

## Tales To Tell

**Artist:** Steve F. Songer (1947-- ) Huntsville, Utah

**Title:** *Liberty Patchwork* 1997

**Media:** oil on canvas

**Size:** 36" x 48"

### BIOGRAPHICAL INFORMATION

Perhaps the best way to describe Steve Songer is well rounded-in both his art and his personal life. He is an artist, a teacher, an outdoors man, and a community leader. Artistically, he works in a variety of media and creates commercial as well as fine art.

Steve Songer was born in 1947. Like many artists, he doesn't remember ever not being interested in art. He received two Bachelor's degrees from Weber State University-one in Commercial Art in 1971 and one in Art Education in 1973. Later he attended Utah State University and earned a Master of Fine Arts in Painting. In 1989, he studied at the Royal Academy of Art in London. He currently lives in Huntsville, Utah.

Songer began his art career in commercial art as a designer for Marveon Sign Company. Since then he has illustrated the cover for the Will Roger's Cookbook, designed the Model Railroad Museum at Union Station in Ogden, Utah, and co-authored and illustrated the Santa Claus Book.

He has recently retired from a twenty-five year career teaching high school and will now devote himself full time to his art. As a teacher he received many awards including Utah State University's Art Teacher of the Year in 1985, competing with candidates from a four-state area. In 1988 he was Teacher of the Year for the Weber School District as well as first runner up for Utah Teacher of the Year. In 1991, Songer was chosen as US WEST's outstanding Teacher of the Year.

Although now retired, Songer's interest in education continues, and he hopes teachers will devise activities to help students learn how to think and to solve problems.

Songer also has received many awards for his artwork. These include 1st place in the Eccles statewide competition and the Award of Merit from the Utah Watercolor Society. He won the Director's Award in the 73rd Utah Spring Salon at the Springville Art

Museum in 1997. His paintings are in private collections throughout the United States and Europe, and he has been featured in 11 one-man shows.

To complete the picture of this well-rounded artist, Songer is also a community leader. He has been a scout leader for ten years, and is on the board of directors for the Ogden Union Station, the Huntsville Waterworks Corporation, and the Eccles Community Center in Ogden. In addition, he is chairman of the Huntsville Tree Committee. Other activities include chaperoning student tours through Europe, working on a commercial fishing boat in Alaska, and camping with his wife and children.

Steve Songer paints many landscapes, partly because he has such good access to stimulating scenes. His early works were Realistic and Representational, but now he is more interested in texture, brushstrokes, the paint surface, and the shapes. In their promotional material, the Gallery Etc in Ogden, which sells his work, describes how his "ability to paint with clean brushwork and color and his deft handling of light create an instant appeal as well as staying power." These qualities can be seen in his *Liberty Patchwork*, which is described by the artist as a scene he enjoys every day on his way to work—the morning sun stretching across the fields of Ogden Valley.

Songer is currently working on a series of boat paintings. He just completed a painting of the Grande Canal in Venice from a sketch he did 15 years ago. He continues to make sketches of various types of boats for this series. Songer's only goal for the future is just to continue to paint.

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## **SUGGESTED CLASSROOM ACTIVITIES**

### **QUESTIONS FOR LOOKING (History, Aesthetics, Criticism)**

What clues does the artist give you about what time period this painting represents? What time of year is it? What time of day? How do you think the artist feels about the scene? What can you use from the painting to justify your response?

How does the medium affect this work? How would it be different if done in watercolor? How does the use of light affect the painting? What is the first thing you see as you look at the painting? How does your eye travel through the painting? How has the artist used line in this work?

What mood does this painting create? How does the way the artist uses brush strokes contribute to the mood or feeling of the painting? Would you like to live in this scene? Why?

## ACTIVITIES

### Art

**Objectives:** Students will be able to demonstrate an understanding of the aesthetic value of works of art by comparing current Utah artists with historically important artists.

The recent special double issue of Life magazine (Fall 1997) entitled "The Millennium: 100 Events that Changed the World," places Cezanne's revolutionary painting style at number 87. The article explains that "(t)he surface of a painting would henceforth no longer be merely a window through which reality could be observed. Cezanne would make it a reality unto itself, one he saw as both classic and transcendent."

Discuss with students the importance of the various art styles that have emerged since the Impressionists. Using Songer's *Liberty Patchwork*, discuss what style it best represents and why. Compare the work with other artists who paint in a similar style, and discuss the similarities and differences and why this painting fits that style. Predict the aesthetic value of Songer's work in terms of its historical importance, communication of ideas and feelings, and monetary value. The discussion can be a class discussion, a small group project, or a written report.

### Art

**Objective:** Students will be able to demonstrate an understanding of the meanings and purposes for art by creating an art work using a personal experience as inspiration.

*Liberty Patchwork* by Steve Songer was inspired by a scene he passed every morning on his way to work. Have students select a setting familiar to them-something they see every day-and then create an artwork depicting this scene. Any medium the student feels comfortable with and which helps to create the feeling the student wishes to convey may be used. The student should select the artistic style that best fits what he or she is trying to portray about the scene.

This activity can be used to discuss SETTING either in conjunction with other artworks such as *Lizard Relay* or alone. See Brest van Kempen Activities for specific ideas and directions.

*Liberty Patchwork* also lends itself to use in a Social Studies lesson on contemporary or rural life in Utah and to a Language Arts lesson on SETTING. You may wish to combine the following Language Arts activity with others suggested in this packet. (See Brest van Kempen Activities )

Additionally, the art activity outlined above can be combined with the following Language Arts lesson.

## Language Arts

**Objective:** Students will demonstrate an understanding of descriptive narrative by writing a description of a familiar scene.

Discuss description as a narrative device with students. What is it? How is it used? How can it convey the writer's feelings about a specific place? Give examples the students can study and discuss. These examples can be excerpts from poems, prose, song lyrics, etc. They will be most effective if the examples explore a variety of types of description. For example, the hymn "The Wintry Day, Descending to Its Close" by Orson F. Whitney contains a beautiful description of a winter's day in Utah in the first six lines of the first verse. Farley Mowat's books A Whale for the Killing and Never Cry Wolf have many useful passages. Other authors whose works are likely to be useful are Ernest Hemingway, James Agee, Edgar Allen Poe, James Thurber, Amy Tan, Emily Dickinson, and Richard Wilbur. You will probably know of other good authors and passages from your classes age-based literature.

After you have read several samples to the students, have the class decide on criteria that can be used to evaluate description.

Students will then select a familiar scene (possibly the one used in the Art activity above) and describe this scene.

The format used could be a travel brochure, a journal entry, a post card sent to friends while on vacation in the area, a poem, or a description of the scene from the point of view of an historical figure. Have interested students share their descriptions.

If students have been critiquing their own writing, have them write a specific critique that in addition to applying whatever criteria you have had them using, includes evaluating whether they were able to describe a particular place effectively. For this part of the critique, the students should use the criteria decided on earlier in the discussion.

## Science

**Objectives:** Students will be able to demonstrate an understanding of the modern and historical importance of agriculture in Utah by reporting on the agriculture in a selected local area.

Students will select a local site such as the rural area depicted in Songer's *Liberty Patchwork* and research the role agriculture has played historically in the selected area, evaluate the role of agriculture today, and predict the future of agriculture in the selected area. The findings will be reported to the class. This activity can be done as a group project with each group given a different area or a specific crop to report on. The economic impact of agriculture, the impact of soil makeup and quality on agriculture, climate and availability of water, some of the current issues impacting farmers such as the use of pesticides, and varying opinions on the role of agriculture are some of the topics that can be covered in the report.

Interviews with local farmers and others involved in the agricultural field may be used to add to the report. Or, have a local farmer or a member of the high school FFA club come and talk to the class about contemporary or future challenges or changes in agriculture.

### **Science**

**Objective:** The students will increase their understanding of the interdependence of relationships in the ecology of a given area by discussing, researching, and reporting on one facet of the local ecosystem.

Show the class the slide of *Liberty Patchwork*. Discuss the amount of farmland in your area of the state and how it affects the ecosystem. Assign the students as individuals or as groups to research one area such as the relationship between plant life and air quality, what particular land formations or local bodies of water affect the local climate and how, what problems agriculture creates and possible solutions, how the growth in your area is affecting farmers, or any other particular relationship that agriculture or the land has to the overall local ecosystem.

When the research is complete, the students should present their findings to the class using visual aids such as photographs, charts, or artworks that help illustrate the information they wish to convey.

**Variation for Young Students:** In a class of young students, the teacher may need to make the presentation and delimit the topic to one major local ecological concern or change that is taking place.

Other artworks may be useful in presenting the activity or in the students' presentations to the class.