

History Boredom Busters!
Textile Arts
Paper Weaving & Embroidery

Historical Context

When England increased taxes, many colonists decided to **boycott** English goods. Instead of buying English goods, colonists started to make their own. After being able to purchase finished cloth and/or clothing, people returned to making and wearing “home-spun” clothes. In fact, it was a sign of patriotism to wear home-spun clothes!

Women learned how to spin, weave, and sew clothes from fibers that could be grown in the colonies, like cotton, wool, and **flax**. Women made **linen** shirts and **shifts**, blankets and towels, and heavy wool clothing. Some used dyed wool yarn to decorate items with needlework.

To see a woman working at a historical linen loom at Mount Vernon, watch this YouTube video “Weaving on Mount Vernon's 18th Century Loom” from George Washington's Mount Vernon at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FnbUF0wglfw>.

Embroidery is the craft of decorating fabric by stitching thread, or yarn, in decorative patterns. Pearls, beads, and sequins were sometimes added to embroidery. Many of the basic stitches of historical embroidery are still used today, including chain stitch, buttonhole or blanket stitch, running stitch, satin stitch, and cross stitch. Historical examples of embroidery can be found worldwide. For example, Chinese embroidery from the 5th - 3rd Century BCE has been discovered!

In 18th-century England and its colonies, elite women were expected to have excellent embroidery skills. It was considered a sign of reaching the stage of womanhood. A woman's embroidery skills indicated her rank and social standing. **Samplers** made with silk were produced by the daughters of wealthy families. However, non-elite women also decorated with embroidery. In fact, their embroidery is sometimes studied as a means of understanding the average woman's life. Since most of these women didn't leave written records, their artwork can give us a window into their lives.

Key Words

Boycott - An intentional end to using services or buying products from a person, organization, business, or country used as a form of protest.

Discussion Point - Patriotic colonists would boycott English goods during the Revolutionary War. Can you think of another historical boycott?

Flax - A plant used for its seeds (linseeds) and the textile fiber inside its stalks. The fibers are removed and then spun into yarn and then woven into a fabric called linen.



Photo Credit: Frontier Culture Museum

Linen - A fabric made from flax fibers. Linen was frequently used for undergarments, shirts, sheets, and towels.



Photo Credit: Creative Market

Shift - An undergarment that was worn under a dress by women or with trousers and an overshirt of some kind (like a vest or jacket) by men. It protected outer layers of clothing from sweat and body oils. Sometimes it was the only piece of clothing washed regularly.

Sampler - A piece of embroidery or cross-stitching that demonstrated a young woman's skill in needlework. They often included the alphabet and a quote or prayer.



Photo Credit: Wikimedia

Activity: "Home-Spun" Paper Weaving

Supplies

- Construction paper
- Children's scissors

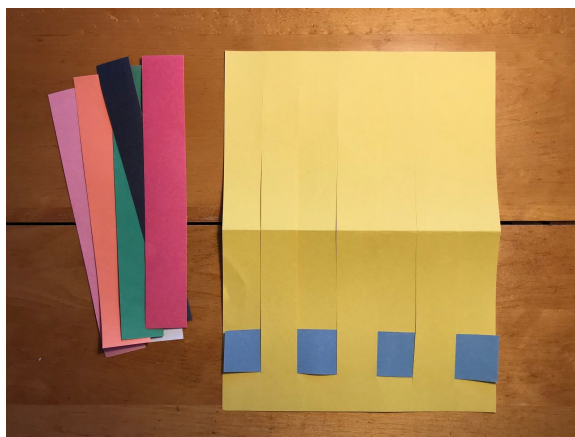


Instructions

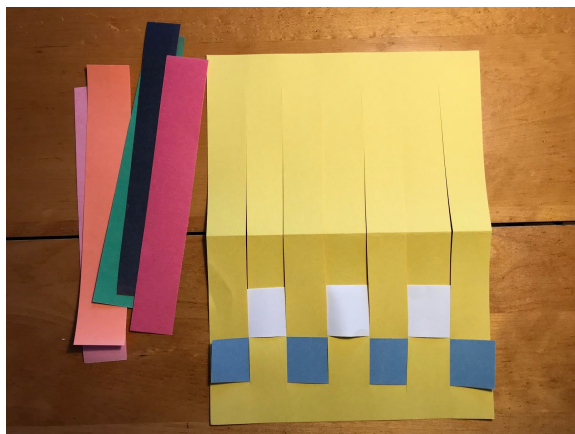
1. Fold a piece of construction paper in half (hamburger style).
2. Make cuts from the folded edge towards the other edge, stopping about an inch or two before you reach the edge. Repeat until you cannot make any more cuts. Cuts should be spaced out about an inch or more apart from each other.



3. Unfold the paper. Then cut out some strips of paper one to two inches in width.
4. One at a time, thread the loose paper strips. Alternate going above and below the slits cut into the piece of paper.



5. Repeat until you cannot fit any more strips. Alternate between starting the strip above or below the first slit so the paper is woven in alternate ways each time.



Activity 2: Embroidery Samplers

Supplies

- Burlap, or other fabric (cut into roughly 10" x 10" squares)
- Embroidery or sewing needles*
- Embroidery thread or yarn, in various colors
- Chalk (optional)

*Careful with needles! Adult supervision required.



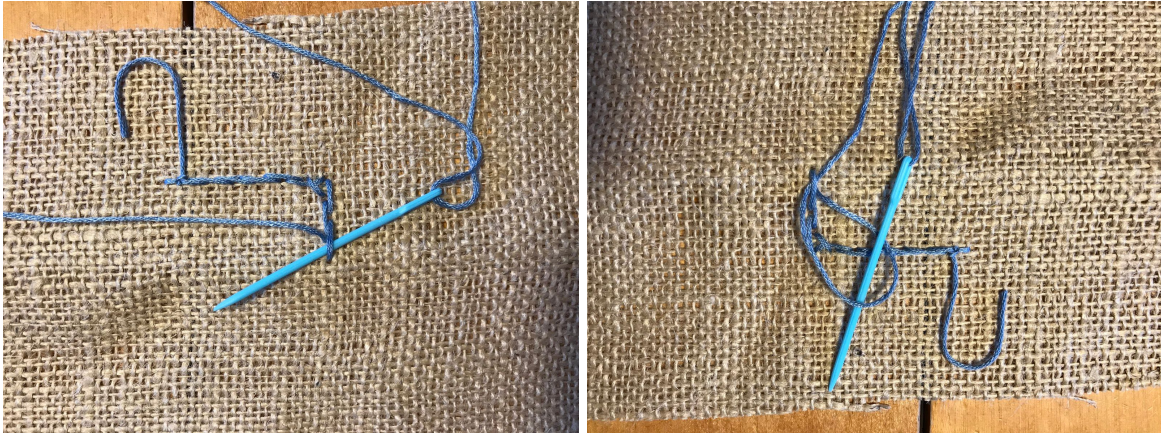
Instructions

1. Optional - Using chalk, draw a pattern (shapes, letters, etc.).
2. Thread the needle. Make one simple straight stitch (starting on the back of the fabric, feed the needle up through the fabric and then back down again a short distance away) and pull the thread so all but an inch or two is left on the backside, flip the fabric over so the back side is facing up and tie the loose end off.



3. Use the back stitch to form letters, numbers, or shapes. (See instructions below.)
4. If you master the backstitch, try the chain stitch. (See see instructions below.)

5. To stop using a color, feed the needle to the backside of the fabric and tie it off on a previous stitch by sliding the needle under the stitch and then through the loop that is created.



Backstitch - This stitch is ideal for outlines and it's the one you'll find you use the most. Follow step 2 above to make a simple stitch and tie it off. Then feed the needle from the backside up to the front side, a stitch distance from the simple stitch. Feed the needle back down where the simple stitch ends. Repeat, coming up a stitch distance from the last stitch and feeding the needle back down where the prior stitch ends. For a video, see "Backstitch" by www.needlenthread.com, available on YouTube at https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rZ_wVC84UmM.



Chain Stitch - This stitch is great for adding texture to your projects! Make a small straight stitch. Feed the needle up a stitch distance away and slide the needle under the small straight stitch, then feed the needle back down where you fed it up. Repeat, but this time slide the needle under the previous stitch to create a chain. For a video, see “How to do a Chain Stitch” from Cutesy Crafts, available on YouTube at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BsIGFb4L7To>.

