

# Artists on Tour

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Barb & Russ Childers (“Bear Foot”)

## *The Story Quilt*



### STUDY GUIDE

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# WHAT WILL CHILDREN LEARN

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The “Bear Paw” quilt block shown here echoes the name which Russ and Barb Childers created for themselves in 1983: *Bear Foot!*

Russ and Barb Childers’ *The Story Quilt* takes students on an interactive, musical journey of the imagination. Audiences discover family stories, proverbs and word play, folk beliefs and folkways—but especially the stories, songs, dances, and games from Appalachian traditions. In the past, the fabrics that made up a handmade quilt often came from bits and pieces of a family’s discarded clothing. If those scraps could talk, what memories would they reveal for today’s child?

The artists use fiddle and banjo – and a full size quilt – to find those threads that run true through our lives and connect our past to the present. From an actual 65” x 45” story quilt with 12 different quilt block designs, children choose from the blocks handmade by the artists’ families and receive a story (and a fun-filled history lesson) unique to that pattern.

- ◆ “See Saw” is a string trick learned from the artist’s mother and now passed on to a willing child.
- ◆ “Shoo Fly” might be a delicious pie, but students sing and dance it, too.
- ◆ “Bow Tie” demonstrates the optical illusions of squares and triangles.
- ◆ “Nine Patch” prompts the artists to demonstrate an easy “hands on” way to learn the nines multiplication table.
- ◆ “Jacob’s Ladder” was a slave song in 1860s and a protest song for textile workers in the 1940s.
- ◆ “Fish Block” uncovers a tall tale about local fishing practices.
- ◆ “Schoolhouse” jumps to life with a banjo song.
- ◆ “Moon Over the Mountain” stirs up a fiddle tune about a midnight fox chase.
- ◆ “Jack Knife” conjures up a Jack Tale – and a dancing limberjack!

## ARTISTS’ BIOS

Russ Childers has been making music since the Beatles came to town in the ‘60s. He started out with rock ‘n roll but gravitated to old-time mountain music when he discovered his love for the music of his Eastern Kentucky ancestors. Now he shares his knowledge of Appalachian traditions through music, stories, and dance. Russ is active in the Ohio and Kentucky Arts Councils, as well as several Cincinnati arts and Appalachian organizations. Barb Childers is a storyteller, dancer, musician, poet, singer, booklover, former children’s librarian – and, since retiring, a quilter! Russ and Barb are members of the Rabbit Hash String Band and also perform together as Bear Foot.

# HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

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Since quilting first appeared in Mongolia in 100 B.C., many cultural groups around the world have engaged in similar piecework—patching together small scraps of fabric to create an artistic whole. Russ’ grandmother in Eastern Kentucky and Barb’s mother and grandmother in Ohio created quilts that are still in use by their families. Barb remembers hearing family stories associated with each scrap of material making up the Ohio Star quilt of her childhood. That quilt now hangs on a wall of the Childers’ home in Batavia. At one time quilts were made for necessity, to provide warmth in the days when wood stoves and fireplaces inadequately heated small cabins. In those days, a cold winter’s night might be determined to be a “three quilt night” – or worse! – causing quilts to be stacked high on the beds. But quilts were more than just practical objects. They also reflected the maker’s eye for beauty as scraps of leftover fabrics were lovingly rescued, reused and recycled, combined in pleasing designs and patterns. Quilting was sometimes a solitary activity in isolated mountain dwellings, but the task became a welcome social activity when groups of quilters gathered to complete the quilts at community “quilting bees.” As the English playwright and poet John Heywood (1497-1580) said, “Many hands make light work!” It is not very hard at all to imagine how scraps of music and stories along with treasured family traditions were also passed along to the children underfoot at such events.

## STUDENT ACTIVITIES TO CONNECT WITH THE ARTISTS’ VISIT

These activities are based on patterns of quilt block squares.

### PINWHEEL



- ◆ Create a paper pinwheel based on the quilt pattern Pinwheel. Directions are available from Pinwheels for Peace <http://www.pinwheelsforpeace.com/pinwheeltemplate.html>.

### FISH BLOCK



- ◆ A “fish tale” is a tall tale, or a story with a nugget of truth buried in a lot of comic exaggeration. Research some tall tales, also known as “windies” and whoppers. For some good examples, see *Whopper, tall tales, and other lies* by Alvin Schwartz.
- ◆ Write a “fish tale” using some true events from your life.

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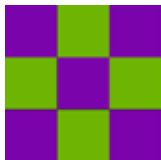
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## SHOO FLY



- ◆ Sing the “Shoo Fly” song in a call-and-answer style (e.g., 1<sup>st</sup> line – girls, 2<sup>nd</sup> line – boys, 3<sup>rd</sup> line – both). Visit Songs for Teaching web site to listen and learn the lyrics. <http://www.songsforteaching.com/folk/shooflydontbothermeml.php>
- ◆ Dance “Shoo Fly” as a folk dance. Arrange students in a circle. All face center with hands joined. For the chorus (“shoo fly don’t bother me”), all raise arms as they move forward 4 beats. All lower arms as they move backward 4 beats. Repeat. For the first half of the verse (“I feel, I feel, I feel, I feel like a morning star”), slide clockwise for 8 beats, facing center of circle with hands joined. Slide counterclockwise second half of the verse for 8 beats. Repeat from the beginning.
- ◆ Make an Amish Shoo Fly pie. Find a recipe from NPR’s Splendid Table. Don’t forget to shoo the flies away! <http://www.splendidtable.org/recipes/shoofly-pie>

## NINE PATCH



- ◆ Use construction paper to make nine 2” square patches. With another color, make nine more of the same size. Draw a 6” square block on a piece of paper. Staying inside the border of the larger block, use nine of the same color smaller patches to form letters. Fill in any empty spaces with the background color. Rearrange the patches to make C, H, I, J, L, O, T, and U. How many are vowels? Consonants? How many words can you spell with those letters? Design a quilt using one letter turned all four directions. Here is an example using the letter H: <http://quilting.about.com/od/quiltpatternsprojects/ss/H-Quilt-Pattern.htm>
- ◆ Nine Patch gets its name from the nine small patches (squares) of the design. Use graph paper to help you “see” this. If the quilt square measures 9” on each side, what is the measurement of each “patch?” What does each side of the smaller squares measure if the large square measures 12”? 15”? Design a whole quilt on graph paper using the Nine Patch design. Decide whether to make a twin, double, queen, or king size quilt. You will have to research those sizes and decide how many Nine Patch blocks will fit in each direction. You will also want to play with the colors you want to use in your collection of Nine Patches!

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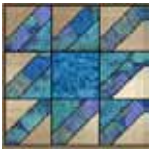
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## OHIO STAR



- ♦ How many points are in an Ohio star? Draw a 6-pointed star by using 2 triangles.
- ♦ Did you know that Betsy Ross recommended a 5-pointed star for our nation's flag over the 6-pointed star that George Washington preferred? Go to the U. S. History website for directions on folding and cutting a 5-pointed star: <http://www.ushistory.org/BETSY/flagstar.html>
- ♦ Some stars have even more points. What are the names of all 16 points of a Compass Rose? Here is a simplified version with only 8 points from Enchanted Learning: <http://www.enchantedlearning.com/geography/printouts/compassrose.shtml>

## NONESUCH



- ♦ Nonesuch, Kentucky, is on the Kentucky River between Harrodsburg and Lexington and is one of the creative names given to early Kentucky settlements, such as Hell-Fer-Sartin, Kingdom Come, Mousie, Marrowbone, Red Hot and Monkey's Eyebrow. Make up your own story about the origins of one of these unusual names – or the name of a town in your locale. See *Kentucky Place Names* by Robert Rennick.

## JACOB'S LADDER



- ♦ This quilt square design comforts us with a story from the Bible, which was frequently the only book in pioneer homes. It was not unusual that no one in the household could read the stories within, but the settlers knew them by heart. The story of Jacob's Ladder was a favorite and even retold in song form! Slaves sang the hymn in 19<sup>th</sup> century America; Pete Seeger rewrote the chorus and sang "Workers of the South" during a textile workers protest in the '40s. Find the lyrics on the Traditional & Folk Songs web site at [http://www.traditionalmusic.co.uk/song-midis/We\\_Are\\_Climbing\\_Jacobs\\_Ladder.htm](http://www.traditionalmusic.co.uk/song-midis/We_Are_Climbing_Jacobs_Ladder.htm). Sing along with the audio clip!

## KEEP YOUR OWN PATCHWORK MEMORY!

Collect a scrap of fabric from each family member (ask permission first!) to put together as a patchwork cover on a small journal. Make a pocket inside the book to hold old photographs of the family members (wearing the clothing from which the scrap of fabric came, if possible). Write a story based on what might be the result "if this fabric could talk."

# RESOURCE LIST

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Ask your librarian for books about quilting. Here are a few of our favorite children's books.

*Basket* by George Ella Lyon (1990). A story with a song based on a true event in the author's life.

*The Bone Talker* by Shelley A. Leedahl (2000). An old woman's neighbors are unable to find a pastime she enjoys until a small child gives her two pieces of cloth, a needle, and thread.

*The Elephant Quilt: Stitch by Stitch to California!* by Susan Lowell (2008). Lily Rose and Grandma stitch a quilt that tells the story of their family's journey from Missouri to California by covered wagon in 1859.

*Papa and the Pioneer Quilt* by Jean Van Leeuwen (2007). As her family travels by wagon train to Oregon, a young girl gathers scraps of cloth so that she can make a quilt.

*The Quilt-Block History of Pioneer Days* by Mary Cobb (1995). Projects kids can make.

*Stitchin' and Pullin': A Gee's Bend Quilt* by Pat McKissack (2008). As a young African American girl pieces her first quilt together, the history of her family, community, and the struggle for justice and freedom in Gee's Bend, Alabama, unfolds.

*Sweet Clara and the Freedom Quilt* by Deborah Hopkinson (1993). A young slave stitches a quilt with a map pattern which guides her to freedom in the North.

*That Summer* by Tony Johnston (2002). A family, including a child who is dying, sews together a quilt of its memories and love.

## WEB RESOURCES

The Internet is filled with websites about quilting! Here are three of our favorites:

- ◆ [Blockcrazy.com](http://Blockcrazy.com) – the online quilt block pattern library
- ◆ [Quiltindex.org](http://Quiltindex.org) – Images and historical information on hundreds of quilts from several major collections developed by the American Quilt Alliance.
- ◆ [Quilterscache.com](http://Quilterscache.com) – find quilt block designs and instructions while listening to music!