

ABOUT

the Author

CYNTHIA GRADY wrote these poems while planning and sewing her own patchwork quilt. She loves quilts of all kinds, from traditional patchworks to contemporary art quilts. *I Lay My Stitches Down* is her first published book. Cynthia is a school librarian living in Washington, DC. Visit her website at www.cynthiagrady.com.

ABOUT

the Illustrator

MICHELE WOOD is a painter, illustrator, designer, and writer. She received the American Book Award for her first book, *Going Back Home*, and the Coretta Scott King Award for her book *I See the Rhythm*. Michele lives in Georgia. Visit her website at www.michelewood.com.



PRaise FOR

I Lay My Stitches Down

“A powerful grouping of thought-provoking poems and brilliantly designed paintings.”

— *Kirkus Reviews* (starred review)

“. . . Discussion will arise from the varied aspects of slavery . . . that Grady covers in this well-researched collection.”

— *Publishers Weekly*

“Wood has created striking illustrations that add a masterful visual component to the volume. . . . This ambitious work offers a bit of poetry, history, folk art, quilting, religion and more.”

— *School Library Journal* (starred review)

“Altogether a stunning achievement for both author and artist.”

— *The Horn Book*

I LAY MY STITCHES DOWN

Written by Cynthia Grady
Illustrated by Michele Wood

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9" x 12" ❖ 34 pages ❖ Ages 10 & up

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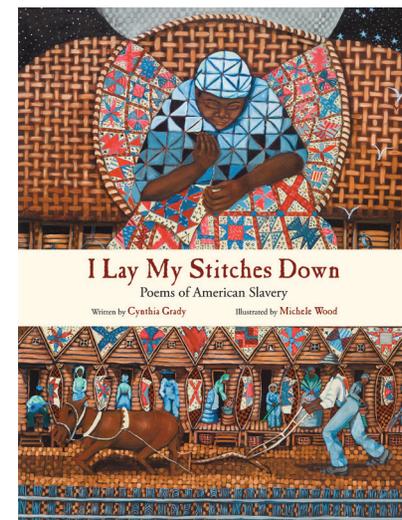
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I LAY MY STITCHES DOWN

Written by Cynthia Grady
Illustrated by Michele Wood



I lay my stitches down and troubles fall away. Before too long, I'm breathing with the rhythm of my quilting — listening wide with every fiber of my soul: the praise songs of my people; voices of my kin; drumbeats of my motherland form the threads that weave the fabric of my life.

THEMATIC CONNECTIONS

- ❖ American slavery
- ❖ African American history
- ❖ African American music history
- ❖ Poetry

Eerdmans Books for Young Readers
Discussion Guide

THINGS TO THINK ABOUT BEFORE READING THE BOOK

1. Select one illustration from the book. Study it closely for one minute. Describe it to another person, then look at it again for 30 more seconds. What did you see the second time that you missed the first time around?

2. Select another illustration. Observe and study it closely for several minutes. Describe what you see. Brainstorm a list of thoughtful questions about the subject of the illustration. After you've read the poem for that illustration, go back to your questions. Did the poem answer them? Can you use these questions to help with further research?



VOCABULARY

Find the following words in the text: dilapidated, divination, dignity, opportunistic, anvil, righteous, spiritual, embers. Can you figure out the meaning of each word from the context of the poems? Look them up in a dictionary if their meanings are not clear.



QUESTIONS TO REFLECT ON AFTER READING THE BOOK

1. The first poem, “Log Cabin,” describes some of the things archaeologists have found while excavating the areas where slaves lived.

If archeologists “excavated” your bedroom, what kinds of things would they find? How do your belongings represent who you are and what you believe?

2. Enslaved children often had chores to do even if they didn’t have to work all day long the way their parents did. Describe the chores you have to do each week. How do they differ from when you were younger? How do you feel before, during, and after completing your chores? Which is your favorite? Why do you like it?

3. Many people risked their safety and their lives to help slaves escape north and west to freedom. What or who do you imagine you would be willing to risk your life for?

4. Many of the poems include a reference to early African American religious songs. In what ways does music help our spiritual lives? What songs do you like to sing or listen to when you are sad or lonely?

5. Have you heard of Euclid, Homer, or Pythagoras before? If not, read about them in an encyclopedia or another trustworthy source.



ACTIVITIES

1. Metaphors help us deepen our understanding of new ideas. A metaphor connects one thing to another. A patchwork quilt serves as an extended metaphor for this entire collection of poems. Select one poem title and see if you can use it as a metaphor for something going on in your own

life. For example, “Kaleidoscope” might remind you of your first amusement park ride, where everything you saw seemed like small bits and pieces flying around.

2. Think about an event in history, or a topic in social studies (such as the Great Depression, immigration, or women’s right to vote). Brainstorm a list of “characters” who might have been involved with this issue and time. Write a poem (or a paragraph) in the voice of each character.

3. Throughout history, quilts have been made for warmth, for charity, or auctioned off to earn money to support various social causes. Call or visit a quilt guild in your area. Find out what kinds of quilts they’re making and for what charity organizations. Ask if there is something your school, church group, or family can contribute to their next project.

4. Many people make quilts to commemorate important events and times in their lives: births; graduations, weddings, etc. What would you like to commemorate in your life? Write a paragraph about it. Select a quilt block pattern (there are hundreds listed online!) to represent that event.

5. Design your own patchwork block on paper. Begin with a 6" block. Create an original design using straight or curved lines. Color it in. Give it a name. Make 15 copies of the block and put them together. See what larger designs can be created out of your original block by positioning it in different ways.