

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.

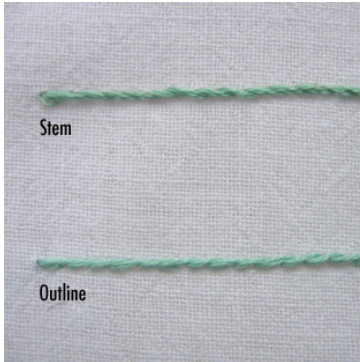
6. Provide each student with a large piece of fabric (approximately 9 in x 12 in) and an assortment of smaller pieces of fabric to create their illustration through fabric. Ask students to completely create and assemble their arpillera in pieces before beginning any stitching! Allow sufficient time for 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.



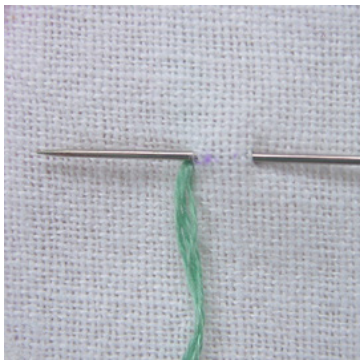


Stitching Tutorials: Outline and Stem Stitches

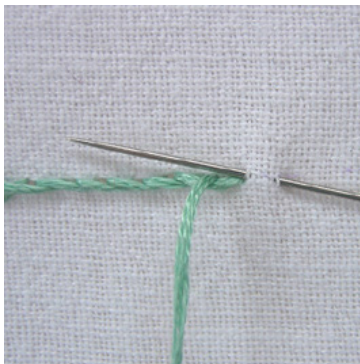
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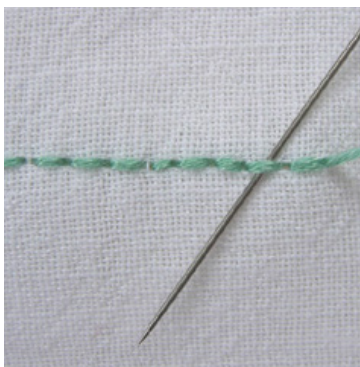
Both outline and stem stitches used primarily for (you guessed it) stems and outlining and they are very similar in how they are worked. For stem stitch the thread is always kept below the needle; for outline it's always kept above. They look pretty similar when completed, too.



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.



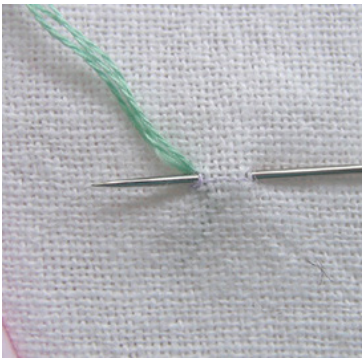
Pull the thread through. Repeat and continue along the line, keeping the tension even and the stitches the same length. Stitches that are close together make a tight line, ones that are farther away make a looser line.



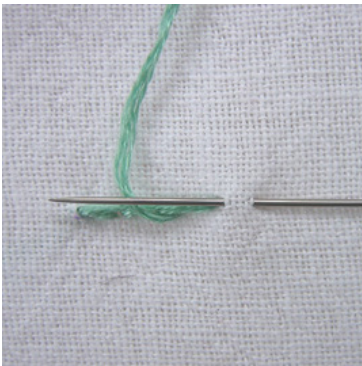
When you come to the end of the line, take the thread to the back for the last stitch but don't re-emerge. Secure the thread with tiny back stitches or weave it back through the line before clipping any excess thread. On both of these stitches you'll see an even row of backstitch on the wrong side of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



And this is how it looks when finished.



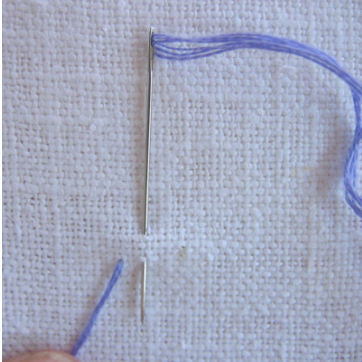
For the outline stitch, do the same thing but keep the thread above the needle.



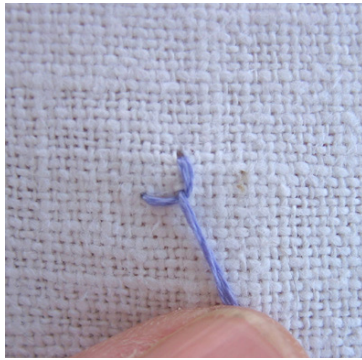
This is how it looks when finished:

Stitching Tutorials: Blanket Stitch

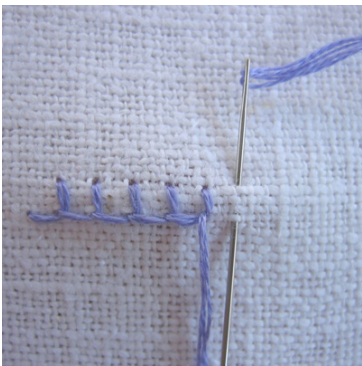
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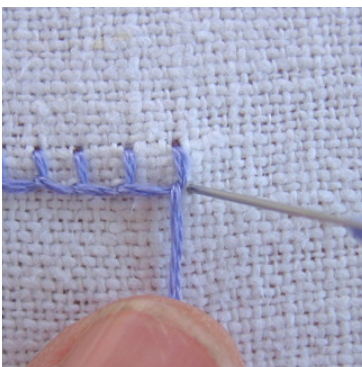
To start bring your thread to the front. Take the needle to the back about $\frac{1}{4}$ inch away (diagonally) and come down so the stitch is aligned along the bottom.



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



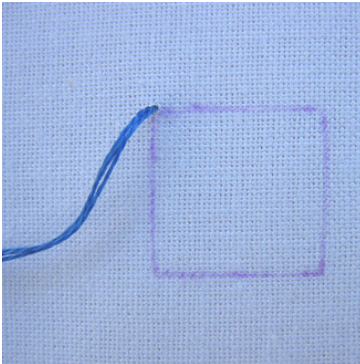
Take the needle to the back again and emerge $\frac{1}{4}$ inch away from the first stitch. Continue along until you've reached your desired length. You'll see that each new stitch secures and holds the loop of the previous stitch.



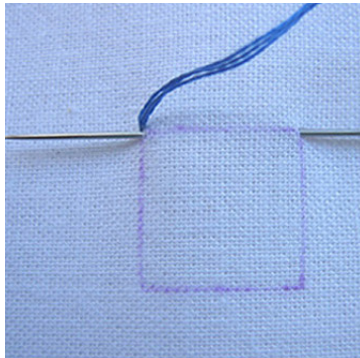
To finish, take a small stitch to the back to secure the last loop.

Stitching Tutorials: Satin Stitch

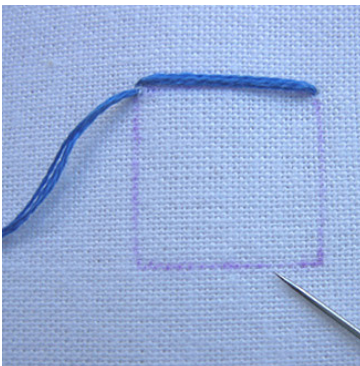
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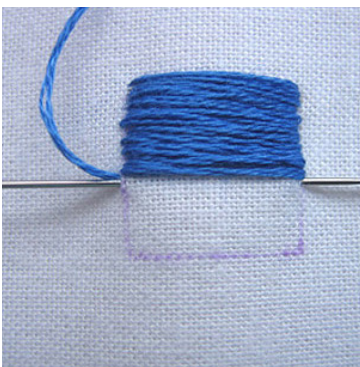
There are actually a couple of ways to work satin stitch. This is the simplest approach. To do it this way you'll need a clearly-defined shape drawn onto your fabric. I'm using a square but it can be any shape you like. Bring your needle to the front at a corner of your shape.



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.