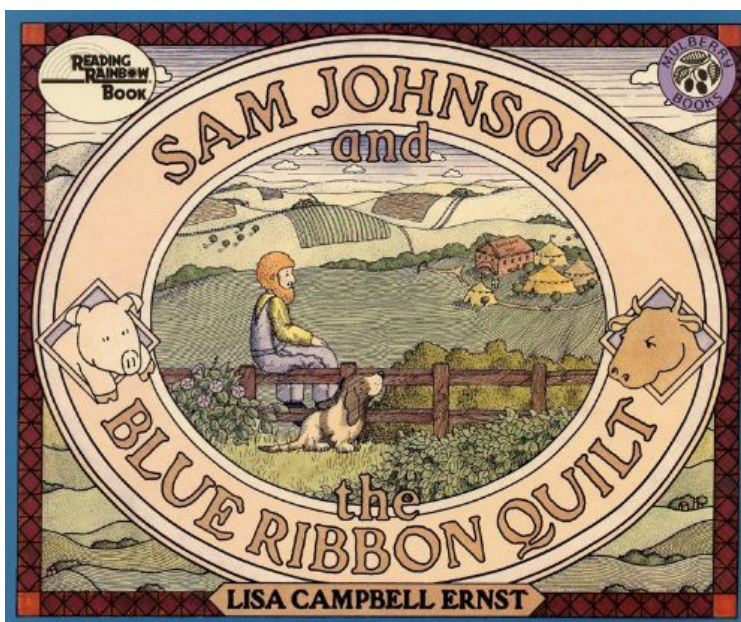


*Literature Guide for Lisa Campbell Ernst's*

**Sam Johnson and the Blue Ribbon Quilt**

*by Robin M. Huntley*



## Summary

As the title of the story says, Sam Johnson and the Blue Ribbon Quilt is about a man named Sam Johnson and a blue ribbon-winning quilt. Sam Johnson is a farmer, and lives the typical storybook rural agrarian lifestyle, complete with a wife who is skilled both in farming and in skills for self-sufficiency – namely, sewing. Sam Johnson's wife and her friends are members of a quilting group, and work together to create quilts that win ribbons at the county fair. Sam, intrigued by the art that is quilting, asks to join the group so that he, too, can exercise his creativity through quilting. Unfortunately, however, the women in the quilting group feel that a man's place is in the fields or in the barn, and they certainly don't think that Sam belongs with them.

After being turned down for membership in the women's quilting group, Sam decides to get together a group of men to quilt with. The women are skeptical that the men will be able to quilt well, what with their lack of experience, but lots of hard work leads the men to produce a fantastic and well-made quilt just in time for the county fair! However, while rushing to the fair, the rival quilting groups crash their wagons, splattering mud all over both of the quilts. Unable to enter their work, the men and women decide to cooperate and salvage the clean portions of their quilts, combine them, and are able to win a blue ribbon after all!

## Critical Thinking Questions

The questions below are intended to be considered during and after a reading of Sam Johnson and the Blue Ribbon Quilt. Readers can use the questions to help deepen their understanding of the story, promote the creation of connections between the story and real life experiences, and to encourage discussion about the story.

- Why do you think the women thought that Sam wouldn't be good at quilting? What life experiences might they have had that lead them to think this way?
- What would you have told Sam if you were a member of the women's quilting group when he

asked to join? Why?

- How do you think Sam felt when he wasn't included in the group? How do you think his feelings helped him decide what to do next?
- Could the men and women have worked together from the start? What do you think would have happened differently if they had?
- What do you think the women's quilting group learned after seeing Sam's success?
- What do you think the quilters learned through their cooperation?

### **Mini-Lesson**

Designed for use with 2<sup>nd</sup> grade students, the following mini-lesson focuses on identifying cause and effect relationships between events during a read-aloud of Sam Johnson and the Blue Ribbon Quilt. The lesson can be easily adapted for picture book readers of any age.

#### *What Happened and Why?*

1. Introduce the mini-lesson by discussing the meaning of the words “cause” and “effect” and the ways in which they are connected. Then, tell readers that during the read-aloud, it will be their job to identify important events in the story and that after they're done reading, they will be responsible for considering the causes and effects of these events.
2. Draw a timeline on the classroom board, labeling the left side “beginning” and the right side “end.” As you read, add major events from the story to this timeline. Give readers a signal that they can use to share when they've identified an important event – perhaps a thumbs up or a raised hand with one finger up.
3. Begin reading the book. After the first major event (perhaps Sam being denied entry into the women's quilting group), pause and tell readers that an important event just took

- place. Add the event to the timeline on the board.
4. Continue to read the story. Pause every page or so to allow students to share their ideas about what should be added to the timeline. Add every idea, whether or not it's truly a major event. When students re-visit the timeline after the story, they'll be able to identify the most important information.
  5. When the story is finished, ask students to consider the timeline with you. Review the story by following the events marked on the timeline. Allow students to give input in regards to adding or subtracting from the timeline.
  6. Once the timeline has been finalized, give a reminder about the words “cause” and “effect.” Then, choose an event on the timeline and identify its cause and its effect. Let students know that not every event has a clear cause *and* a clear effect.
  7. Ask students if they see the cause or effect of any other events. Encourage deep thinking by suggesting relationships between events on the timeline, allowing students to discuss their thinking with neighbors before sharing with the class, and by asking leading questions while students think.

### **Extension Activities**

The following activity suggestions provide opportunities for readers to expand their understanding of the information and ideas introduced in the story. Each activity allows readers to learn about a topic in math, history, language arts, or social studies within the context provided by the story – thus providing them with the chance to strengthen their understanding of each topic explored.

#### *Quilt Geometry*

Using reference materials (perhaps a dichotomous key) detailing proper identification of polygons, look over quilts and quilt patterns to see how many different shapes you can accurately

identify. For younger readers, this activity could be as simple as pointing out triangles, squares, and rectangles, and the ways in which the shapes are repeated throughout a given pattern. For older readers, the activity can go more in depth into specific identification of shapes based on side lengths, congruent sides and angles, and angle measures. It is best if real quilts are available for inspection, but books of quilt patterns or online resources for quilting can be used as an alternative. Readers can even consider the shapes found within the quilts in the book – the ones that are created by the characters, and the ones that outline the edges of each page, too!

### *Fractions of a Quilt*

This activity connects basic understanding of fractional parts of a whole with the art that is quilting. Using real quilts, quilt pattern books, or print-outs of quilt patterns from online resources, readers can find the fraction of a whole represented by each color of fabric and/or each shape represented in a pattern. This works best with patterns made up only of squares, rectangles, and/or triangles, as it is much more difficult to determine what fraction of a quilt is represented by irregular polygons or shapes with 5+ sides. Because most quilts are rectangular but made up of many square blocks put together, it is fairly simple to find out what fraction of the quilt is represented by one shape. For example, if a quilt is made up of 24 blocks, each block is  $\frac{1}{24}$  of the whole. If each block is made up of two triangles, each triangle represents  $\frac{1}{48}$  of the whole, as it is  $\frac{1}{2}$  of  $\frac{1}{24}$ . This activity, like Quilt Geometry, can be adapted for readers of all ages, and could even serve as an introduction to fractions for very young mathematicians.

### *Quilts as Stories*

Each quilt pattern is unique, and each pattern tells a different story. While the names of some quilts sound nothing like what the patterns look like, each name has a story behind it. Using quilt pattern books or online resources, choose a few interestingly named patterns and research the origins of

their design and naming. Often, the name of a quilt can be derived from the creator's personal experiences, and even more often, the funniest sounding quilts' names were given during past eras whose use of English was quite different from ours today. Researching the roots of a quilt pattern can help readers to understand the role of quilts in the history of rural America, and can also help readers to learn about the importance of folk art in American culture.

### *Quilts and Family History*

Using family quilts as inspiration (or another similar type of handmade item if you don't have quilts), write a story about your family. Each quilt tells a story about its maker and its owner, and there are many ways to tell these stories. Families may focus on the birth of a child using a baby quilt, the winning of a raffle using a quilt received as a prize, or reminisce about a lost loved one using a quilt made by someone who has passed. Family stories can be archived by writing them down as stories, poetry, or comics. Digging deep into the significance of beloved objects can help readers understand their family history.

### *Experiencing Local Culture*

Participating in agricultural fairs is a rural tradition that goes back generations. Exhibition halls at agricultural fairs fill annually with homegrown, homemade, and handmade goods of all kinds, showcasing the self sufficiency skills and resiliency of rural folks. A good portion of each exhibition hall is filled by quilts – just like in [Sam Johnson and the Blue Ribbon Quilt](#). Visit your local agricultural fair to see the exhibition hall, and see what's on display! Viewing ribbon-wining quilts and thinking about the level of difficulty of the pattern and the amount of skill needed in order to create each one can help put Sam's efforts into perspective and into context. Be sure to read the names next to each quilt and determine whether more quilts were made by women or men. Your findings may be consistent with Sam's experiences in the story!

## *Quilting At Home*

Combining a curiosity for quilting and skills in visual arts, readers can plan (and perhaps create) their very own quilts! Using graph paper or another type of grid, create a plan for a quilt pattern made up of squares, rectangles, and triangles – perhaps in a repeating pattern like many traditional quilt patterns. Quilt patterns can be created and colored on paper, or transferred into cloth and sewn (though this requires some pre-existing skills on the part of both young readers and their supporting adults). The creation of an original quilt pattern is a great way for readers to think about how quilts are created, and to use what they know about themselves to create a geometric piece of art that symbolizes something unique about them. If you create a real quilt (or even just a quilted potholder using your original pattern), think seriously about entering it at your local agricultural fair!