

An Education in Embroidery

Sampler, Anna Bockett

Reading, writing, arithmetic...needlework? In 17th-century England, learning the art of embroidery was considered a core part of a young girl's education. Created to practice different techniques and stitches, embroidery samplers like this one by Anna Bockett highlighted the artist's skill and knowledge of her craft.

At the top of this sampler, Anna—who was just 12 years old when she embroidered it—signed and dated the piece in neatly stitched text. Below her name, a woman enrobed in a peach-colored gown and man with a brown coat and feathered hat stand facing each other. Animals fill the space around them. A dog sits between the two figures, a lion with long claws and small fangs stands to their left, and a unicorn with black hooves and a white horn stands to their right. Cupid, symbolizing love or marriage, floats above them holding a wreath made of leaves, while his bow stays tucked behind his back. Fruit trees and flowers frame the couple on each side, and a horizontal band of stylized animals separates the scene from the rows of patterns that make up the rest of the artwork.

The remainder of the linen sampler further demonstrates Anna's ability to create a variety of different stitches. Threads in shades of green, red, blue, and yellow create flowers, intricate knots, and decorative symbols. During the 17th and 18th centuries, embroidery was considered an important skill, as nearly all textiles were made and decorated by hand. In addition to being used for clothing and accessories, embroidered fabrics also served as decoration for homes.

Classroom Activities

- Embroidery patterns during this time were often inspired by nature, as evidenced by the stylized plants and animals forming many of the rows in Anna's sampler. Ask students to find leaves, flowers, pebbles, and other small natural materials, then challenge them to create a repeating pattern using the objects they collected.
- Invite students to try their hand at embroidery! Using a [safety needle](#), [thread](#), and [fabric](#), felt, or burlap, students can practice different stitches. Teachers can introduce basic techniques such as the running stitch, backstitch, and more found here:

[Learn Embroidery With 32 Helpful Stitch Instructions \(thesprucecrafts.com\)](#)

Once students are comfortable using the needle and thread, challenge them to try making different shapes and patterns.

- To learn more about Anna's sampler, please visit: [metmuseum.org](#)



Anna Bockett. *Sampler*. 1656. Linen worked with silk thread; long-and-short, split, stem, back, tent, cross, and satin stitches. Framed: 30 3/4 x 12 1/4 x 1 1/4 in. (78.1 x 31.1 x 3.2 cm). Unframed: 27 7/8 x 10 3/8 in. (70.8 x 26.4 cm). Lent by The Metropolitan Museum of Art, Gift of Irwin Untermyer, 1964 (64.101.1327)

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