

Beginner Hand-Stitching and Darning

Embroidery and embellishment techniques for clothing

Lesson plan prepared by Flora May for the Art Gallery of Nova Scotia.

Suggested Grade/Age Levels

Ages 12 and up.

Subject Areas

- Visual Arts
- Craft

Introduction

Flora May covers introductory and intermediate embroidery stitches, as well as introducing darning methods: exterior patches, interior patches, and repetitive stitches.

These techniques are evident in the artwork *Sprouting Grass Moon*, created by Flora May from the 2019–2021 Art Gallery of Nova Scotia exhibition *Worn Inward*. Through this quilted piece, the artist expresses connection to her culture and the land where she is from.

Mending clothing is a great way to explore stitch techniques and variations while completing an embroidery piece that is simple, enriching, and meditative. This project can be simple or made more complex, perfect for a range of ages and skill levels.



Flora May
Sprouting Grass Moon, 2019
Fabric, embroidery floss, Labrador tea
47.0 x 47.0 cm
Private collection

The straight “running” stitch and back stitch will be covered. You will be able to begin an embroidery piece on clothing, or a fabric “embroidery sampler” that could be used as a patch later.

Set Up

Find a piece of clothing that needs a mend, or any scrap piece of fabric you like!

Materials

- Sharp scissors
- Dressmakers pins
- Selection of embroidery needles with a large eye – May’s favourites are ‘sashiko’ needles
- Cotton embroidery thread in as many colours as you like
- Clothing or scrap fabric
- Other scrap patch fabrics and materials
- Embroidery hoop is not necessary, although a small hoop – under 6” – is best for clothing repair and patch projects



Process

Position your fabric and prepare your needle:



1. Begin by layering scrap fabric over or underneath your clothing's hole or damaged area. Explore with patch placement and coloured fabric. This depends on personal style- it can be fun to see the layers or cover the hole completely.



2. Pin your fabric patch onto clothing with dressmakers' pins.
3. Thread the needle with the "thickness" of embroidery thread you choose. Using all six strands will result in a bold stitch, using fewer strands will make your stitches thinner and more subtle.
4. Tie a knot at the end of the thread.



Optional: Position your fabric within an embroidery hoop to keep your surface flat and tight. This adds extra stability and will make the embroidery process smoother.

Straight stitch:

Begin with a straight stitch – a simple stitch that produces lines in a dash-space-dash pattern. The straight running stitch is the best for covering large areas in less time.



1. Begin by poking your threaded needle up through the fabric from the backside, where you would like your line to begin. Pull the string through until the knot is next to the fabric on the back.



2. Next, poke the needle back down through the fabric around one cm to the left or the right of where you first pulled your needle out.



3. Pull the thread down into your first stitch.



4. Now, poke your needle back up through the fabric, leaving a space from the previous stitch.

5. Then poke the needle back down through the fabric again making your second stitch. Keep the stitches consistent to make your work look more precise. The length of your stitches on the front do not need to be the same as the backside, however you do not want to exceed one cm, otherwise your thread can become loose.



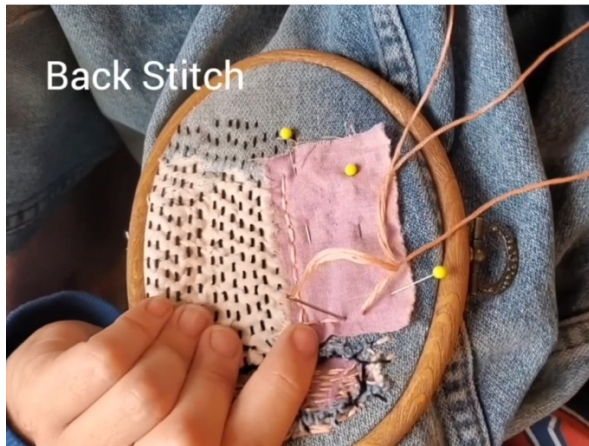
6. When you are finished, tie a knot at the end on the backside so that no thread is hanging loose. You can also weave loose thread through the stitches on the backside until there is no more loose thread.

Back stitch:

This makes a neat, unbroken line that is useful for solid outlines and is also a reinforcement stitch.



1. Begin by poking your threaded needle up through the fabric from the backside, where you would like your line to begin. Pull the string through until the knot is next to the fabric on the back.
2. Next, poke the needle back down through the fabric to the left or the right of where your line begins. Make this single, straight stitch as long or short as you want.



3. Pull the string through the back so that it is flat against the fabric on the front, and not loose.
4. Continue along your pattern line. Come back up through the fabric in a blank space ahead, the same distance as the first stitch you made.



5. Instead of going forward to continue your line, bring your needle back down into the same hole at the end of the last stitch you made. This will give you two stitches that join side by side.
6. To create your third stitch, you are repeating step four and five. Each time you bring your needle back down to the underside of the fabric, try to aim to pierce through the thread on the backside, for your design to have extra strength.
7. Repeat steps three, four, and five to continue your line with a reinforced stitch.

Finishing:



- Experiment with decorative stitching and switching up colours and patterns.



- End embroidery by turning clothing inside out and weaving thread back through your last bunch of stitches. You may tie a knot for extra security.