



Owinja means *quilt* in the Lakota dialect.

In the past century, Lakota women have raised their star quilts to an art form much in demand.

The majority of Lakota star quilts are dominated by a single star; however, multiple and broken star patterns are not uncommon.

The single star is made of small diamond-shaped patches pieced together in eight sections. When these sections are joined together, the eight-sided star is formed.

The star pattern is derived from early buffalo robe designs. The extermination of the buffalo herds coincided roughly with the implementation of the first mission schools where the craft of quilting was taught. The pattern bears a resemblance to various Anglo-American designs dating to the 18th century.

The morning star is an important figure in Sioux ceremonies. It represents the direction from which spirits travel to earth and is a link between the living and the dead (in extension), thus symbolizing immortality.

Just before the sun rises, there is a star standing alone, shining brightly in the east. Lakota refer to this beautiful sight as the *Morning Star*. This star announces the coming of sun and light to the earth; it heralds the dawn. Because of its great importance in the gift of each new day, the morning star is often used in designs and decorations.

Black Elk spoke to the star as follows:

*"Morning Star, there at the place where the sun comes up, you who have the wisdom which we seek, help us in cleansing ourselves and all the people, that our generations to come will have light as they walk the sacred path. You lead the dawn as it walks forth, and also the day which follows with its light which is knowledge. This you do for us and for all the people of the world, that they may see clearly in walking the **wakan** - holy - path, that they may know all that is holy, and that they may increase in a sacred manner ..."*

Native American Star Quilts are used in sacred ceremonies, as well as weddings, births and funerals. They are given to mothers after they have babies and gifted at special ceremonies, birthdays and graduations. Native American women learned to quilt from the wives of government officials stationed on reservations, missionaries and at boarding schools. They started quilting because the men weren't allowed to leave the reservation to hunt, so they couldn't get animal hides to make robes and clothing. Star Quilts were often used by young men for going on the hill, also known as vision quests.

Native American Star Quilts are given to men and women. Star Quilts are displayed in bedrooms on beds and on couches or chairs in living rooms. Star Quilts are not thrown away, but they are used and treasured forever. Native Americans believe that the older the quilts get, the more valuable they are.