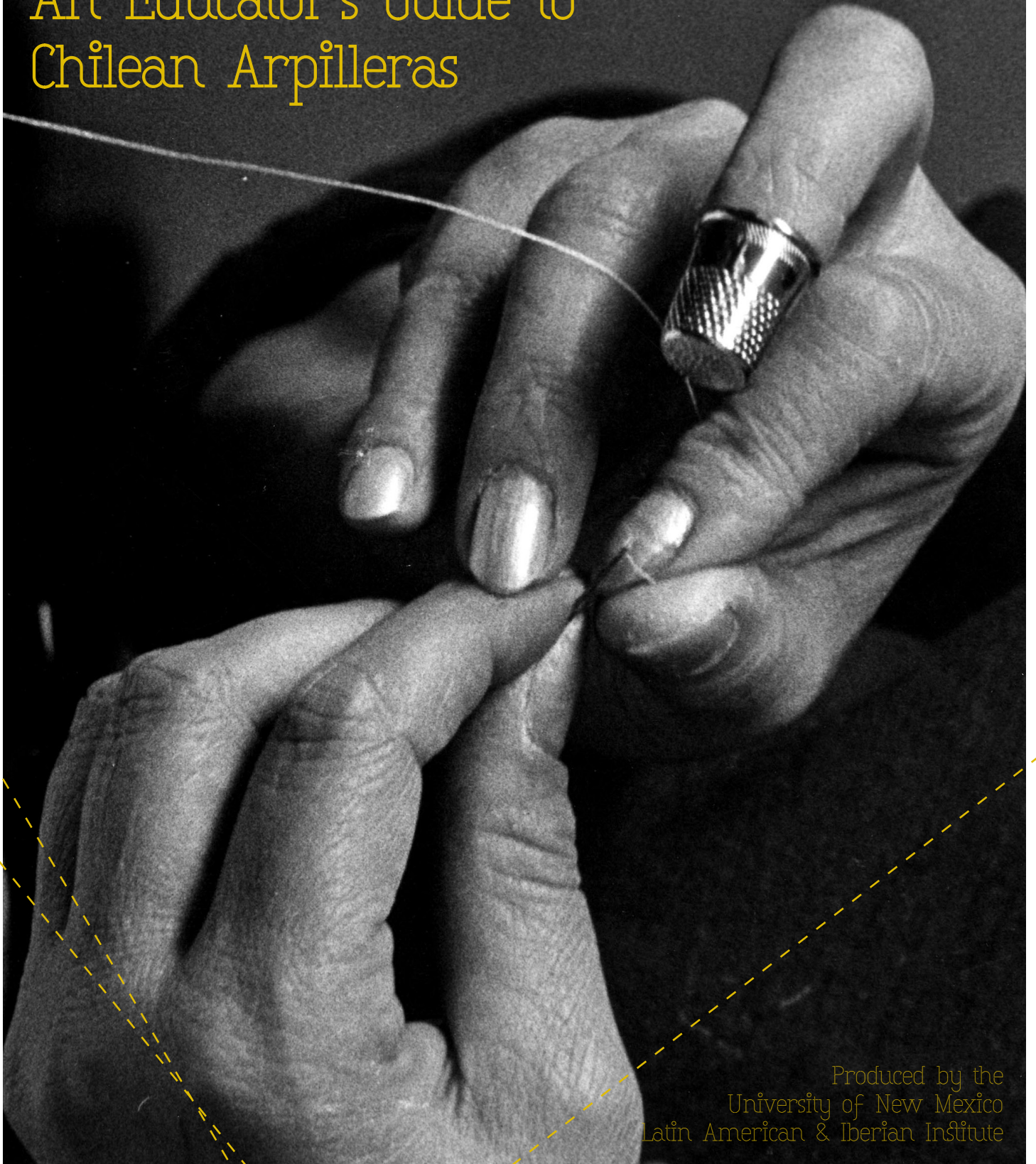


# Stitching Resistance:

An Educator's Guide to  
Chilean Arpilleras



Produced by the  
University of New Mexico  
Latin American & Iberian Institute

# Table of Contents

Introduction . . . . .	3
Background & History . . . . .	4
Vocabulary . . . . .	10
Curriculum	
Discussing Arpilleras . . . . .	11
The Arpillera: Poem Analysis . . . . .	12
Comparing Herstories: The Arpilleras of Chile and African-American Women Quilters in the U.S.: . . . . .	18
Creating an Arpillera . . . . .	25
Supplementary Materials . . . . .	33

\*Cover image is a photograph of a woman's hands threading a needle, wearing a thimble. The photographer is Jerry Soalte, date unknown. Provided by Kheel Center for Labor-Management Documentation and Archives, Cornell University Libraries, via Flickr. Copyright unknown.

# Introduction

Dear Educators,

These resources have been created to support teachers in integrating discussions and activities concerning Chilean arpilleras into their classroom.

The UNM Latin American & Iberian Institute (LAI) developed this educator's guide in conjunction with professional development workshops held in Spring and Fall 2013 through a partnership with the National Hispanic Cultural Center. The workshops were organized to explore teaching about the exhibition "Stitching Resistance: The History of Chilean Arpilleras," on display at the NHCC from October 19, 2012, through January 31, 2014. The intent of this powerful and extensive exhibit was to help illuminate the artistry and the history of arpilleristas and arpilleras in the hope that what happened to Chileans between 1973 and 1990 is never forgotten - and that the artists who stitched it are forever recognized.

As a first recommendation, we suggest that educators review another wonderful resource available online at no cost: The Making History Series "Stitching Truth: Women's Protest Art in Pinochet's Chile" from Facing History and Ourselves. This document includes a series of readings and comprehension questions to help students learn both about the history of Chile and the use of art as a form of political protest. Facing History and Ourselves has also provided complementary lesson plans on their website. You can access both "Stitching Truth: Women's Protest Art in Pinochet's Chile" and the complementary lesson plans at <http://www.facinghistory.org/resources/publications/bordando-la-verdad-arte-de->.

To support that resource and expand upon it, we have provided here a short overview and introduction to the relevant themes and topics which may be raised through discussing Chilean arpilleras, including politics and authoritarianism, women and community, abductions and desaparecidos (the disappeared ones), human rights and exile, and significant events after 1990. This narrative of arpilleras was written by the NHCC Art Museum and is reprinted here with permission. Educators are encouraged to read this background information, as it provides critical information which will aid when developing additional lesson plans and readings for their classrooms.

Finally, we have also included a list of books organized by reading level to support teaching about Chile, along with a list of relevant films.

# Background & History

The following background information was provided courtesy of the National Hispanic Cultural Center Art Museum.

## Overview

When the armed forces of Chile overthrew the administration of Salvador Allende nearly forty years ago now, the arpillera suddenly became much more than a charming and quaint appliqué, embroidery, or patchwork depiction of everyday life by Chilean and Peruvian women. September 11, 1973 created the necessary conditions in which this art form was born and soon the arpillera became the most visual (and visible), poignant, and widespread manifestation of opposition to authoritarianism, violation of human rights, the disappearance of loved ones—all things associated with the violation of human rights of the military government that ruled Chile until 1990.

Arpilleras are a powerful art form. Layers of sackcloth or burlap fabric (arpillera) were joined, principally through applique, to create multi-dimensional (in layers and meaning) works of protest and resistance. Arpillera the burlap cloth became the preferred medium for resistance and protest because the material was easily obtained and inexpensive. Appliqué, embroidery, and patchwork were traditional skills of women, the widows and mothers—whose families were destroyed in the months and years following the golpe de estado of September 11, 1973. Their artistry with humble cloth is vibrant testimony: history in textile form, every bit as compelling as any other of the visual media. The detail and composition of the works can be simple or intricate. Each one tells a story; each one conveys a message.

The exhibition, *Stitching Resistance: The History of Chilean Arpilleras*, is a result of an intense collaboration by poets, artists, scholars, and curators. Its intent is to help illuminate the artistry and the history of arpilleristas and arpilleras in the hope that what happened to Chileans between 1973 and 1990 is never forgotten. And the artists who stitched it forever recognized.

## POLITICS AND AUTHORITARIANISM

President Salvador Allende Gossens was elected president in September 1970. A longtime leader of Chile's Socialist party, he led a Marxist-democratic left coalition government. On September 11, 1973 (el once de setiembre) the Chilean armed forces, the navy, and the national police, Carabineros de Chile, seized control of the government by means of a coordinated golpe de estado in which President Allende took his own life rather than surrender to the insurgents. On that day, General Augusto Pinochet Ugarte became president of a four-man military junta. Today, "once de septiembre" is as fateful a date (with as meaningful an aftermath) for Chileans as 9/11 is for New Yorkers, Pennsylvanians, and citizens of Washington DC metropolitan area—and for all citizens of the United States.

Rather than restore civilian rule to Chile with elections, the junta, with Pinochet as its head, wielded power over the country for nearly seventeen years, years of extreme hardship for Chile. The golpe, or coup, split the intellectual and political communities. Many were exiled and others voluntarily left. In the streets, there were tear gas and water cannons, curfews and fear. Abductions, death squads and disappearances (whence the term desaparecidos) affected thousands of families.

In 1988 the government gave Chileans an opportunity to express their preference of a future: People flocked to the voting polls to check one of the following "Augusto Pinochet Ugarte: Si—No—." This was not a democratic election per se and there didn't need to be a choice, the government believed they would win. Instead, "Si" or "Yes", lost with only 44% of the vote.

On October 6, 1988 the Government conceded the loss. A year and a half later Chile had a civilian president for the first time in seventeen years with the election of Patricio Aylwin Azócar.



## WOMEN AND COMMUNITY

Chilenas, Chilean women, have always been depicted as having strong character as well as a sense of the importance of place and of self. They have always been noted for their outspokenness and for being politically and socially active (despite not having been able to vote in national elections until 1952). That Chilenas organized themselves into solidarity movements of protest and resistance through art during the 1973-1990 years should not surprise anyone.

Visual (and visible) courage and resistance in the guise of “simple and quaint” women’s work, arpilleras made in Chile between 1973 and 1990 were masterful and significant as non-violent expressions of denunciation, outrage, and opposition. Post-1990 works show the continuing importance of stitching memory and history into humble cloth scraps.

As significant as the works themselves are the artists who created them. Gathering in church basements, soup kitchens, community centers, and workshops the arpilleras gained momentum as a movement during these crucial years in the history of Chile. Together the women not only created noteworthy works of art, they stitched together a community torn to pieces by violence; they gathered strength to defy, protest, and denounce. With each stitch they grew more vocal and more resilient.

International Women’s Day became another vehicle for women in Chile as well as around the world, to celebrate and demonstrate. Held every year on March 8th, International Women’s Day has its roots in suffrage movements of the early 1900s. 1975--precisely as Chileans were suffering from the ravages of suppression-- was declared “International Women’s Year” by the United Nations. Today, March 8th is celebrated globally as part of Women’s History Month. Chilenas used this day to the best of their advantage and arpilleras often depicted it in their works.

As more and more husbands, sons, fathers, brothers, and boyfriends were “disappeared” by the military regime, chilenas took it upon themselves to search for their desaparecidos. They literally chained themselves in protest in very public venues like the former tribunals of justice. They consulted lawyers and church officials, and implored public officials in their searches. And all the while they continued to produce these remarkable art works that chronicle this time period in Chilean history.

## ABDUCTIONS AND DESAPARECIDOS (THE DISAPPEARED ONES)

---

Dónde están? Where Are They?

Can anything be more terrifying than the unexplained loss of a loved one? For the arpilleristas and so many Chileans, it was one of authoritarianism's tragic realities. Students and teachers of all levels, artists, writers, singers, scholars, members of the intelligentsia—anyone who opposed the junta might be abducted, go missing, and become a desaparecido.

Throughout Chile, in big cities and small towns alike, abductions and disappearances were all too common. Remaining family members demanded to know the whereabouts of their desaparecidos, often to no avail. As much as the people demanded and searched, the government was not forthcoming with information. Vulnerable communities, including the Mapuche, feared reprisals and could not publicly announce their search for lost loved ones. But all the people could not be deterred.

To put a human face on these desaparecidos, the women wore black and white identification photos on their clothing like badges, marking themselves with the image and memory of the missing. Arpilleristas incorporated such photos and other likenesses as well as scraps of clothing and other objects belonging to desaparecidos into their works. In doing so, they kept them ever in the public eye and memory. An empty chair, a longing glance from a window, grieving women dancing alone are emotionally haunting visuals utilized to convey this experience.

As the desaparecidos grew in number, women, families, church groups and other human rights organization continued to press for information, gaining strength in numbers and expanding protest methods. Encadenamiento (enchainment) became an important method to visibly and physically denounce human rights abuses. Organizations like La Asociación de Familiares de Detenidos Desaparecidos (Association of Families of the Detained and Disappeared) and Vicaría de Solidaridad (Vicariate of Solidarity- a Catholic Church run agency to help families of victims) formed and grew in numbers.

Over twenty years after the return of democracy, many Chilean families continue to search for answers to the whereabouts of their desaparecidos and stage public protests in their honor and memory.

## HUMAN RIGHTS AND EXILE

The record of human rights violations in Chile during the 1970s and 1980s includes, but is not limited to, imprisonment, torture, murder, and exile. Opponents of the regime were detained, interned, and imprisoned-- often sent to remote parts of the country as *relegados* (individuals internally exiled in locations with adverse weather and harsh living conditions).

Torture was a routine occurrence, ranging from severe beating to simulation of execution by firing squad, from mutilation to electric shock. More routine methods were frequent. Assassination of influential Chileans and the murder of suspected enemies of the regime marked the days, the months, the years. Intentional abuses of human rights by the government have been likened to tactical and strategic policies designed to wage war on internal enemies of the regime change initiated in 1973. The official violation of human rights ("state-sponsored terrorism") served to create an environment of terror and fear that permeated everyday life for Chileans. Martial law, state of siege, and curfews; tear gas, water cannons and the breaking up of public gatherings terrified a nation. Prisons and prison camps bulged with detainees. Chile was not alone among Latin American countries in suffering human rights abuses at the hands of the government during these decades, but the extent of the abuses found greater and more lasting artistic portrayal there. The arpilleras in the exhibition speak to these violations through their depictions of the confrontations between Chileans and their own police and armed forces.

Human rights organizations were formed in response to these abuses that occurred in Chile. In 1975 Chile's popular Cardinal Raúl Silva Henríquez, an outspoken activist in the human rights movement organized what became the internationally well-known Vicaría de Solidaridad (Vicariate of Solidarity) as an official agency of the Catholic Church for the express purpose of rendering assistance to afflicted families of the detained and disappeared.

Exile, clearly a human rights abuse, was also a form of emotional and mental torture. Being forced to flee one's homeland for fear of death, or having to leave for one's own safety, is a most severe sentence to be handed down by a government that is widely seen as illegitimate. Many had no choice in the matter, others including members of the intelligentsia left voluntarily. All were exiles. More than a few, like Hortensia Bussi de Allende, the dead president's wife, were perceived by the government as potential threats to its existence, rivals who challenged the authority of Pinochet and the junta. Academics, artists, musicians, novelists, poets, students, writers, and activists from various stations of life traveled to neighboring countries, to Europe, and to the United States. Every Chilean exile left behind family, jobs, and community.

In 1992, then President Patricio Aylwin Azócar relayed the well-documented findings of the National Commission for Truth and Reconciliation Report (the "Rettig Report," named for its chairman Raúl Rettig Giessen) to Chile and the world. The report made clear the extent of human rights abuses that occurred in Chile resulting in death or disappearances. Since the report first came out, all Chilean administrations have made it a priority to locate unmarked graves and the remains of the missing. A 2004 report published by the Ethics Commission against Torture found that 33,000 Chileans had been tortured during the seventeen years between 1973 and 1990. In Chile, the process of recovering *desaparecidos'* bodies has taken on symbolic and enormous importance.



## AFER THE DARKNESS: POST 1990 WORKS

In 1990, Chileans became once again a people with a civilian, democratic government. Seventeen years of dictatorship had taken their toll on the country, but had not exhausted the creative talents of arpilleristas. In the post regime decades, they have enhanced the use of this art form as a medium for visual, political, and social commentary. Recent works remind viewers to both remember the painful times of the past and to look forward to a better future.

It was a long-standing tradition in Chile (and for families) to fly kites on Sundays and festive occasions. In arpilleras the flying of brightly colored kites represents affirmation of faith in the present with soaring hopes for the future of democracy. Numerous arpilleras portray aspects of the rebuilding of Chilean democratic institutions and constitutionalism after the military regime. Flowers and colors used are more vibrant, and while always on message politically and socially, these artworks portray less sorrow, more hope. Some artists now proudly sign their full names to their works, whereas before they may have been afraid to do so.

The 1998 arrest and detention in London of Augusto Pinochet was a milestone event for the human rights movement and a symbolic step toward healing for Chileans. Numerous arpilleras make reference to this controversy and Spain's attempt to extradite him for trial there. Spain's request for, and Britain's refusal of, extradition made it imperative that Chile take responsibility for legal action against the former president.

Works portraying the presidency of Michelle Bachelet, especially her dedication to women's causes and her vigorous support for the founding of the Museum of Memory, have also been popular themes of the post 1990 arpilleras. The Museum of Memory continues to attract large numbers of visitors. In recent years, the Chilean government has turned some of the most notorious detention and torture centers into memorials and museums; streets and buildings have been renamed in honor of torture and murder victims. That Chileans' memories of the 1973-1990 years do not fade has become a fact of life owing greatly to the efforts of the arpilleristas.

Most recently, works have vividly depicted the 2010 Chilean earthquake and tsunami and the rescue of the trapped Chilean Miners- events that captured the world. They also depict continued protests by Chile's indigent people, who seek to recover lands taken from them in the past.

While opinions continue to differ on the experiences of the 1973-1990 years --and beyond--Chileans are more united than ever before on the merits of civilian, democratic, representative government. The simple arpillera and the courage of women who made (and still make) them are an integral part of this unity.

## Arpillera

Layers of sackcloth or burlap fabric (arpillera) that are joined through applique, to create multi-dimensional works of protest and resistance.

## Arpillerista

A woman who creates an arpillera.

## Dictator

A person who exercises absolute power, often times a ruler with complete and unrestricted control in a government.

## Dictatorship

The rule of a dictator.

## Communism

A socialist movement with the goal to create a social order based upon common ownership of the means of production.

## Activism

Efforts to bring about social or political change through direct action, like protests or demonstrations.

## Social Movement

A group of people connected by a set of common beliefs or ideals who work together to achieve certain goals, often related to social change.

## Facism

An authoritarian and nationalistic right-wing system of government and social organization.

## Coup d'état

A sudden change of government illegally or by force; the overthrow of a government.

## Disappeared/desaparecido

A person who disappeared during a period of military rule, presumed to have been tortured and/or killed by members of the regime.

# Curriculum: Discussing Arpilleras

## Overview

The following is based upon Marjorie Agosín's article "Introduction," which is reprinted here with permission from "Stitching Truth: Women's Protest Art in Pinochet's Chile." The article serves as a short overview or introduction to the themes and topics that will be raised in the other readings included in the Facing History curriculum guide. The following are suggested questions to use in guiding students as they read through Agosín's article.

1. According to Agosín, in what ways did people resist the Pinochet government? (p. ix-x)
2. What is an arpillera? (p. x)
3. How did the arpilleras help to get information about what was happening inside of Chile to people outside of the country? (p. x)
4. What did the arpilleras show? (p. x)
5. How does Agosín contrast the Latin American dictatorships with the women's movements? (p. x)
6. How did the arpilleristas become more visible? (p. xi)
7. What was the background of many of the women who joined the arpilleristas? Had many of them been involved in politics previously? (p. xi)

## INTRODUCTION

---

*Majorie Agosin*

*Luella La Mer Slaner Professor of Latin American Studies at Wellesley College,  
an award-winning poet, and a human rights activist*

During the early years of the Chilean military dictatorship, the city of Santiago always seemed dark and silent. A curfew forced the people to return to their homes at night and remain inside until the

following day. I remember the days too. I remember the sunny squares of Santiago and how they became empty, just like its many gardens

where children once played and laughed. In the empty plaza, all one could hear was the wind from the Andes and the sound of heavy boots patrolling the streets. I often dreamt of a night without fear and without a curfew. My city, once open and filled with noises, was now still and somber.

The rule of General Augusto Pinochet plunged the country into a culture of terror and fear. It felt as if each person lived trapped in her or his own silence, as if the city were turning into one perpetual night of shadows.

While most of the population was living this internal exile, some Chileans created a different sort of life, one that was not shaped by the demands of Pinochet's government. Secretly, groups of intellectuals gathered in homes to talk about books that had been banned and

censored. The meetings lasted from the beginning of curfew until it was lifted the following day. There were also women's groups that formed literary workshops to resist succumbing to fear. They refused to

play active roles in a society that punished its artists, banning their books and burning them. Poetry, once so vibrant and alive, was written in

secret: it had become a dangerous activity. Yet people wrote on napkins, on shoeboxes, and poets recited subversive poems in public buses. Life was still possible in the surreal world of order and punishment that the generals had created.

Pía Barros, a remarkable writer and a friend of mine, created a series of workshops all around Santiago, encouraging women to gather in their houses to talk and write about the dreadful state of the nation. Churches also provided safe havens for this parallel existence. For me, these gatherings provided a powerful inner light that served to remind me of our humanity, of our ability to think and contest the everyday horrors of life in a dictatorship.

Chilean *arpilleras*—the apparently simple embroidered fabrics that narrate

---

**It felt as if each person lived trapped  
in her or his own silence, as if the  
city were turning into one perpetual  
night of shadows.**

---

the darker, otherwise censored acts of the Pinochet regime—belong to this other life that existed in Chile. I had the chance to get to know some of the women who made them. Marginalized by poverty and sexism, they carried on tenaciously with their work during this dark era. They turned their sorrow into a unique art form that recounted, through hand-sewn images, their lives as mothers in search of their missing children, as civilians demanding truth and justice.

The arpilleras were created as a response to censorship, as a way to fight against the impunity enjoyed by government forces. They became an important vehicle for spreading the news about Chile's situation. These pieces of cloth traveled abroad: customs officials never suspected that these humble wall hangings had the power to transform those who touched them. The arpilleras made it to museums around the world, to the calendars of Amnesty International, to the homes of exiles, and to many others who cared deeply about Chile.

The women who started this arpillera movement began their journey in the places of fear—hospitals, morgues, and cemeteries. They told me how they would recognize one of their own: each carried a mark of pain. They would ask each other whether they were there for a vanished son or a husband and how many children had been taken, when they had disappeared. Violeta Morales, one of the founders of the movement, always said that she was able to recognize her own grief in the faces of others. And they recognized the shoes

worn out from walking the streets in search of their loved ones.

Their first conversations were heavy with the language of pain, but the exchanges quickly turned into a language of solidarity. Slowly, they began to think of ways of uniting in a collective project that would transcend their individual plights. Soon they gained the support of the Vicariate of Solidarity, a branch of the Catholic Church. This organization, under the direction of Cardinal Silva Henríquez, a noted human rights activist, was created to protect the country's victims.

The arpilleras are made with plain scraps of cloth; they are made with the fabrics of scarcity. From marginality, these beautiful tapestries emerge, describing through their embroidered images daily life under Pinochet. Many show the abduction of young people, torture, arbitrary detention, fear, even exile. In other words, the arpilleras are an artistic and historical record of human rights violations, a record virtually unthinkable at a time of suffocating censorship. As a counterpoint to the images of loss and absence, some chronicle the history of Chile before Pinochet. These are moving arpilleras set against a landscape of hope, where scenes of families sharing a convivial meal contrast with more sedate images of family gatherings haunted by an empty seat, the seat of the disappeared loved one who will never come home. If Latin American military dictatorships inspired terror by destroying lives, women's movements attempted to honor life, to celebrate life, to preserve—through quilts

and other domestic crafts—the memory of lives snatched away.

I also recall the arpillera at the center of which Violeta Morales placed an enormous dove; or the ones by Viviana Díaz, which always included a table with flowers and a seat ornamented with a question mark, the seat of absence. The arpilleras were capable of denouncing what was happening in Chile and of revealing the innermost thoughts of the women who embroidered them. Stitching a secret pocket onto a quilt, an embroiderer placed in it a handwritten message. Often

these notes spoke of a time when torture would cease and justice would

prevail. One can feel the anguish of the women who so desperately want to reach others with their story. The message is both a call for hope and an act of witnessing.

On many occasions, I visited the workshops where the *arpilleristas* gathered. As they stitched, they spoke. Sometimes they needed to stop their sewing because the cloth was wet with their tears. But mutual support and love allowed them to continue embroidering the stories of their children, those they had lost, and their country. The art of the arpillera combines the individual pain of each of these women with the collective pain of all Chileans.

The arpilleristas come from many different walks of life: Pinochet's violence was indiscriminate, crushing the human rights of rich and poor. Still, while I have

met professors and doctors who joined this movement, most members are from humble backgrounds—washerwomen, hotel workers, and cooks—and live in areas where there is no water or electricity.

I feel so moved by the generosity of their spirit, the solidarity that they extend to each other. I saw them feed off this spirit as they became more powerful and extended their actions to public activities, hunger strikes, and tying themselves to the gates of Congress. They became visible; they challenged fear in search of justice and

assumed a central role in Chile's human rights movement. The interesting thing

to note is that these women lacked any political background; they became experts through the specific experience of dealing with the disappearance of their relatives. From that moment on, the arpilleristas began to learn, eventually founding an inspiring and generous form of activism.

The art of embroidery has played a role in grassroots movements beyond Chile's borders. It had a very powerful influence in Peru, where women who had been victims of violence at the hands of the Shining Path also made arpilleras in order to tell their stories. And embroidery played an important role in Soweto, where women made quilts to denounce apartheid.

Everyone who owns an arpillera, as I do, is reminded every day of what happened in Chile, in other Latin American countries,

---

**The message is both a call for hope  
and an act of witnessing.**

---



in all of the countries where might makes right. We must always remember if we are to create a future free of hatred and violence. The arpilleristas have given us the texture of memory and truth.

Now the arpilleras are the light of Chile, the clear heart of the country. They are the legacy of dark times. They are the memory of a generation that disappeared. Nearly two decades after the end of the dictatorship, women in Santiago continue to make them, using the same appliqué techniques; their themes are often the same as those of 30 years ago. Many of today's arpilleras say NO to impunity, NO to amnesty for those who ordered and carried out the violence of the Pinochet era.

And some of their demands have been acknowledged. When Pinochet died during the summer of 2006, he did not receive the official recognition his supporters wanted. A socialist woman from the same party as Pinochet's predecessor, the former President Allende, is today the head of

the government; her father was murdered under Pinochet. She leads a country that is struggling to know itself, rethinking its own identity, and daring to dream once again.

I believe that the spirit of justice and fortitude created at the birth of the arpillera movement almost 30 years ago is still very much alive in today's Chile, where a woman who was once tortured and exiled rules the country with a sense of unity and a profound belief that in order to forge a decent future Chileans must remember their grim past. The art of the arpillera is both the past and the future in my country.

This year I returned to Chile in the fall, and each golden leaf reminded me of lives cut short. I tried to gather all the leaves in my hands, and I felt that Chile was also changing seasons, entering a time of dialogues and reflections, hope and reconciliation. I felt that I could finally truly return to a country that now dares to dream—and then I realized that I no longer feared the night.

# Curriculum: The Arpillerista

## Overview: Poem Analysis

The following activity guides students through an analysis of Marjorie Agosín's Poem "The Arpillerista," which is reprinted here from "Stitching Truth: Women's Protest Art in Pinochet's Chile."

Agosín's poem offers an excellent way to bridge literacy with content area studies. Through analyzing the poem, students gain both knowledge of this period of Chilean history, but also experience in practicing literary analysis of poetry. Since students would need at least some understanding of the historical period in order to complete the analysis, this is an activity best done after the unit has already been introduced. It could even be used as an assessment activity at the end of the unit to gauge student knowledge.

1. What is an arpillerista? Agosín defines the arpillerista as "artisan of remains." What does this mean within the Chilean context?
2. How does an arpillerista "burn" with cold? What does the cold represent? (s. 1 v. 3)
3. What is a shroud? (s. 1 v. 6)
4. Why do you think Agosín uses all of the allusions to fabric? (remnants, trousers, ragged scraps)
5. Who is Philomena? (s. 1 v. 13) Why is she relevant to the poem?
6. Who are the "victorious armies"? (s. 2 v. 7)
7. What does it mean to "bring the dead back to life" in the context of the arpilleras? (s. 2 v. 9)

## The Arpillerista

The arpillerista,  
artisan of remains  
burns with rage and cold  
as she tenderly  
picks through the remnants of her dead,  
salvages the shroud of her husband  
the trousers left after the absences  
submerges herself in cloth of foaming, silent blood  
and though she is fragile she grows large,  
sovereign over her adobe hut,  
her ragged scraps  
and determined to tell her story  
truer than the tale woven by her sister Philomena.  
Disruptive and beautiful she  
puts together her flayed remnants  
like a greenish forgotten skin  
and with her disguised thimble  
hidden in the pocket of her modest apron  
and her harmless needle  
she conjures up victorious armies  
embroiders humble people smiling, become triumphant  
brings the dead back to life  
fabricates water, bell towers, schools, dining rooms  
giant suns  
and the Cordillera of the Andes  
peaks opening like portals  
of this splendid city.

—  
Marjorie Agosín  
*Scraps of Life: Chilean Arpilleras*

# Curriculum: Comparing Herstories

## Overview:

The purpose of the following pages is to not only to demonstrate hands-on ways to bring arpilleras into the classroom, but also to explore the possible connections one could make between the arpilleras' social movement in Chile and the history of African-American quilting in the United States. Superficially speaking, these two topics may seem to have very little in common, yet when one delves a little deeper quite a few commonalities emerge—for example, art and craft as social protest, women's social movements, or story-telling through art.

The materials below provide information and resources to help teachers discuss these connections in the classroom. Included first is a short overview of the significance of arpilleras in Chilean history. The rest of the materials focus on quilting: its history, significance for women, and role in the African-American community. Print resources and links to relevant websites are provided throughout.

## The History of Quilting Among African-American Women in the U.S.

Above, we wrote of arpilleras: “Their artistry with humble cloth is vibrant testimony: history in textile form, every bit as compelling as any other of the visual media. The detail and composition of the works can be simple or intricate. Each one tells a story; each one conveys a message.” I believe that we can make a very similar statement about quilting in the African American community. In *Crafted Lives: Stories and Studies of African American Quilters*, Patricia Turner discusses her own realizations on the significance of quilting. She writes about how she came to think of “the role art and craft can play in anchoring the stories that African Americans tell about themselves and their pasts. In the two decades since, I’ve come to realize that stories of individual and black collective experience can be narrated through quilts” (p. 1). Just as the arpilleras tell an important story, so do quilts. While the story they tell, and the manner in which they tell it, are different, there are enough similarities to make the comparison of quilts and arpilleras an interesting area to consider. As so many teachers already cover content areas like slavery, the Underground Railroad, and the Civil Rights Movement where a study of quilting could easily be included, a comparison study of the two art forms offers a way to bring in the story of the arpilleras.

## What is a Quilt?

In order to begin a comparison, students must first have a definition of both art forms. Arpilleras are defined in the preceding pages. The following definition of a quilt comes from Susan Meeske’s “Quilt Me a Story” which is

available at <http://comminfo.rutgers.edu/professionaldevelopment/childlit/books/MEESKE.pdf> . Meeske's piece offers simple and straightforward background information on quilts that could even be used as supplementary reading with students.

Meeske writes, "A quilt is comprised of three layers. The top is either pieces of fabric stitched together to form a pattern or it is a solid piece of fabric. The center of a quilt contains batting or filler. . .The final layer of a quilt is the backing. This is usually a solid piece of fabric, but some quilts do have pieced backings."

## Quilting as Constructed Stories

While quilting certainly isn't limited to African American women in the United States, that is our primary interest here, as the role of quilting in this community has significant similarities to the role of arpilleras in Chile. There are a number of easily accessible and informative resources on quilting available. Listed below are the resources used to put much of the following information together. Where possible, they have been linked to their online location.

- Fry, Gladys-Marie. (1990). *Stitched from the Soul: Slave Quilts from the Ante-Bellum South*. New York: Dutton.
- Meeske, Susan. "Quilt Me a Story."  
Found at <http://comminfo.rutgers.edu/professional-development/childlit/books/MEESKE.pdf>
- Susurro, Potente. (2009). "BHM: African American Women Quilters as Herstorians and Keepers of Our Dreams."  
Found at <http://likeawhisper.wordpress.com/2009/02/25/bhm-african-american-women-quilters-as-herstorians-and-keepers-of-our-dreams/>
- Turner, Patricia. (2009). *Crafted Lives: Stories and Studies of African American Quilters*. Jackson: University Press of Mississippi.

While quilting in Africa was largely done by men, in North America it was done mainly by women. As slaves, African American women were charged with sewing, mending, and other textile work as part of household chores. Often they used discarded fabric or rags to piece together blankets for the colder months. In her book *Stitched from the Soul: Slave Quilts from the Ante-Bellum South*, Fry discusses both the art and the freedom or autonomy represented by these quilts. Meeske discusses the importance of the quilting bees that allowed slaves to gather without being watched by their owners.

Quilting was significant for women in a number of ways. Susurro provides an excellent discussion of the importance of quilting for African American women in her blog post, "BHM: African American Women Quilters

as Herstorians and Keepers of Our Dreams.” Through her discussion, the similarities between the roles of both arpilleras and quilting for women become quite obvious.

She writes:

*Women quilters used the symbols above as well as innovations in the form developed in the colonies, to mark down the history of their families and their struggles. They were the first African American historians and their stories were invaluable at a time in which slaves were denied literacy and colonials did not care to mark their lives except in terms of ledgers and occasional notes. Despite the fact that the WPA Slave Narratives included references to the importance of quilts (for income) and later collection as art by primarily white female collectors/educators, it was most often slave ledgers and white slave and plantation owners letters and diaries that early historians went to when writing our lives back into the historical record.*

*Women also used quilts to protect their families and their homes. Often words or symbols for protection were woven into quilts, particularly those that hung over doors or were meant to cover children.*

*Both before and after slavery, quilting provided African American women with homosocial bonds. As one of the modern quilters from the Pacific Northwest African American Quilters organization argues, quilting bees allowed African American women with limited funds an opportunity to come together and socialize after church or in the evenings with very little economic investment. . .It is also true that quilting bees have always proliferated in working class and subsistence level communities among both white and black women.*

*The same interviewee argued that quilting also helped secure bonds between black women in the same community through “sister quilts.” Sister quilts were done by the quilting bee to mark key rites of passage, 50th birthdays, graduations, births of children, etc., and were presented to the group member only when completed. The key elements of these quilts were a combination of personal aesthetics of the recipient and memorialized oral history of her life and/or connecting her life to larger African and African American themes. Though these quilts may have different names in other parts of the country, they are common. In my own life, my grandmother made “sister quilts” for the women in our community and in our family and when my closest friend had her first child, the first thing I thought to do was ensure she had a quilt whose symbols reflected our shared African and African American pasts as well as hopes for the baby’s future. The quilt maker who helped me put it together was absolutely familiar with the form, though she had not made one for a newborn before.*

*The tradition of quilting was passed on along gendered lines as well. Women learned quilting from each other including white women teaching black women during slavery, black women teaching white women especially in antebellum, and especially women passing the knowledge down from generation to generation. Most modern quilters site their mothers’ or grandmothers’ work as an inspiration for becoming quilters.*



*One of the most obvious connections between the role of African American quilts and arpilleras may seem to be the use of quilts as part of the Underground Railroad. Yet, this is a controversial subject that has been hotly debated within the quilting community, especially among quilting historians. Many argue that the idea that a Quilt Code was used to help direct runaway slaves is merely a myth. Again, I'm going to defer to Susurro's discussion of this debate. Not only does she explain the controversy, but she also shows how, regardless of the truth of the Quilt Code, it's now an important part of the dialogue.*

Susurro writes:

*There has been much controversy over whether or not quilts symbols were used along the Underground Railroad. There are two major proponents of the theory, Gladys-Marie Fry's book *Stitched from the Soul* and Tobin and Dobard's *Hidden in Plain View*. Fry's book argued that the color black meant refuge, triangles indicated prayer, etc. but offers no substantial citations for her deductions. Tobin's book is based on the report of an African American quilter who remembered a history of using quilt patterns as a way to escape slavery; according to some, the quilter was hounded by Tobin for "meaning in her quilts" and by others that her "quilt code" was given freely. This matters b/c it goes to the credibility of the account and the role of informant as possible trickster; unfortunately, Tobin's source died before the book went to print. The patterns in question. . .include "Bear's Paw" to follow animal tracks north through the Appalachians, "Flying Geese" as other escapees, "Drunkard's Path" is the erratic route, and other patterns meaning wheels, cabins, crossroads, etc. There were also symbols in the stitching and tying of quilts. There were no actual quilts made just the memorization of pre-existing quilt patterns as a remembered road map to freedom. Tobin and Dobard argue that this symbolic language would be in keeping with other maps to freedom like "negro" spirituals. Despite criticism from quilt historians about the utter lack of textile evidence for such a story, Tobin and Dobard remind that slaves did not make, carry, or look for quilts but rather memorized quilt patterns.*

*The dispute seems to stem largely from a lack of evidence in the textiles themselves, pattern dating that precludes certain pattern use, and leaps of logic that do not leave room for existing ambiguities in the known record. (see link for a list of historian and quilter criticisms of the quilt code here – scroll past the yellow block text to the actual documented piece) Others have argued that the confusion comes from popular names for patterns like the "under ground railroad pattern". . . Names related to slavery and freedom cropped up in antebellum and may have fused with oral histories of escape to create a "quilt code" after the fact. There are also stories of Tubman giving a quilt to an abolitionist, though no mention of a quilt code. Also fictional accounts of the quilt code were published in both children's and young adult literature, and some historians have argued that people wanting to make money manipulated the fiction(s) to turn them into fact.*

*What is important for this post is that regardless of whether these symbols were actually used in the railroad, they have become a part of modern symbolic language among some African American quilters. In the modern version, these elements are used to tell the story of escape to freedom, in quilts honoring Tub-*

*man, or as border art in quilts connecting our past to our present. In this way, they serve a new purpose that can be deconstructed through the quilt code but do not necessarily have to reflect an actual historical reality or worse “exotica” for capitalist gain. Instead they can be seen as reterritorialization from a largely white imaginary of black quilting forms into one of African American storytelling, like the Penny Sisto quilt to the right that frames Tubman with the supposed symbol for safe house. As elements of modern herstory technique they remain significant and need to be recognizable to those analyzing quilt content.*

Despite (or maybe because of) the controversy, the idea of the Quilt Code can be a powerful lesson for our students. A number of children’s books have been written about the Quilt Code, and it’s a valuable discussion for the classroom. In examining the arguments for or against the reality of a Quilt Code students can learn how historians study and examine the past to come to conclusions about what is historical reality. Even beyond this, it’s important for students to consider why or how historical myths come to be presented as truth, and why they become so powerful.

Below are listed various books and lesson plans for teaching about the connection between quilting and the Underground Railroad. Keeping in mind the controversy surrounding this topic, it will be up to you how you present the information provided in the books and lessons to your students.

## Supplementary Resources

- Grady, Cynthia. (2012). *I Lay My Stitches Down: Poems of American Slavery*. Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdman’s Books for Young Readers.
- Hopkinson, Deborah (1993). *Sweet Clara and the Freedom Quilt*. New York: Scholastic.
- Hopkinson, Deborah (2001). *Under the Quilt of Night*. New York: Atheneum Books.
- Vaughan, Marcie (2005). *The Secret to Freedom*. New York: Lee & Low Books.

## RELATED LESSON PLANS

- Mathwire.com has a number of lesson ideas and resources related to the Freedom Quilts and their mathematical patterns. These can be found at <http://mathwire.com/quilts/quilts.html>
- Really Good Stuff provides a number of ideas for how to teach about the connection between the Underground Railroad and the Quilt Code. Students study the Underground Railroad by learning about the quilts—and the secret escape codes quilters stitched into them to guide their people to freedom. Included here are a number of templates that can be used to teach various quilting patterns. Lessons and resources can be found at <http://page.reallygoodstuff.com/pdfs/154227.pdf>
- ReadWriteThink has a lesson plan for using Sweet Clara and the Freedom Quilt in the classroom. This can be found at <http://www.readwritethink.org/classroom-resources/lesson-plans/escaping-slavery-sweet-clara-127.html>
- At <http://ses.westport.k12.ct.us/squire/idivsquares.htm> find pictures and explanations of the Quilt Code Squares.

## Procedure

In the earlier pages of this guide we shared an activity based upon Marjorie Agosín's poem "The Arpillerista."

This activity is expanded upon through the comparative poetry lesson below. For this approach, we've included another poem, "Basket," taken from *I Lay My Stitches Down: Poems of American Slavery*, a book written by Cynthia Grady and illustrated by Michele Wood.

Through analyzing the two poems, students gain knowledge both in literary analysis and historical content. In comparing the two poems for similarities and differences, students deepen their knowledge of these two historical periods and art forms. Some background knowledge of the two contexts will be necessary for students to complete the analysis.

Suggested questions for analysis include:

1. What symbols are included in both poems?
2. How does sewing become a form of resistance in each poem?
3. In each poem, the arpillera or the quilt represents a way to tell the artist's story or history, to connect them to her past. How does each author communicate this?
4. How does the practice of creating the art (the arpillera or quilt) help the artist to heal or feel better about their situation?

## The Arpillerista

The arpillerista,  
artisan of remains  
burns with rage and cold  
as she tenderly  
picks through the remnants of her dead,  
salvages the shroud of her husband  
the trousers left after the absences  
submerges herself in cloth of foaming, silent blood  
and though she is fragile she grows large,  
sovereign over her adobe hut,  
her ragged scraps  
and determined to tell her story  
truer than the tale woven by her sister Philomena.  
Disruptive and beautiful she  
puts together her flayed remnants  
like a greenish forgotten skin  
and with her disguised thimble  
hidden in the pocket of her modest apron  
and her harmless needle  
she conjures up victorious armies  
embroiders humble people smiling, become triumphant  
brings the dead back to life  
fabricates water, bell towers, schools, dining rooms  
giant suns  
and the Cordillera of the Andes  
peaks opening like portals  
of this splendid city.

---

Marjorie Agosín  
*Scraps of Life*

## Basket

Each night I take my patches, blocks, and scraps  
of fabric from the basket by the chair;  
my thimble, thread and needle comfort me.  
I lay my stitches down and troubles fall  
away. Before too long, I'm breathing with the  
rhythm of my quilting—listening  
wide with every fiber of my soul:  
the praise songs of my people; voices of  
my kin; drumbeats of my motherland form  
the threads that weave the fabric of my life.

—

Cynthia Grady  
*I Lay My Stitches Down*

# Curriculum: Creating an Arpillera

## Overview

In this lesson, students identify a social issue either in contemporary global society or within a specific historical period and then design and create an arpillera which comments on or illustrates that issue.

## Materials

- Fabric (felt is recommended), embroidery thread, needles, scissors
- Optional: safety pins or straight pins, beads, found objects, sewing thread
- Adaptation: for younger students, provide pre-cut shapes (circles, rectangles, squares, triangles) to speed design and construction process

## Procedure

1. To prepare students for the main activity, brainstorm social issues which are relevant to the time period and/or country being addressed. Brainstorming can happen in large or small groups. Record this list on the board.
2. Ask each student to choose a social issue to illustrate through simple pictorial representation with a minimal amount of text. Encourage or require students to draft their design using paper and pencil before moving to fabric.
3. Suggestion: Ask students to submit their design before providing instruction on stitches and arpillera construction. Consider allowing students to work in small groups to provide each other feedback on designs before moving to fabric.
4. Provide students with fabric scraps to learn and practice stitches before moving to their arpillera construction. Teach students three basic stitches using embroidery thread: outline and stem stitch, blanket stitch, and satin stitch. In the pages following, we have provided tutorials for how to do each stitch type.
5. Discuss how each element/figure in quilting and textile work is usually created by using smaller geometric shapes. See the following pages for photographs of sample classroom arpilleras and an illustration of this concept.



6. Provide each student with a large piece of fabric (approximately 9 in x 12 in) and an assortment of smaller pieces of fabric to create their illustration through fabric. Ask students to completely create and assemble their arpillera in pieces before beginning any stitching! Allow sufficient time for students to assemble and embellish their arpilleras either during class time or as homework.
7. Suggested: Ask students to write a short narrative description about their completed arpillera. As an extension, also ask students to write three short narrative descriptions about the arpilleras of other classmates.

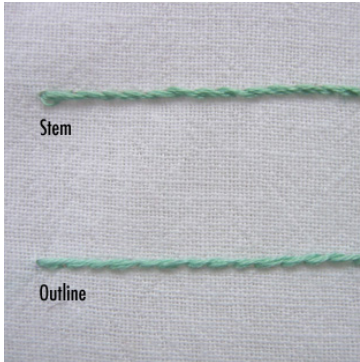




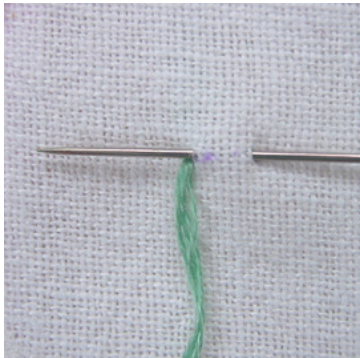


## Stitching Tutorials: Outline and Stem Stitches

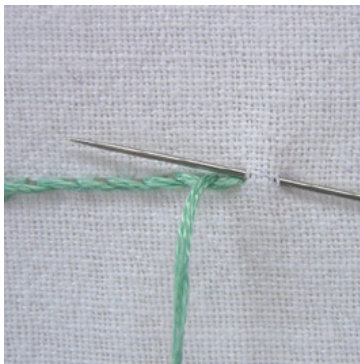
Reprinted from the “Stitch School” blog ([stitchschool.blogspot.com](http://stitchschool.blogspot.com)) with permission from Janet McCaffrey. Visit the website directly to see the images in larger scale and to browse additional tutorials.



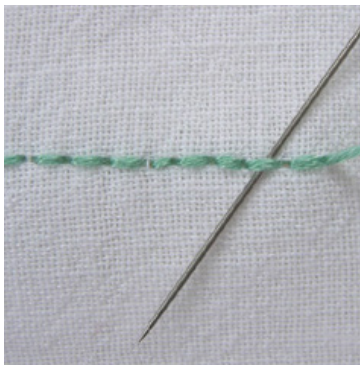
Both outline and stem stitches used primarily for (you guessed it) stems and outlining and they are very similar in how they are worked. For stem stitch the thread is always kept below the needle; for outline it's always kept above. They look pretty similar when completed, too.



To work the stem stitch bring the thread to the front at the left edge of your drawn line. With the thread below your needle, take the needle to the back about  $\frac{1}{4}$  inch to the right and re-emerge at the point where your thread began.



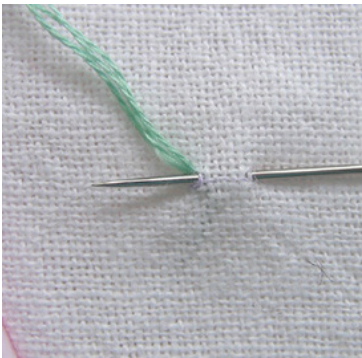
Pull the thread through. Repeat and continue along the line, keeping the tension even and the stitches the same length. Stitches that are close together make a tight line, ones that are farther away make a looser line.



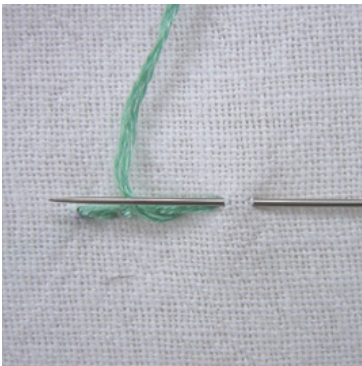
When you come to the end of the line, take the thread to the back for the last stitch but don't re-emerge. Secure the thread with tiny back stitches or weave it back through the line before clipping any excess thread. On both of these stitches you'll see an even row of backstitch on the wrong side of the material.



And this is how it looks when finished.



For the outline stitch, do the same thing but keep the thread above the needle.

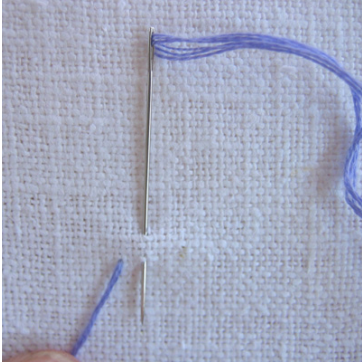


This is how it looks when finished:

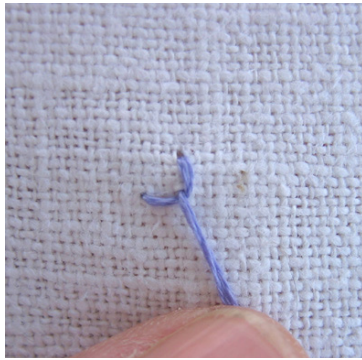


## Stitching Tutorials: Blanket Stitch

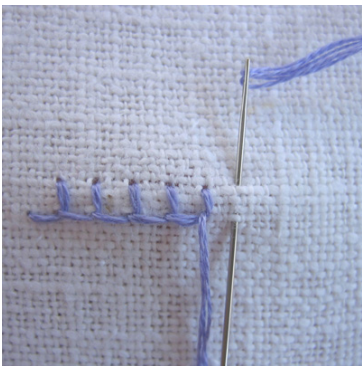
Reprinted from the “Stitch School” blog ([stitchschool.blogspot.com](http://stitchschool.blogspot.com)) with permission from Janet McCaffrey. Visit the website directly to see the images in larger scale and to browse additional tutorials.



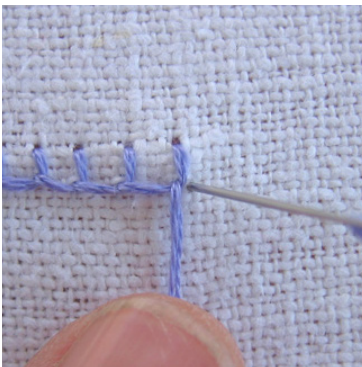
To start bring your thread to the front. Take the needle to the back about  $\frac{1}{4}$  inch away (diagonally) and come down so the stitch is aligned along the bottom.



Making sure your thread loops under the needle, pull it through until it lies tightly against the emerging thread.



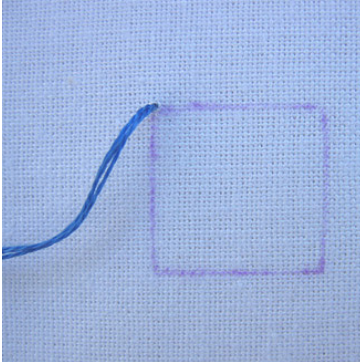
Take the needle to the back again and emerge  $\frac{1}{4}$  inch away from the first stitch. Continue along until you've reached your desired length. You'll see that each new stitch secures and holds the loop of the previous stitch.



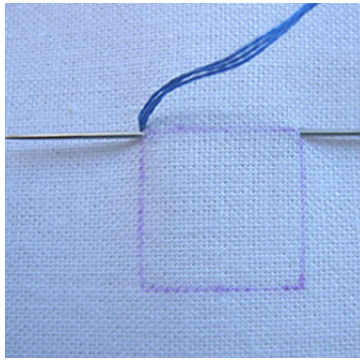
To finish, take a small stitch to the back to secure the last loop.

## Stitching Tutorials: Satin Stitch

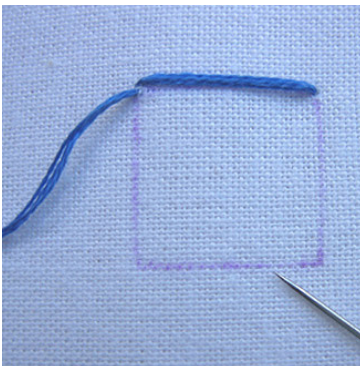
Reprinted from the “Stitch School” blog ([stitchschool.blogspot.com](http://stitchschool.blogspot.com)) with permission from Janet McCaffrey. Visit the website directly to see the images in larger scale and to browse additional tutorials.



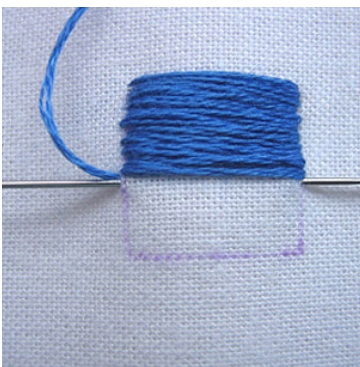
There are actually a couple of ways to work satin stitch. This is the simplest approach. To do it this way you'll need a clearly-defined shape drawn onto your fabric. I'm using a square but it can be any shape you like. Bring your needle to the front at a corner of your shape.



Take your needle down at the opposite corner, then up again right next to where your needle first emerged.



Pull the thread through making sure your floss lays flat.



Placing your stitches close together, continue along until your shape is filled. Follow the exact guidelines you've drawn for a smooth, even edge. This is actually pretty hard to achieve so I'm looking forward to trying the outlining technique.



When you're finished filling the shape, hide your ending thread behind the shape by weaving it in under the threads on the back. You'll notice that the back looks very much like the front.



# Supplementary Resources

## Books

While the majority of the following books do not speak directly to the Pinochet dictatorship or the arpillera art form, they all focus on Chile in on manner or another. There are a variety of genres represented, from folktales and fiction to non-fiction. They are grouped according to reading level.

### *A Hen, a Chick, and a String Guitar*

by Margaret Read McDonald. Ages 2 and up

Inspired by a Chilean folktale, this rollicking chant-along tale is a delight for young children. “Grandma gave me a clucking white hen. Cluck! Cluck! Cluck! Cluck! Cluck! ... One day that hen gave me a chick! I had a hen. And I had a chick. Ay! Ay! Ay! Ay! Ay! How I loved my two little pets.” As the animals arrive two by two, the story adds them up...ending with 16 pets! Thus a counting/adding book, a baby animal names book, and a just plain fun to chant story. Includes a CD composed, sung and played on guitar by Bob King.

### *Land of the Wild Llama: A Story of Patagonian Andes*

by Audrey M. Fraggalosch. Ages 4 and up

Among the windy peaks of the Andes Mountains in Chilean Patagonia, herds of guanaco, wild ancestors of the domesticated llama, make their home. In spring, a newborn guanaco is born.

### *The Day the Stones Walked*

by TA Barron and William Low. Ages 4 and up

Pico’s father isn’t like the other fathers on Easter Island. Instead of building boats or hunting octopus, he sculpts the giant stone figures that he believes, in times of trouble, will rise and walk. Impossible, thinks Pico, until the Great Wave crashes into the island and Pico experiences firsthand the wonder of the stones. In this stunning tale of faith and the humbling power of nature, T. A. Barron and William Low envision life as it might have been on the mysterious Easter Island . . . before the stones became the island’s only inhabitants.

*My Name is Gabriel/Me Llamo Gabriela: The Life of Gabriela Mistral/La vida de Gabriela Mistral*

by Monica Brown | Ages 4 and up.

Gabriela Mistral loved words and sounds and stories. Born in Chile, she would grow to become the first Nobel Prize-winning Latina woman in the world. As a poet and a teacher, she inspired children across many countries to let their voices be heard. This beautifully crafted story, where words literally come to life, is told with the rhythm and melody of a poem. The second in Luna Rising's bilingual storybook biography series. *My Name is Gabriela/Me Llamo Gabriela* is beautiful tribute to a woman who taught us the power of words and the importance of following our dreams. The story of Gabriela Mistral will continue to inspire children everywhere.

*Mariana and the Merchild: A Folk Tale from Chile*

by Caroline Pitcher. Ages 5 and up

Old Mariana longs for friendship, but she is feared by the village children and fearful of the hungry sea-wolves that hide in the sea-caves near her hut. When one day Marianna finds a Merchild inside a crab shell her whole life changes- but she knows that one day, when the sea is calm again, the Merchild's mother will come to take her back. A memorable story of unconditional love, this poetic retelling of a traditional South American folk tale beautifully conveys the joy that may come if you open your heart to what you cannot keep.

*A Pen Pal for Max*

by Gloria Rand and Ted Rand. Ages 5 and up

Max doesn't know what to expect when he slips a note into a box of grapes headed to the United States, so he is thrilled when he receives a response from a girl named Maggie. The two quickly become pen pals. Then one day Max's village in Chile is hit by a huge earthquake, and his school must be closed because of damages. When the school finally reopens, a surprise is waiting for Max from his faraway friends.

*Pablo Neruda: Poet of the People*

by Monica Brown. Ages 6 and up

Once there was a little boy named Neftalí who loved wild things wildly and quiet things quietly. From the moment he could talk, he surrounded himself with words. Neftalí discovered the magic between the pages of books. When he was sixteen, he began publishing his poems as Pablo Neruda. Pablo wrote poems about the things he loved—things made by his friends in the café, things found at the marketplace, and things he saw in nature. He wrote about the people of Chile and their stories of struggle. Because above all things and above all words, Pablo Neruda loved people.

*To Go Singing Through the World: The Childhood of Pablo Neruda*

by Deborah Kogan Ray | Ages 8 and up

Pablo Neruda grew up in the rough and wild frontier town of Temuco, Chile. His father was a railroad man and not inclined to draw out the introspective boy. However, his stepmother, descended from the Mapuche people, was gentle and nurturing and told him stories of Chile's native people. But in her husband's presence, she was as silent as Pablo. So the child found refuge in nature and in books. And secretly he wrote down his thoughts. With the encouragement of Gabriela Mistral, an award-winning poet, teacher, and friend, Neruda's writing grew resonant and powerful. At age sixteen he left Temuco for the university in Santiago and went on to become the "people's poet" and to win the Nobel Prize in Literature.

*The Story of the Seagull and the Cat Who Taught Her to Fly*

by Luis Sepulveda. Ages 8 and up

It's migration time and as a mother gull dives into the water to catch a herring she's caught in an oil slick! Thinking of the egg she is about to lay she manages to extract herself and fly to the nearest port. Exhausted, she lands on a balcony where Zorba the cat is sunning himself. Zorba wants to get help, but the gull knows it's too late and she extracts three promises from him: 1) That he won't eat the egg, 2) that he'll take care of the chick until it hatches, and 3) that he'll teach it to fly. Well the first two are hard enough, but the third one is surely impossible. Isn't it?

*Trapped: How the World Rescued 33 Miners from 2,000 Feet Below the Chilean Desert*

by Marc Aronson | Ages 10 and up

In early August 2010, the unthinkable happened when a mine collapsed in Copiapó, Chile, and 33 miners were trapped 2,000 feet below the surface. For sixty-nine days they lived on meager resources and increasingly poor air quality. When they were finally rescued, the world watched with rapt attention and rejoiced in the amazing spirit and determination of the miners. What could have been a terrible tragedy became an amazing story of survival. Now, with exclusive interviews with rescuers and expert commentary, Marc Aronson brings us the backstory behind this incredible event. By tracing the psychological, physical, and environmental factors surrounding the rescue, *Trapped* highlights the amazing technology and helping hands that made it all possible. From the Argentinean soccer players who hoped to raise morale, to NASA volunteering their expertise to come up with a plan, there was no shortage of enterprising spirit when it came to saving lives.

*The Dreamer*

by Pam Munoz Ryan. Ages 10 and up

From the time he is a young boy, Neftali hears the call of a mysterious voice. He knows he must follow it—even when the neighborhood children taunt him, and when his harsh, authoritarian father ridicules him,

and when he doubts himself. It leads him under the canopy of the lush rain forest, into the fearsome sea, and through the persistent Chilean rain, until finally, he discovers its source. Combining elements of magical realism with biography, poetry, literary fiction, and sensorial, transporting illustrations, Pam Muñoz Ryan and Peter Sís take readers on a rare journey of the heart and imagination.

### *Gringolandia*

by Lynn Miller Lachman. Ages 14 and up

Daniel's papá, Marcelo, used to play soccer, dance the cueca, and drive his kids to school in a beat-up green taxi—all while publishing an underground newspaper that exposed Chile's military regime. After papá's arrest in 1980, Daniel's family fled to the United States. Now Daniel has a new life, playing guitar in a rock band and dating Courtney, a minister's daughter. He hopes to become a US citizen as soon as he turns eighteen. When Daniel's father is released and rejoins his family, they see what five years of prison and torture have done to him. Marcelo is partially paralyzed, haunted by nightmares, and bitter about being exiled to "Gringolandia." Daniel worries that Courtney's scheme to start a bilingual human rights newspaper will rake up papá's past and drive him further into alcohol abuse and self-destruction. Daniel dreams of a real father-son relationship, but he may have to give up everything simply to save his papá's life. This powerful coming-of-age story portrays an immigrant teen's struggle to reach his tortured father and find his place in the world.

## **Films**

The following films can be used in parts or their entirety to teach about different facets of Chilean history and society.

### *The Official Story*

Rated R. In Spanish with English subtitles

This film takes place in Argentina, but tells a story similar to what many experienced in Chile during the Pinochet dictatorship. An Argentine teacher lives in blissful ignorance of the evils perpetrated by her country's government. Over time, however, her students' rejection of the "official" versions of their history leads her to question things herself. Suspecting that her adopted daughter may have been the child of a murdered political prisoner, she attempts to unearth the truth. But her investigation reveals levels of political corruption so abhorrent that the illusions of her past life are irrevocably shattered.

### *Missing*

Rated PG. In English

The peril facing a lone American amid Third World political turmoil is elegantly communicated in this important film from Costa-Gavras (*Z*), adapted by the director and Donald Stewart from Thomas Hauser's

nonfiction book. The key to its power onscreen stems from the decision not to center the action merely on the disappearance of Charles Horman (John Shea), but also on the search for him by his father Ed (Jack Lemmon)--and on Ed's discovery of a son he never knew. The Oscar-winning script flows freely between that search and Charles's earlier experiences in the unnamed country (in the true account, Chile). Providing a link between those two stories is Charles's wife Beth (Sissy Spacek), who follows her father-in-law around a country in chaos, teeming with reckless authority and disinterested American diplomats (epitomized by ace character actor David Clennon). The film, which was nominated for a Best Picture Oscar and won the Cannes Film Festival's top prize, is certainly manipulative, but it works because of its finely detailed human elements. Usually emotionally extroverted, Lemmon gives one of his finest performances playing against that type--here, he's a controlled, intellectual man who learns more about his son, and his country, than he ever dreamed he would. --Doug Thomas

### *Death and the Maiden*

Rated R. In English

Roman Polanski's film adaptation of Ariel Dorfman's stunning play about the legacy of torture has more in common with the director's first film, *Knife in the Water* (with all the latter's unnerving ambiguities about power, sexual transgression, and confused alliances among three people) than a straightforward political parable. Sigourney Weaver (a bit underwhelming in this role, but good overall) plays a former political prisoner in an unnamed South American country that has gone democratic. She is married to a government official (fine work by Stuart Wilson) heading up official inquiries into the practice of torture under the former regime. Still shattered by her experience, Weaver's character seeks safe haven in closets of the cliff-top house she shares with her husband. But when the latter comes home in the company of a seemingly nice fellow (a brilliant Ben Kingsley), she believes she recognizes the stranger as the interrogator who raped her repeatedly in prison. She violently takes him hostage, and what ensues is a hurricane of fury and confusion, as Kingsley's terrified character denies all accusations, Wilson's guilt-ridden spouse can't decide whom to defend, and Weaver turns her psychosexual rage into a weapon of humiliation. Dorfman adapted the screenplay himself, but there's no question that Polanski is leading us down a familiar path of human betrayal and terror that he crossed in such films as *Rosemary's Baby*, *Repulsion*, and *Bitter Moon*. At times stunning in its bluntness and compelling to the last, *Death and the Maiden* literally takes us to the edge of oblivion, where--in Polanski's films--the hardest truths always seem to fall into a heretofore unknown perspective. --Tom Keogh

### *Machuca*

Not Rated. In Spanish with English subtitles

Set in Chile, 1973, this is an astonishingly intimate and painful coming-of-age story about a pair of 12-year-old boys from opposite extremes of society who form an unlikely friendship during the last days of President Allende and the first days of Pinochet. The potent events are accompanied by a searingly beautiful soundtrack with heart-stopping beats that propel the drama of the story.

*El Clavel Negro: The Black Pimpernel*

Rated PG. In Spanish with English subtitles

Santiago, Chile, September 11th, 1973. Allende is overthrown. The film is based on the true life of Swedish ambassador Harald Edelstam (Michael Nyqvist) and his struggle to help Chilean refugees. During the panic after the State Coup, Edelstam fought for human rights, justice, and dignity. What drove him? What price did he have to pay for his total commitment? Haunted by his past, we follow the search of a man's desperate account to find true love again. Saving thousands of people persecuted by the new regime, Edelstam finds himself and his true love, Consuelo (Kate del Castillo).

*Dawson Isla 10*

Not Rated.

After the 1973 coup that deposed Allende and brought Pinochet to power in Chile, the former members of his cabinet are imprisoned on Dawson Island, the world's southernmost concentration camp. Veteran filmmaker Miguel Littin follows the ordeal of these men who are determined to survive and provide history with their testimony. Written by Palm Springs International Film Festival

*Gringuito*

Not Rated. In Spanish with English subtitles

Gringuito is the story of a young child that is uprooted from his New York home and forced to move back to Chile with his parents. He has always lived in New York and feels totally out of place the day his parents settle in to their new apartment in Santiago, Chile. Ivan, the Gringuito, considers his parents' return very disappointing and feels that his mother's pregnancy will also take attention away from him and cause him to lose his "exclusivity". Shortly after moving in, he decides to runaway and gets involved with "El Flaco", who looks after Ivan and for whom he develops a true friendship. Ivan's experiences develop into a young boy's rite of passage and lead him to a poignant encounter with Chile.