

CROSS STITCH (HANDWORK)

The following is excerpted from the book, *Traditional American Crafts* by Betsey B. Creekmore, Hearthside Press, Inc., 1968.

A sampler, as the name implies, was first intended to be a reference work; on a single piece of cloth, an accomplished needlewoman would preserve her complete repertoire of embroidery patterns, drawnwork, lettering, and fancy stitches. In seventeenth century England, samplers were long and narrow—about eight inches wide and a yard or more in length. Fragments of designs and examples of stitches were scattered over the entire surface. As it was worked, the sampler was rolled up, scroll fashion. It could be tucked away in a chest or a drawer until needed, and unrolled to permit the seamstress to select the proper motif for decorating clothing, chair covers, bed hangings and cushions.

In the colonies, where small girls received their first (and usually their only) schooling at home, the sampler became a teaching aid with a dual purpose. Having already mastered knitting—by the age of four a little girl was expected to be able to make plain stockings and mittens on long wooden needles—it was vitally important that a child of five should learn to sew. If she could be taught to read at the same time, so much the better. Across the top of a large square of linen, colonial mothers drew the alphabet in capital and small letters, and underneath it, numbers from one to ten. “Great A, little a, Bouncing B . . .” As the time-honored rhyme was repeated, small fingers worked the letters in cross or chain stitch using a large needle and dark worsted thread. Literally, girls learned to sew before they learned to read, but they were not likely to forget either lesson.

As the next step, a “text” was printed in the center of the sampler and worked with smaller needle and finer thread. This text was a quotation from the bible, a moral sentiment, or such an applicable verse as:

Ye springing Fair, whom gently Minds incline
To All that’s Curious, Innocent, and Fine,
Now let the Fingers, whose unrivaled Skill
Exalts the Needle, grace the noble Quill.

Below the text, there usually was room for an embroidered needle-picture; landscapes, houses, and Noah’s Ark were favored subjects. Vines, leaves, flowers and birds (often worked in silk thread) provided a colorful border as embroidery motifs were practiced. Finally, at the bottom of the composition, the name of its maker and the date of its completion were added—the little girl was often in her teens by this time, the sampler having been her constant companion for several years. The finished product was then framed and hung in a place of prominence on the wall, for a sampler was a sort of diploma as well as a piece of decorative needlework.

CROSS STITCH CLASS PREPARATION

Supplies Needed: gingham cloth, approx. 11 yards
 (1.5 yds. yields approx. 60 squares)
 embroidery floss, approx. 20 - 25 skeins
 embroidery needles, approx. 60 needles used per day
 (15 needles threaded per skein of floss)

Use all the same color gingham and floss for the duration of education week. Different colors and the element of choice will lead to confusion!

Gingham fabric will need to be cut into squares and have the tree pattern marked in Xs onto the fabric in pencil. Squares should be cut prior to Orientation night, packaged in groups of 25. Mark tree pattern on first square in each packet.

— The **squares will need to be marked in advance.** On Orientation Night, one volunteer for each day should take 2 packets of squares home and mark the pattern on the squares. Bring marked squares on assigned day.

— The **needles will need to be threaded in advance.** On Orientation Night, one volunteer for each day should take home 60 needles, 4 skeins of floss and a board. Use 2 threads of the floss for each needle and cut the thread 36” long. Thread the needle, double the thread and knot to make 18”-long finished, threaded needles. Bring board with threaded needles on assigned day.

CROSS STITCH CLASS DIRECTIONS

Have the children come in and sit down on the floor.

Be very clear and concise with directions:

1. Pass out hoops.
2. The children separate the hoop into 2 sections and place the inside portion on the floor in front of them.
3. Pass out marked squares and have children place fabric on top of the hoop that is on the floor. (Distribute pencils for students to mark their initials in corner of the square.)
4. Press the exterior portion of the hoop over the fabric; hoop makes the fabric tight.
5. Pass out needles. Have children wait until all children have received needles.
6. Have children begin pattern at the base of the tree trunk and to have needle come up from the underside; knot will then be on the bottom.
7. Tell children to complete each X and then go on to the next and do the pattern of X one at a time and in order (Xs next to one another).
8. Have children raise hands and remain seated if they need help. Encourage teachers and chaperones to help also.
9. If children complete the design, they may have time to personalize with their name or initials, “to Mom” for Mother’s Day (additional supplies available at Fiske’s).

**HAVE CHILDREN TURN IN NEEDLES.
DO NOT LET CHILDREN TAKE NEEDLES HOME!**