

Educator Resource Guide

NANCY BESS HAD A DRESS

Written by Claire Annette Noland

Illustrated by Angela C. Hawkins

After the family flour sack is emptied, Nancy Bess remakes it into a dress, only to find new uses for it as her needs change with the passing of the seasons.

Juvenile Fiction

32 Pages ~ 10 x 10 inches

Grades K to 3rd ~ Ages 5+

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Key Concepts: Recycling and repurposing, arts/crafts (quilting and sewing), inventing/creating, seasons, and U.S. history (1930's).

About the Author: Claire Annette Noland is an award-winning author of books for young children. As a children's librarian, reading specialist, and author, her life's goal is to excite kids about books and reading. Claire lives with her husband in a book-filled home in Central California. She finds inspiration from the children in her life, family stories, and her very large poodle-mix, Mr. Ernie. When not writing, you can find Claire stocking her Little Free Library, playing bocce ball on the beach, and taking field trips using kidlit as her travel guide. Learn more about Claire at <https://claireannettenoland.com>.

About the Illustrator: The Arts are embedded in Angela's DNA: Not only has she wielded pencils, crayons, and markers from when she was as small as her book characters, she's also studied violin, piano, voice, and ballet (her heart won't let go!). Much to her teenage sons' chagrin, she is often found – and heard! – singing, humming, whistling, and dancing to the music swirling through her neurons.

Angela has won a number of illustration awards, including the 2021 SW-Texas SCBWI Portfolio Award, the 2020 Summer SCBWI Bulletin Art Spot, the 2017 SCBWI Don Freeman Grant Winner, and the 2017 RMC-SCBWI Portfolio Showcase. She's illustrated for several clients, including Babybug, Ladybug, and Spider Magazines. Cute kids and charismatic animals are her specialty. Above all else, she aims to delight, educate, and inspire love while attempting to capture the wonder of our world and the beauty within each human soul. Learn more about Angela at <http://www.angelachawkins.com>.

Using this guide:

This educational resource guide can be used by anyone interested in sharing enthusiasm about *Nancy Bess Had a Dress* with children of all ages. If you are a teacher, librarian, home school instructor, camp counselor, or super cool parent, grandparent or guardian, this guide is for you! Feel free to adapt the suggested learning projects and activities according to your needs, interests, time, audience, and goals.

We have done our best to provide information, discussion points, and resources that may be useful for you and your learning participants. However, this is not an exhaustive list of ideas or topics. Also, website content and accessibility is subject to change. Please review all suggested resources and websites prior to sharing them in your learning environment to ensure they meet with your individual standards and contain age-appropriate content for your participants.

This guide is broken down into two general categories: 1) learning opportunities (with associated activities) related to the history of flour sacks and The United States in the 1930's, and 2) learning opportunities (with associated activities) related to repurposing/reusing and recycling common materials and sewing/quilting. These are broad categories with overlap between subjects, and each activity will vary in complexity depending on the age of the participants. Please modify as you see fit.

Suggested learning activities can be found for each category and are intended to align with appropriate Common Core, NGSS and/or National Core Arts Standards. To inquire about additional materials or if you have questions about this guide, please view our website at: www.gnomeroadpublishing.com.

PART 1: FLOUR SACKS AND THE UNITED STATES IN THE 1930's

Learning Opportunity #1: Let's talk about United States History in the 1930's!

- The author of *Nancy Bess Had a Dress* did a lot of research about the construction and use of flour sacks in the United States to write her book. Flour sacks became a popular material for making clothes such as dresses and aprons during a period of United States history known as the Great Depression. Have you ever heard of that time? What do you already know about it?
- The Great Depression occurred in the early 20th Century, primarily during the decade of the 1930's. This was a time of hardship for a lot of people. There weren't as many opportunities for people to support themselves or their families. People struggled financially, meaning they didn't always have enough money for things that they needed. They looked for ways to save or reuse what they had. Do you remember the phrase Mama used in the book as they used up the flour? (Hint: Look at the spread where they

make all the bread, biscuits and pancakes). What do you think Mama meant by “Waste not, want not”?

- Some of the hardships people faced in the 1930’s included having no access to electricity and running water. Even things like fresh fruit, sewing machines, school and household supplies might be considered luxuries. How is that different from what life is like today? How is it similar?

Suggested Activities ~

Show What You Know

- It’s time to sharpen your research skills and show what you know about the Great Depression and the 1930’s in the United States. Use the Question Sheet provided with this Resource Guide to help keep track of new information. You might want to work in groups and divide the questions up, or pick and choose the questions to answer and work alone. When you’re finished share what you’ve learned with others!

Nancy Bess Had a Dress . . . and Other Cool Things!

- The illustrator took great care to depict what life was like in the 1930’s in a rural (rather than inner-city) environment. There are plenty of images in the book where you can see differences between objects we have today and what they would have looked like then. Make a list of all the things you see in the book that are different than today! If you’re in a large group, divide into smaller groups and see who can find the most differences! (Bonus: What objects do we have today that are not found in the book at all?)

Learning Opportunity #2: Let’s talk about flour sacks!

- When times became tough in the 1930’s people became resourceful and learned to use what they had in multiple or new ways. One such item was the flour sack. Made of cotton, these sacks originally held food staples such as flour and sugar as well as feed for livestock. Did you see how much the sack of flour weighed that Nancy Bess and Mama got at the store? (Hint: It’s written on the front of the sack). These weren’t like the small paper sacks of flour and sugar we see today. They were large – for large families and to last for longer periods of time!
- When women started remaking the emptied white cotton flour sacks into towels, cleaning cloths and diapers, it wasn’t too long before textile (fabric) companies decided to make patterned sacks that women would want to repurpose into clothes. The companies knew that if they made a pretty sack, women were more likely to buy it. That meant they would have more customers for their brand of flour!
- Although the flour sacks were made into clothing out of necessity in the 1930’s, women continued to repurpose them after the start of World War II (at the end of the decade). Companies that made flour and feed sacks hired fabric designers to keep up with popular trends and sold patterns to assist women and girls in making other types of sewed materials such as curtains, stuffed animals and dolls. Fashionable dresses were shown in women’s magazines and even sold in stores. In today’s language, we might call this “going viral” or part of “branding”. Can you think of any household items, pieces of clothing or toys that have trended like this in your lifetime?

Suggested Activities ~

Become a Flour Sack Design Expert!

- Use your research skills to find out more about flour sack designs. In groups or on your own, use the internet or library to identify some of the original flour sack patterns. Your teacher, parent or facilitator may be able to help you find patterns on sites like Pinterest and Instagram. Using the Flour Sack Collage Sheet provided with this Resource Guide, print and paste some of the patterns into a new work of art! For extra fun, print in black and white and fill in the colors yourself (or do this if you can't print in color anyway).

Design Your Own Flour Sack Pattern!

- Now that you've learned more about flour sacks and the variety of patterns and colors they came in, it's time to showcase your own style and draw, paint or craft one of your own. Don't forget to give the pattern a special name! You can share with your class or other learning participants if you're in a group. And for extra fun, try piecing the patterns together to make . . . a paper quilt!

PART II: REPURPOSING/REUSING, RECYCLING AND SEWING/QUILTING

Learning Opportunity #1: *Let's talk about Repurposing/Reusing and Recycling*

- The phrase "Waste not, want not" sets up an important theme in the book. The author wanted readers to know that Nancy Bess and her family were resourceful people and that it was important to reuse or recycle what they had. Even an empty flour sack could be made to last in different ways for years! How many times did you count Nancy Bess repurposing the flour sack material? (Hint: Don't forget the last scrap!). Were you surprised by all the things Nancy Bess could create with the material?
- Repurposing/reusing and recycling are related words but have different meanings. When you repurpose or reuse something you use the same item in a different way or by different people. When you recycle something it is made into a totally different item. Technically, Nancy Bess repurposes her flour sack material because the material stays the same, although you could argue she is recycling the material since it is made into "new" creations. Perhaps she is both repurposing and recycling! Can you give examples of how people repurpose materials today? Can you give examples of how they recycle materials?
- Just like Nancy Bess, kids today can repurpose and recycle things we use all the time. What are some items you have in your home or at school that you can repurpose? How would you remake those items to use in a different way? What are some items you can recycle?

Suggested Activities ~

Try Your Hand at Repurposing!

- Now that you know more about repurposing and watched Nancy Bess do it in the book, it's time to plan out your own activity. But first, complete the Repurposing Steps Sheet included with this Resource Guide to identify the steps Nancy Bess took

to transform her flour sack material from the start of the book to the end of the book. Then use the sheet labeled My Repurposing Plan to show the steps you would take to repurpose an item of your choice. Don't forget to ask a teacher or guardian before you actually do it, though. You should always ask permission first!

Reuse by Giving!

- Reusing isn't only accomplished by repurposing what you have. An item can be reused when you give it to others. You might call this donating, but the end result is that someone else gets to reuse what you once used. Things like clothes, lamps, furniture and toys are often donated and then reused. If you are in a classroom or group setting, make a plan for each of you to collect an item from home that you are ready to donate. Then designate a teacher, caregiver or other adult that would like to donate these items to an organization that will give others the opportunity to reuse them. (If you are working individually, make a list of some items you are ready to donate and make the trip with your adult caregiver to an organization of your choice).

Learning Opportunity #2: Let's talk about sewing and quilting!

- At the start of the book, Mama is the one who does most of the sewing when Nancy Bess first makes the dress from the family flour sack. By the end of the book, Nancy has learned to do much of the sewing by herself. Like lots of hobbies and work skills, it took time, patience and practice. What kinds of activities do you like to do that you had to learn and practice first?
- The last thing Nancy Bess makes with the original flour sack material is part of the quilt she gives to her new sibling. Like flour sack dresses, quilts have a fascinating history of their own and quilting has become an art form practiced by people all over the world. The type of quilt Nancy Bess sews is called a scrap quilt – which makes sense, because it was made of pieces of scrap material. Do you know of any other types of quilts or quilt patterns? What do you think people have used quilts for throughout history? (Hint: Quilts don't just provide cover, they tell stories, too!)
- Some quilts are made of smaller pieces called 'Quilt Blocks', which are fabric squares that are assembled and joined together to make a larger quilt. This means a lot of planning goes into preparing the pattern in the quilt blocks and the overall pattern of the quilt. It's math and art combined! Can you think of other examples where math and art come together in such a useful way?
- There are also quilts called 'Story Quilts'. These are quilts that do more than present a pattern – they tell you something about the person or people who made it. (Note: Even specific quilt patterns can tell you something about the people who made them. Many quilt block patterns or quilt styles come from unique people, cultures, or regions of the world.) Just like writing a narrative paper, these quilts tell a story through the images or words shared on the finished quilt. Why do you think people told stories using quilts and still do today?

Suggested Activities ~

Sew, Sew, Sew Your Boat (or animal, pillow, or other soft object).

- Sewing can be a relaxing hobby while also providing you with cool crafts and clothes. But before you can make something of your own, you might need some instruction and practice. Ask your instructor, guardian or responsible adult to help you gather the materials you need to get started. Here are some online tutorials made for kids like you (or for teachers or guardians to use in showing you how to sew):
- [Learning To Sew For Beginners](#)
- [Tips For Teaching Kids To Sew: Ages 2-11](#)
- <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CTKqYcBS7AY>

It might be easier to start with a kit purchased online or at a store. Ask your responsible adult to help you choose one and get started that way. Here are a few examples of what a sewing kit looks like:

- [12 Best Sewing Kits For Kids](#)
- [Sewing Kits Subscription Boxes For Kids](#)
- [Many Sewing Kits For Kids](#)

Make Your Own Quilt Block (and More)!

- A Quilt Block Sheet is provided with this Resource Guide for you to design your own (or color a favorite) quilt pattern or narrative picture. But before you get started, take a look at some fabulous quilt patterns for inspiration (and maybe even learn something about what they mean to others).

Here are a few websites:

- [National Quilting Museum](#)
- <https://sewguide.com/quilt-block-names/>
- <https://scissortailquilting.com/quilt-block-library-images/>
- If you have time and are in a group or classroom setting, assemble your quilt blocks into a larger piece to create a group quilt!

For additional information and fun resources on these topics:

Websites About Flour Sacks:

- [Flour Sack Dresses](#)
- <https://helensclosetpatterns.com/2019/10/28/fashion-history-feed-sack-fashion/>

Websites About United States History in the 1930's:

- [The Great Depression](#)
- [Breaking News of the 1930s](#)

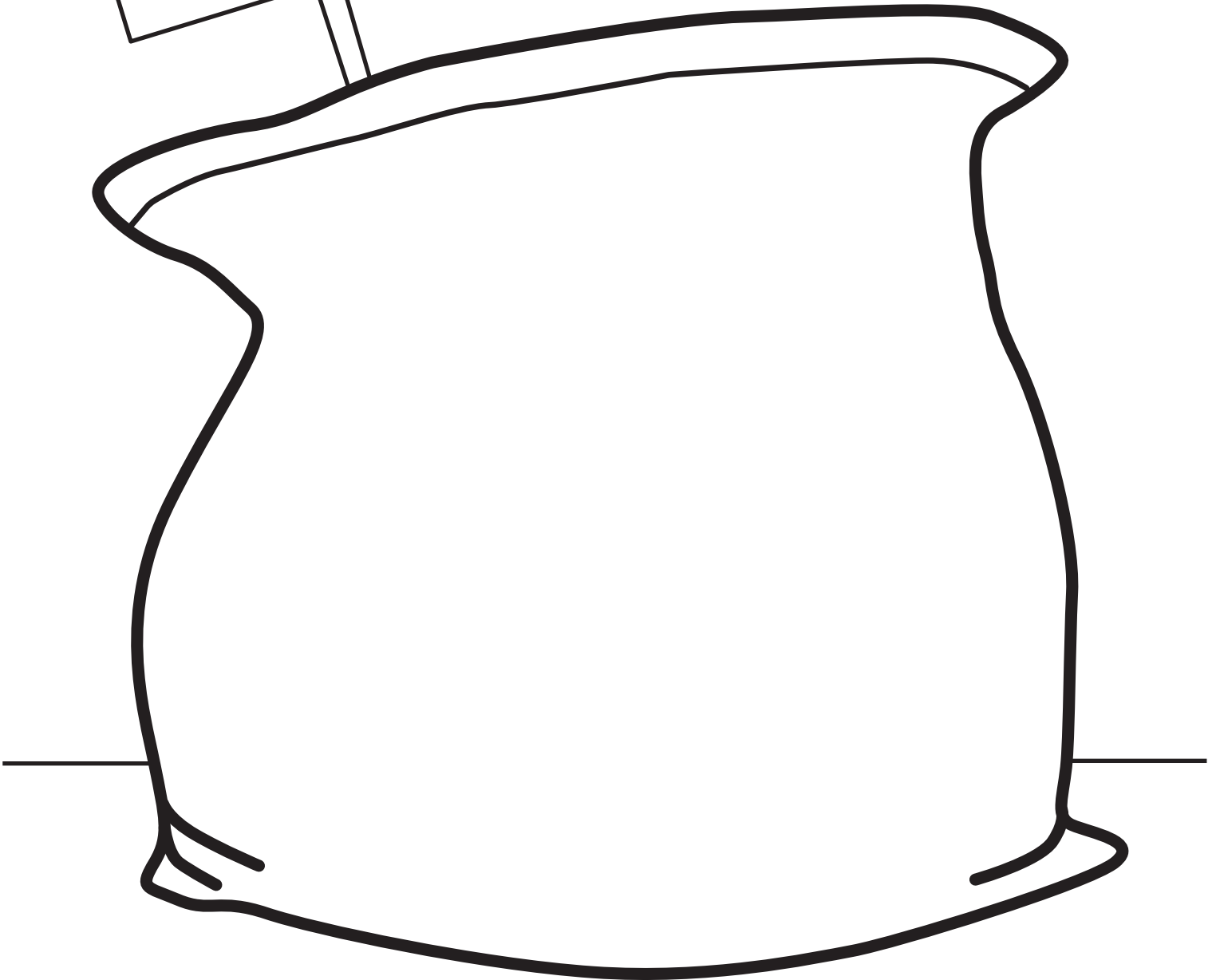
Websites About Repurposing and Recycling:

- Recycle City: Activities and Knowledge
- The 10 Best Recycle, Reduce, Reuse Websites For Kids

My Flour Sack Design

50 lb flour bag
25 ¢ OFF!

My Flour Sack Design Name:



Show What You Know



When did the Great Depression begin and why? When did it end?

Who was the president during most of the 1930's? How long was he in office?

What was it like in the cities during this time? What was it like in rural areas?

What major events happened or organizations formed in the 1930's?

(Hints: What is the Dust Bowl? When was the attack on Pearl Harbor? What was the New Deal? What was the Civilian Conservation Corps? Find other examples.)

What were some of the movies that came out in the 1930's? Do you recognize any of them still today?

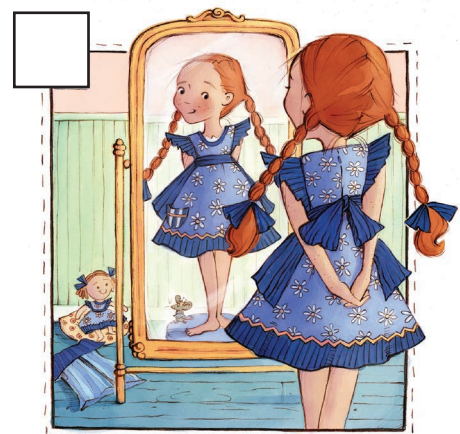
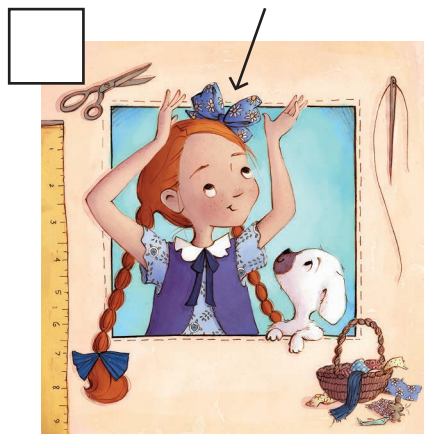
Can you find photographs in the library or through online research that show important people or places in the United States during this time?

What is one fact or person that interested you most about this time in history?



Repurposing Steps

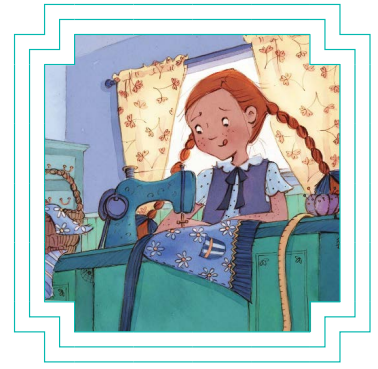
Number the steps Nancy Bess took to transform her flour sack material from the start of the book to the end of the book.



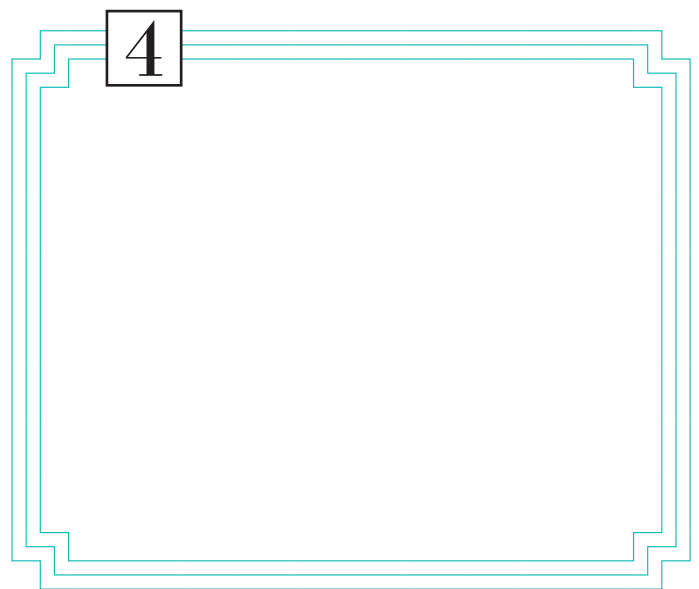
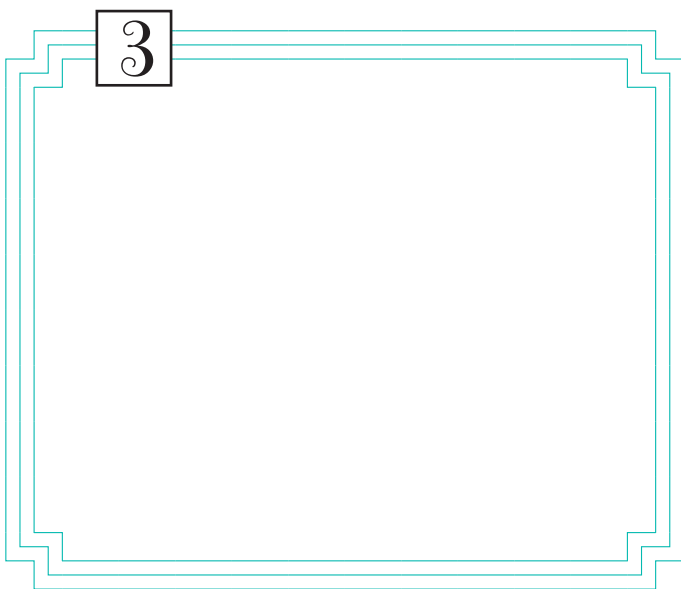
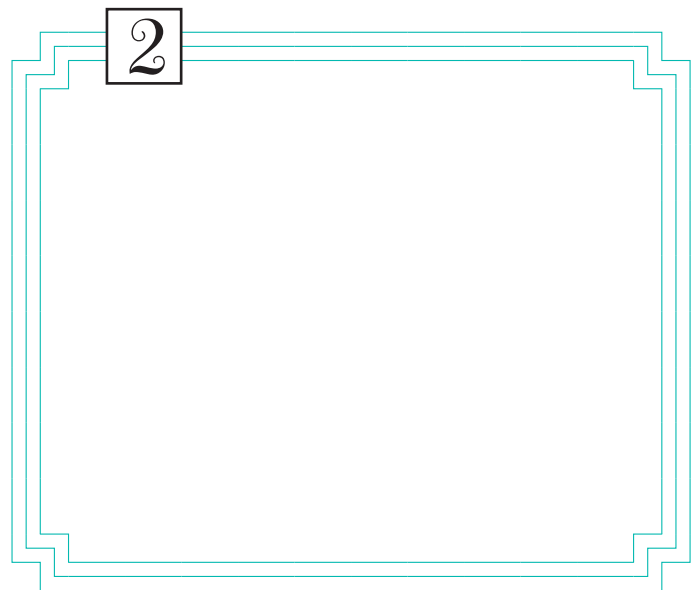
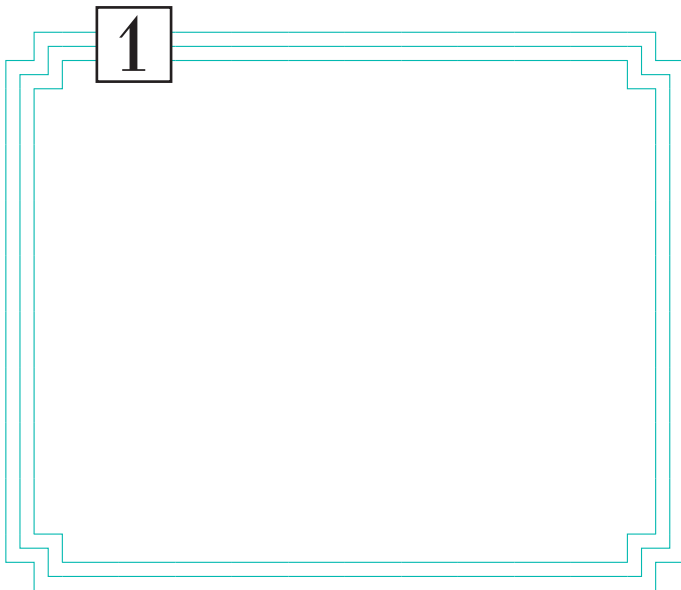


My Repurposing Project

Use the boxes below to draw each step you will take to repurpose something.



The thing I will repurpose is: _____



The repurposed thing is: _____



Creating Patterns

Patterns are designs that repeat over and over. Use this grid to create or collage a pattern of your own.



My Quilt Block Sheet

Block Sheets are used to help a quilter to remember which fabric goes where. Use this grid to design one block for a quilt. Use the fabric key to show which fabric you will use and where by labeling the block with the numbers.

FABRIC
SWATCH
KEY



1

2

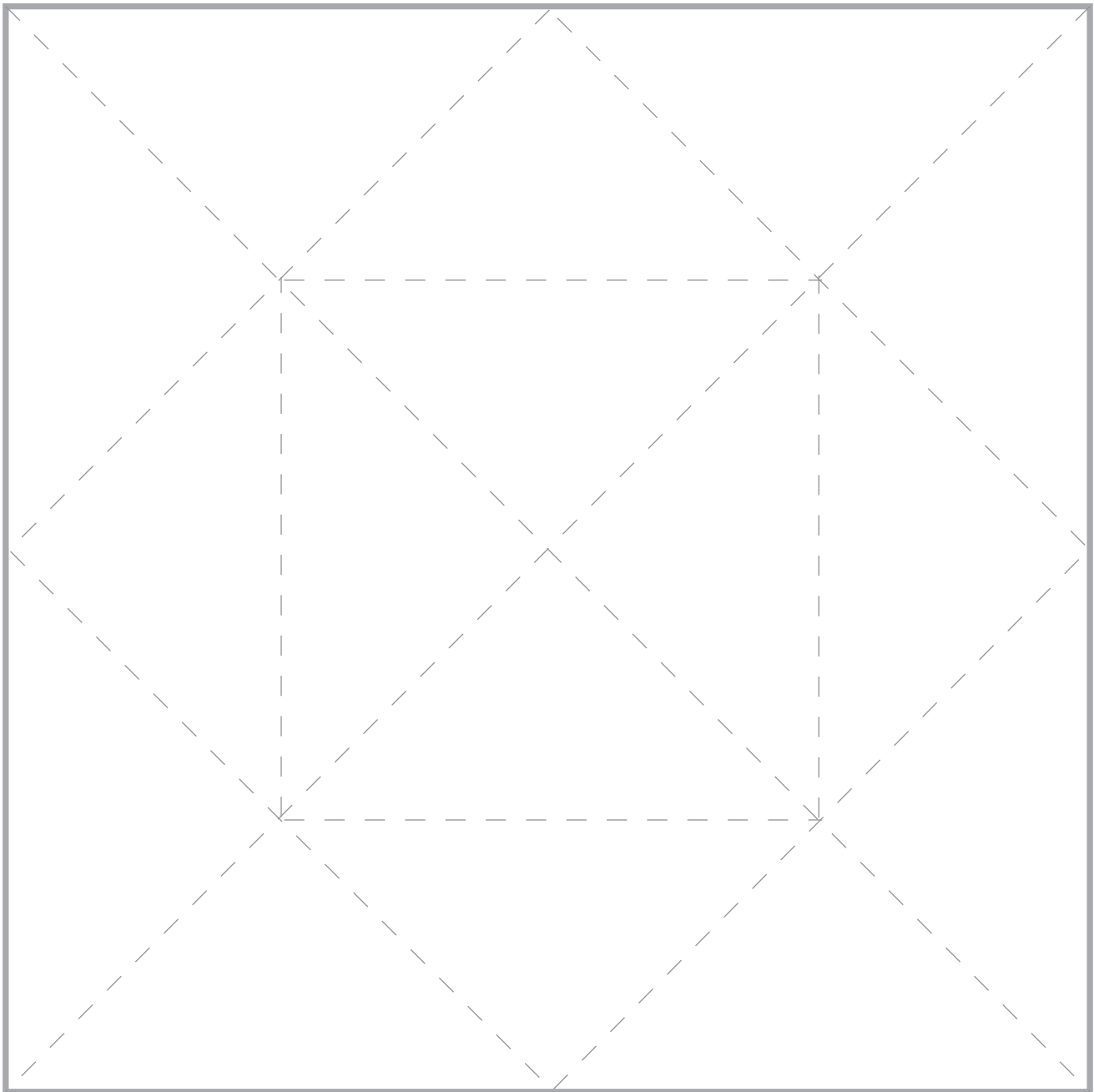
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4

5

6

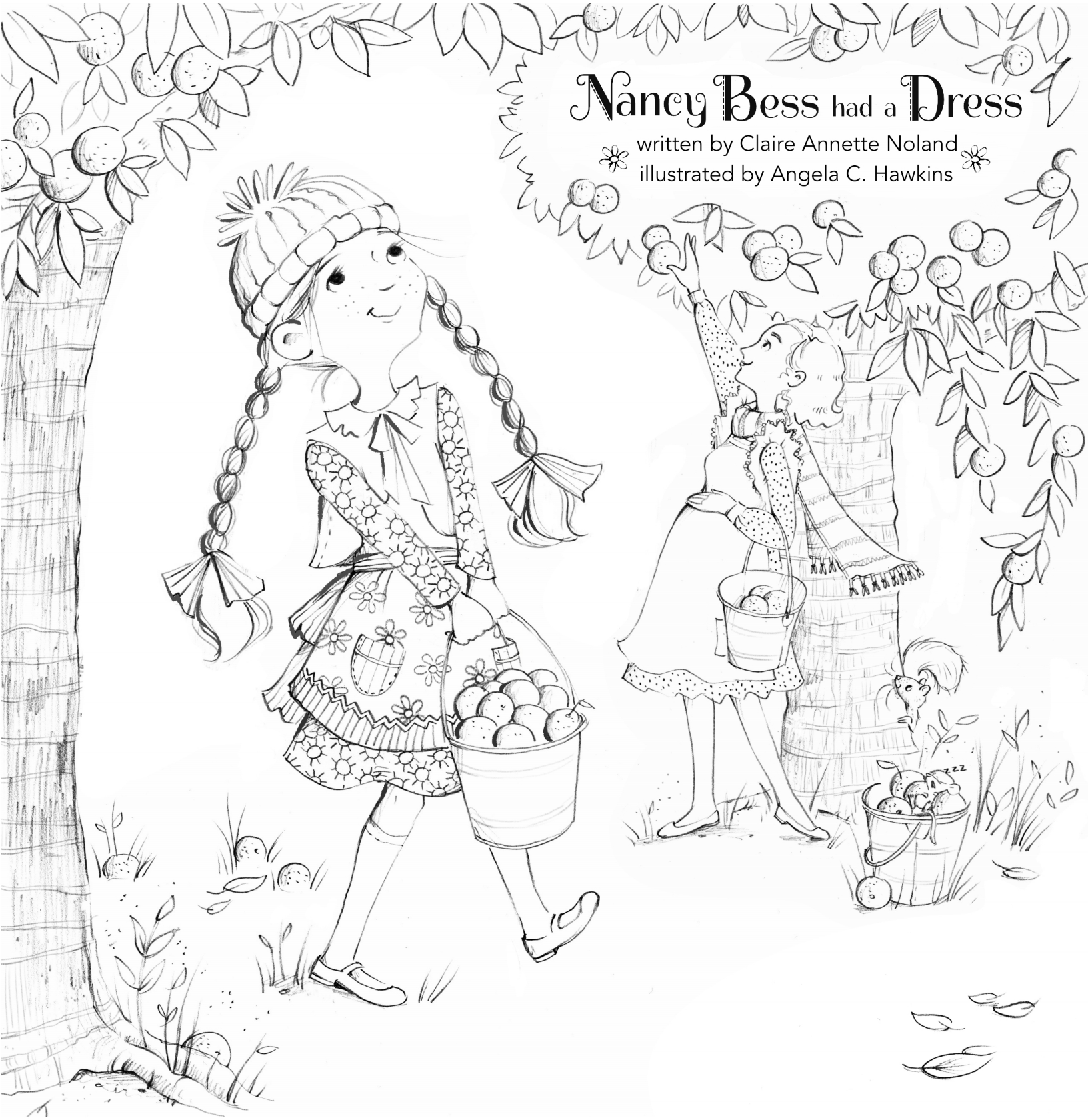
(This template is just to get you started. Add as many shapes to your block sheet as you like.)

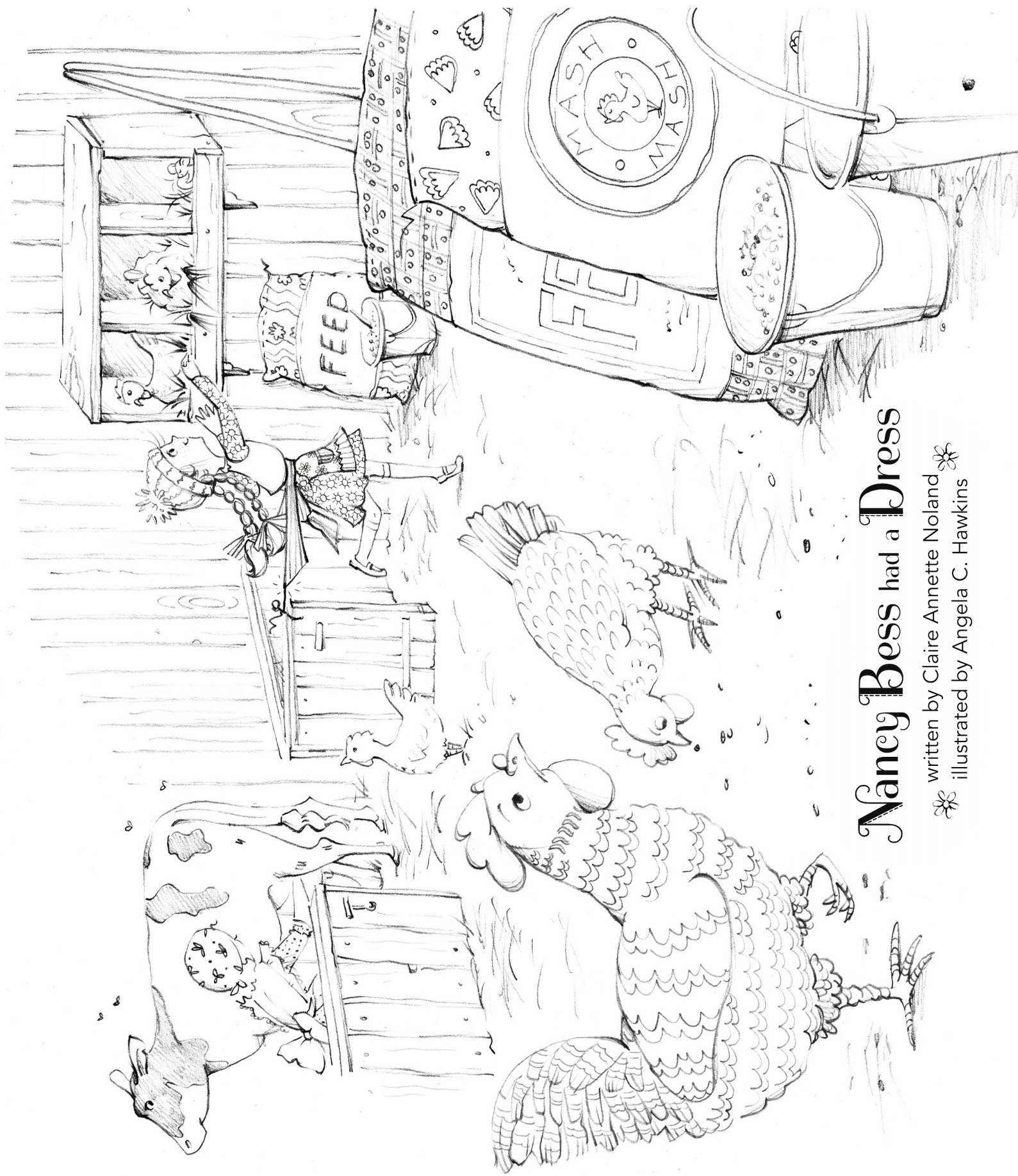


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