhangs of your “roof”. Extra pieces of fabric? Use thread or fabric glue to attach to your “walls”.

Post-activity reflection:

Are Katie's dwellings mobile? As you created your own dwelling, was there anything about the process that surprised you? What did you find easy? Was anything difficult?

Example of student work:



Further connections

<https://www.katieknight.net/1/scenes/Home.htm?win=Main>

<https://holtermuseum.org/exhibitions/speaking-volumes-fresh-and-familiar-faces/>

Additional references

How to Thread a Needle:

Hold the needle steady and carefully guide the thread through the eye of the needle (the hole near the top), pull enough thread through to work with. If preferred, pull until half of the thread length is through. Connect the 2 ends of the thread together and tie a knot to secure your thread.

How to Blanket Stitch:

Move your needle to the edge of the fabric, and bring it up through the fabric, creating a loop. Do not pull this loop closed yet. Instead, pass the needle under the loop and now pull it through, creating the first stitch. Continue to move along the edge, inserting the needle at the upper end of the previous stitch. Bring the needle up through the fabric, creating another loop. Pass the needle under the loop and pull it through, creating the next stitch. Continue the process until you reach the end of your stitch. Make a few tiny stitches over the last loop to secure.

<https://sewinginspo.com/hand-stitch/how-to-hand-sew-a-blanket-stitch/>