Almost 200 years ago, six men named Henry, Hark, Nelson, Sam, Will, and Jack gathered in a swampy woodland area called Cabin Pond in southeastern Virginia. Each of the men was enslaved by a white family on a nearby farm. For months they had been plotting rebellion with their leader, Nat Turner.

History tells us that Turner was a preacher who despised the institution of slavery. He believed that God called on him to fight against its evils by bringing down white slaveholders. On August 21, 1831, Turner and his cohorts gathered more recruits and made their way from farm to farm, freeing enslaved families and attacking their masters. Days later, furious white militias retaliated against the entire black population. In the end, 55–65 white slaveowners and their families lay dead, and more than 200 people of color had been slain.

In this quilt, Baltimore artist Stephen Towns shows us the hours before the uprising began—the final plotting and planning, the vowing to stick together whatever the cost. Using small pieces of cloth, Towns stitched a picture of six men in workaday shirts and jackets, surrounded by the green trees of Cabin Pond. By making the light gray brim of each humble hat resemble a halo, the artist has consciously depicted the devout country preacher and his men in the style of traditional Christian religious imagery. The connection between these individuals and a larger cosmic and religious narrative is made even more clear by Nat Turner’s gesture as he raises his arm and points to the luminous sky full of stars.

**CHALLENGE**


Read the articles linked above and explore photographs and documents about the Nat Turner rebellion at [natturnerproject.org](http://natturnerproject.org). Discuss the different ways that Nat Turner and his uprising of 1831 have been understood, interpreted, and explained at various moments in American history.


**PRINT THE IMAGES ON PAGES 2 AND 3 FOR YOUR STUDENTS.**
One Night at Cabin Pond

One Night at Cabin Pond


Towns sewed portions of his quilt by hand. He used light-colored thread to define Nat Turner’s chin.

Towns created a starry sky with layers of sparkling deep blue fabric, lightweight netting, and shiny glass beads.