

Simple Strip Quilt for the Junior Quilter

By Felicia Brenoe and Jaelyn Brown

“Yes! Elementary-age children can learn to quilt!

This summer, my 8-year old step-daughter is in my studio working diligently on the Janome Horizon Memory Craft 15000. Although she has played on the sewing machine before, this is the first real quilt she has ever made.

Here are the general directions for making Jaelyn’s quilt along with some pointers for teaching younger children how to love quilting. This design is very flexible to allow the child to make decisions in the design and cutting and to vary the size of the quilt.

(If you are a beginner adult quilter or just want to make a really fast project, go for it! Not every quilt we make has to be complicated and technical!)” - Felicia Brenoe of Felicia’s World

Best Practices for Quilting with Children:

Michael Miller Cotton Couture Fabric

- The goal of the project is that your child develops a joyful understanding of the quilting process and make a functional quilt.
- Functionality is MUCH more important than perfectly matched points. Only point out and correct mistakes that affect the usability and durability of the quilt, perfection can come later.
- Let your child make as many choices as possible in the process: Fabrics, thread color for quilting, wool or cotton batting, strip width (within reason), etc.
- Small stature, lack of dexterity and shorter attention span means that you have to be willing to help junior quilters in all stages of the process depending on the needs of your particular child.
- Be wise about your child’s ability to stay safe around rotary cutter, scissors, sewing machines and pins. Teach them safety!
- Once you start a project with your child, try to finish it in a matter of days or a couple of weeks at most. Remember when you thought a week until Christmas was like an eternity? Bring closure to the project while it is still new and interesting to the child.
- Simplify whenever possible: Make bindings extra wide, use a 1/4” presser foot with a fabric guide and spray-baste rather than pin-baste.

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- Don't expect your child to be excited about your old calicos and batiks. Consider spending a few dollars on quality trendy fabrics that your child feels truly excited about. Cotton & Steel, Tula Pink, Art Gallery and Michael Miller fabrics are all very popular and have great colors and styles for fashionable young quilters. Go to the quilt store together with a budget and have fun!
- Children do not need quilts as big as adults do. Depending on the size of the child, try widths between 40" - 50" and lengths between 50" - 70". Smaller quilts are easier to handle on the machine, a bit faster to make and just as functional for a child.
- Set up your sewing machine station so it is comfortable for a child. One method is to raise the chair seat and put the foot-control onto a stool or under the table. Another option is to move the machine to a child-height table so they can sew and reach the pedal on the floor.

Directions for Jaelyn's Strip Quilt:

Size: 49" x 69"

Materials:

- 1/2 yard of each 4-6 coordinating fabrics for the quilt center
- 1 yard of fabric for the border
- 2/3 yard of fabric for the binding
- 3-4 yards of fabric for the backing (depending on the size of the quilt top)
- Twin size batting (Felicia recommends something that can be quilted at least 4" apart. Silk, wool and cotton batting all work well.)
- Basting spray
- Wide masking tape
- Coordinating thread for piecing
- Coordinating thread for quilting

Other tools:

- Clover binding clips
- Rotary cutting mat, ruler and cutter
- Scissors
- Sewing machine in good operating condition
- 1/4" quilting foot (O foot)
- Walking foot
- Water soluble marking pencil



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Piecing the Quilt Top:

1. For the quilt center, remove selvages and then cut 10-14 strips along the width of the fabric from your selected fabrics. For the model quilt, the narrowest strip is cut 3 1/2" and the widest strip was 13". Start with a handful of strips and let the child lay them out on the floor in the order they want them in their quilt. Cut more strips and then lay them out until the quilt center is the desired length. (Ours was 58" tall after piecing.)
2. Sew the strips together. Don't worry about the slightly different lengths of the fabric strips at this point. Use a 1/4" presser foot with a fabric guide for the best results (O Foot). Teach your child to check their seam allowances and to go slow so that they maintain control. Make sure they get into the habit of keeping their hands safely away from the needle when sewing. As their quilt center grows, the child will likely need more help keeping the fabric straight and feeding it into the machine.
3. Press the entire quilt center. If your child is new to irons, make sure they understand how to handle themselves safely. Make sure the seams are reasonably flat, but remember the rule about functionality vs. cosmetics and don't stress about less than perfect pressing.
4. Trim down the uneven sides of the quilt center so the quilt center is a nice rectangle.
5. From the border fabric, cut the strips for the border. In the model quilt, the strips were cut to 5 1/2", but you can make them narrower or wider depending on the size of the quilt you want. All of the borders were pieced to make them long enough. Felicia and Jaelyn used a total of six 5 1/2" strips. Attached the sides borders first, then the top and bottom.
6. Press the borders and square up the quilt if necessary.



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Basting:

1. Assemble the fabric for the quilt back so that your backing is 8" wider and longer than the quilt top.
2. Using masking tape, make sure to tape the quilt back to a non-carpet floor. The backing should be flat with no wrinkles, waves, curls etc. However, it shouldn't be stretched either. It can be really effective to work on opposite sides with your child. Have both of you tape down the center of the long sides, the center of top and bottom, the opposite corners, etc. Remember that you want the right side of the fabric towards the floor!
3. Spray the backing with your preferred brand of basting spray according to the directions on the bottle.
4. Starting in the center of the quilt backing, lay down the batting. Stroke from the center out in all directions to eliminate folds.
5. Spray the top of the batting with the basting spray and put the quilt top in place. Make sure it is roughly centered and smooth it out from the center as you did for the batting.
6. Cut down the extra batting and backing so you have 2-3" extra around the outside of the quilt. Cutting the excess fabric and batting off makes it less likely it will accidentally fold under and get sewn onto the back of the quilt.



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Quilting:

Note: "I have let my children use both the free-motion quilting foot and the walking foot to quilt their quilts and they are able to use both. However, it is easier to control the distance between the quilting when we use a walking foot to quilt straight lines. Loosely spaced straight lines also make for a nice and soft quilt." - Felicia

1. Use a walking foot to quilt straight lines across the quilt. On the model quilt, the lines are diagonal and Felicia and Jaelyn drew these up in advance using a long ruler and a water soluble pen. Horizontal lines may be the easiest direction since the lines between the fabric strips can act as a guide. A distance of 3-5" between lines may be appropriate for a child but make sure to look at the specifications of your batting.
2. Stay with your child when she is quilting. Help her move the quilt so that it is feeding straight into the sewing machine. It doesn't matter if your child migrates off marked lines here and there. Remember: Functionality before cosmetics.
3. After the quilting is done, trim off the excess batting and backing. Felicia highly recommends that an adult does this since a mistake in this process can be pretty devastating.



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Binding:

Note: "This is probably the trickiest part of the quilting process for a child. Slipping off the edge of the quilt can be a problem. I recommend making the double fold binding wider than a standard binding to allow for larger seam allowances. We attached both the front and back of the binding by machine and we used LOTS of clover binder clips to give the young quilter control." - Felicia

1. From your chosen binding fabric, cut enough strips along the width of the fabric to go all the way around your quilt. For the model quilt, Felicia and Jaelyn needed 7 strips of fabric. She recommends cutting the strips between 2 3/4" - 3" so that the child can have a slightly wider seam allowance in both steps of attaching the binding.
2. Sew the strips together and press into a double-fold binding.
3. Use clover binding clips to attach the binding along one side at a time. Mark on the binding where you want the child to stop for each corner. Take the quilt off the machine, fold the corner and attach the binding to the next side of the quilt with the clips. Continue all the way around the quilt.
4. Use your normal method for combining the two ends of the binding when you get all the way around the quilt. This part requires some accuracy, so Felicia suggests this last step as a see-and-learn experience for your child.
5. Fold the binding around the edges of the quilt and secure with binder clips. Have the child sew slowly in the ditch between the quilt top and the binding. Stop her/him periodically and make sure she/he is actually grabbing the binding on the back side. (hence the wider than normal binding).

Hurray! Your child just finished their first real quilt!

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