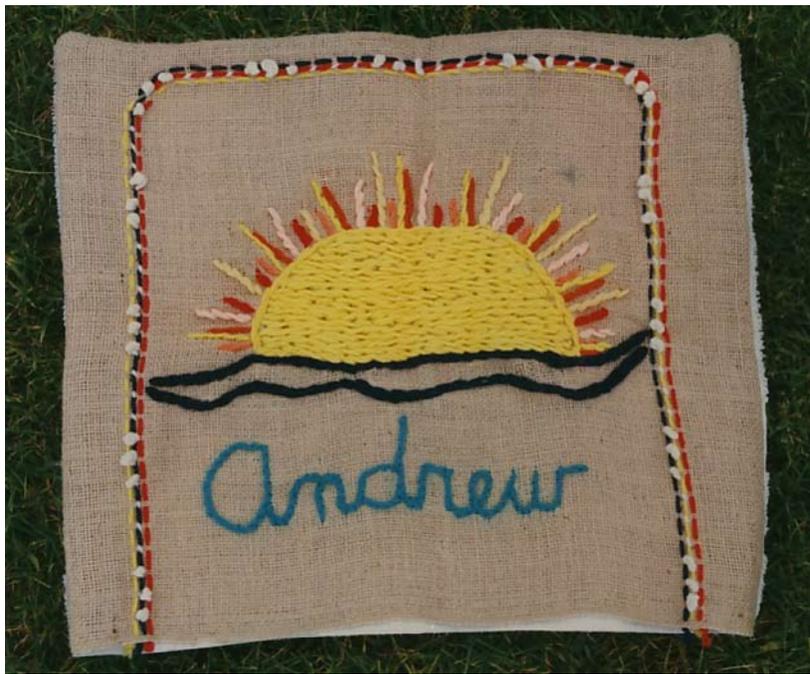


# STITCHERY SEAT COVERS

*A Step-by-Step Guide  
for Creating a Thing of Beauty*



*Stitchery Seat Covers*  
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*Not that we are sufficient of ourselves to think of anything  
as being from ourselves, but our sufficiency comes from God.*  
—II Corinthians 3:5

*A thing of beauty is a joy forever.*

*—John Keats*

# Stitchery Seat Covers

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## Goals for this eBook:

- ✓ Learn what materials you'll need.
- ✓ Learn how to make a running stitch and a French knot.
- ✓ Learn how to make a sampler.
- ✓ Learn how to make and sew seat covers.
- ✓ Develop the skill and knowledge to be able to have your own students complete this project.



Let me show you one of my favorite art projects. It's one I've done for years and has always proven to be a huge hit with students and parents. Because of the experience I've gained, I've been able to work out most of the bugs and have gotten it down to a series of pretty simple steps. In this eBook, I'll pass along the secrets for success so that you and your students can create some chair-covering artwork. And the next time you have your students put their chairs on their desks, your room will look like an art museum instead of a furniture warehouse.



*The margin icon shown to the left is meant to draw your attention to one of those secrets. There are eight of them and are worthy of your attention.*



*There are eight warnings in this eBook that are designed to help you to avoid the problems I've experienced over the years. I'm hoping you can learn from my mistakes.*

## The Sampler

The sampler is a small practice piece your students will make before they attempt to make an actual seat cover. By doing a sampler, they will not only learn the fundamentals of stitching, but will also develop an awareness about the kinds of graphics that can be successfully made with just needle and yarn: simple, bold, and basic being the operative words.

### Sampler Materials

Each student will need:

- ✓ a small piece of burlap, approximately 12" X 12"
- ✓ a steel yarn needle, size 13 (16's are too small)
- ✓ a piece of black yarn
- ✓ a pair of scissors



### A Word About Needles...

Yarn needles are the fat metal kind with a large eye for easy threading. They come two in a pack and sell for \$1.35. You'll need at least 25% more needles than you have students. No matter how well you train them, some students are just going to lose their needles.



*You might want to buy a few plastic needles to use as loaners. Our policy is this: If you lose your needle, you need to pay \$.50 to buy a new one. Until you bring in your money, I'll take a written I.O.U. and allow you to use a plastic loaner. Since no one really likes using the plastic needles, money is quickly brought in to buy a new metal one.*

### Step 1: Tying a Knot

To keep the yarn anchored to the burlap, you're going to need to tie a knot at the end before you make the first stitch. Although you can use a simple overhand knot, it will sometimes slip through the burlap. You can make the knot bigger by tying another overhand knot in the same place, but that's not as easy for students to do as it may sound. We use a Chinese coil knot.



**FIG. 9-1**  
A Chinese coil knot is easy for students to tie and will not slip through the burlap.

Start as if you were making an overhand knot (*far left photo*) and then feed the end through the loop a couple of more times. When you pull it tight, the extra loops will create a knotted coil that will not slip through the burlap.



*Helpful:* This might be a good time to determine some kind of tutoring procedure. Take advantage of those overachievers and put them to work showing the less capable how to do things. The key here is "show." Students needing assistance are sometimes more concerned with getting a task done than learning how to do it. Thus, they sometimes ask the tutor to do the task instead of taking the time to learn it themselves. Encourage tutors to demonstrate slowly and carefully and then observe until satisfied that the task has been mastered.

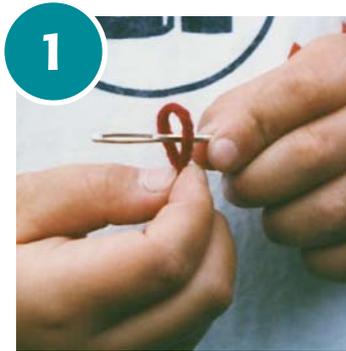
### Step 2: Threading the Needle

Here's one skill the students will really need to have down cold. Since they will be threading their needles a hundred times during the course of this project, it's critical that this skill is properly taught and practiced so that it becomes almost automatic.

It's actually a simple process, but what you'll have to overcome is the conditioning they've had as to how needles are threaded, i.e., lick the thread, line it up with the eye of the needle, and then poke, poke, poke until it goes through.

Although this technique may work with thread, it's a bust when it comes to yarn. Here's a better way.

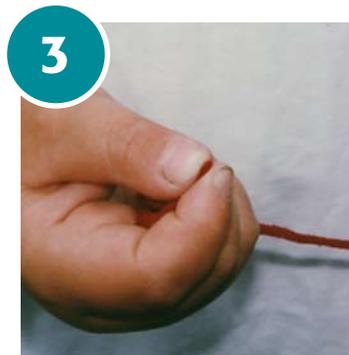
**Fig. 9-2**  
The ability to thread a needle quickly and easily will make the entire project more manageable.



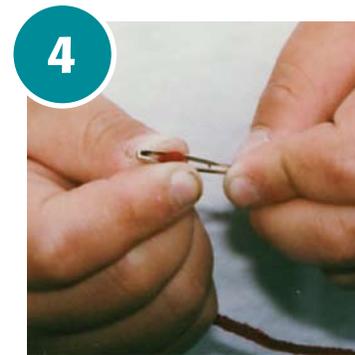
**1**  
*Make a loop with the end of the yarn and hold it between your thumb and first finger. Put the eye of the needle inside the loop.*



**2**  
*Tighten the yarn as you slide your finger and thumb up to the needle. Your fingertips should end up holding the needle and yarn.*



**3**  
*Slide the needle out. Close your finger and thumb so that there is just a bit of the yarn showing between your fingertips.*



**4**  
*With a sawing motion, move the eye of the needle back and forth as you slowly expose the yarn. The yarn will work its way through.*

If you are patient and genuinely willing to reteach threading over and over again to the hard-core underachiever, you should have everyone threading successfully by the end of the first week. The danger in not taking the time to master basic stitchery skills is that some of your students will begin to see the entire stitching project as something to be avoided. Mastery is motivation.

### **A Word About Management...**

Now would probably be as good a time as any to talk about student management. Once they get their hands on the materials and begin stitching, you'll occasionally find yourself struggling to get their attention for additional stitchery instruction as they struggle earnestly to finish that one last stitch. Although it may seem as if they are right there with you, that little deer-in-the-headlights look you're seeing means they're not really listening to you.

All of their collective awareness is centered in their hands as they try to feel their way through another stitch. They're thinking: *I can listen to the teacher and still keep on stitching. I'll just look at her so she thinks I'm really listening.*

What's happening, of course, is they are so consumed by their Braille stitching, that they are missing what you are trying to share.



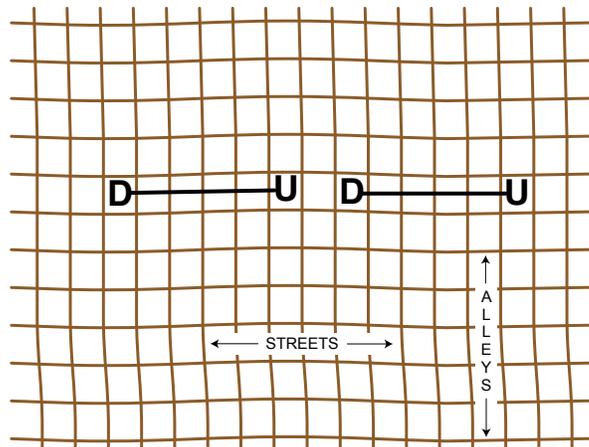
**Fig. 9-3**  
This is actually the sign for "quiet" but we use it to mean: "Put everything down. Let it go."

At this point, I'd use sign language. Since sign language works so well for communicating needs, we made up one for when we're doing stitchery and I need everyone's attention.

It's a simple, peaceful way to get them to let go of the stitchery materials they're still holding so that they can more fully concentrate on the lesson or the point I'm about to make. The other pleasant aspect to the use of a sign is that the students will use it with each other. As they see you make the sign, they'll echo it to their neighbors who have not yet gotten the message. All in all, it helps to keep everyone calm, relaxed, and focused on what you're doing.

### Step 3: Running Stitch

You might want to demonstrate this stitch on the whiteboard before showing them how to do it on the burlap. The whiteboard graphic will provide them with a refresher later on when needed.



**Fig. 9-4**  
A grid drawn on the whiteboard will help your students to visualize how the running stitch is supposed to be made.

1. Start by drawing a grid. The grid will represent what their burlap would look like if it were magnified. Label the horizontal spaces between threads "streets" and the vertical spaces "alleys."
2. Mark a **U** in one of the spaces to indicate where the needle will come up. Now draw a line over five lines, or "burlap threads." Then mark a **D** to show where the needle goes down.
3. Skip two "threads" and repeat this procedure. Reinforce that they will be going over and under, over and under.

After you've shown the concept on the board, gather them around for an actual burlap and yarn demonstration. *Suggestion:* Allow the students who are not visual learners to stand behind you as you demonstrate. This will provide them with the correct point of view for their own stitching.

1. Start by threading your needle and then tying a Chinese coil knot in the end of the yarn.
2. Poke the needle up through the burlap. Pull the yarn until the knot rests against the back side.
3. With the tip of your needle acting as a pointer, count over five threads. Poke the needle through the space between the fifth thread and the sixth. Pull the yarn through.



*Don't pull the yarn too tightly. You want the yarn and the burlap to be tension-free.*

4. Skip over two threads and poke the needle back up through the burlap. Make sure the stitch is staying in the same "street."
5. Keep stitching, saying aloud, "Over five... under two...over five...under two." This little song will really aid your students as they begin their own running stitches.
6. Send them off to work on their own. Ask them to show you their stitching after they have done five running stitches.



### **A Word About Quality...**

Now is a good time to reinforce your expectations of quality. As you check over their first five stitches, take the time to count the threads they've skipped on each stitch.

If, as many of them will, they've skipped over four threads or six threads, went under three threads instead of two, or jumped from one "street" to another, remove the needle from the yarn, reach around to the back side, grasp the knot firmly in your fingers, and pull the yarn from the burlap. This will magically erase their five running stitches. Return the yarn and the sampler material with a smile and a simple, "Over five...under two...over five...under two."

This may seem a bit harsh; nonetheless, if you allow them to be lazy in the quality control of their first attempt, the rest of their stitching and the level of mastery of the subsequent lessons will only get worse. It's a Tough Love thing.

### Step 4: Making a Rectangle

After students have successfully completed their five running stitches, have them continue stitching so that they make a rectangle. The rectangle should fill no more than half of their sampler.

You might want to demonstrate on the board the approximate scale of the rectangle. Also, they'll need a quick visual lesson on how to turn the corner. On the board, show them that when they get to the end of one side of the rectangle, all they need to do is turn their samplers 90° and start stitching down an "alley."



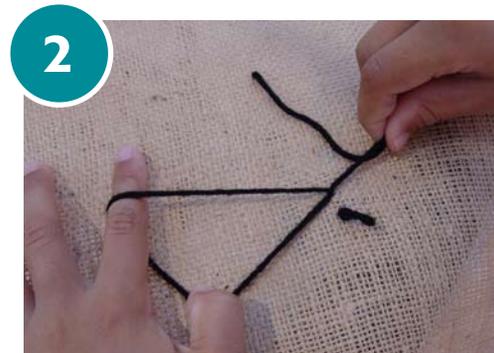
### Step 5: Tying a Knot on the Back of the Burlap

As students finish their rectangles or, more likely, come to the end of the piece of yarn they are using, you'll need to show them the proper technique for tying off the yarn. Experience has shown that without instruction, they will just trim the yarn on the back side and start with a new piece. Before too long, the trimmed piece will work its way through the burlap and be waving at them from the front side. Here's how you tie a backside knot.

**FIG. 9-5** Tying a knot in the yarn on the back of the burlap is not easy for students to grasp at first. Make sure you give them plenty of practice.



*You need at least 6" of yarn to make a knot. First, make a loose overhand knot.*



*Pull the yarn in opposite directions until the yarn sits snugly on the burlap.*



*Hold the knot in place with your thumb and index finger. Pull the yarn to tighten the knot.*



*Repeat this procedure so that you end up with a double-knot. Trim the extra yarn.*

### A Word About Bonus Stitching...

It will take the students anywhere from 15 minutes to 2 days to complete their rectangles. That's just how it goes. In order to keep the overachievers from getting too far ahead of the underachievers, I've taken to using white yarn for "bonus stitching." Students who finish the rectangle are given a piece of white yarn and asked to fill in the gaps in the running stitch. We call this kind of stitch a "fill-in" stitch. Fill-in stitches are especially useful for stitching letters or outlines.

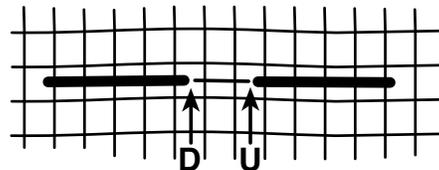
Due to the somewhat competitive nature of most students, you'll find that the white yarn is a status thing that many of them will find irresistible. Thus, they'll be motivated to complete the basic rectangle so that they can do some bonus stitching.



**FIG. 9-6**  
Bonus stitching is easy to do and looks great. It's a real student motivator.

Bonus color used to fill in the gaps of the basic running stitch.

To make a "fill-in" stitch, merely come up at one end of a black stitch and then go down at the beginning of the next black stitch. Make sure the bonus yarn shares the same opening as the black yarn.



### Step 6: Making a Circle

When you feel it's appropriate, introduce them to their second stitching task which is to stitch a circle. The circle will be much more difficult for them to make because they won't be able to follow the neat little streets and alleys they used when they made the rectangle. Also, they won't be able to use their patented "over five...under two" mantra. My suggestion is to use this situation as a hands-on lesson in scale and proportion.

#### MR. MORRIS

*Now then. You won't be able to count threads the way you did when you made the rectangle. So, here's what you should do. Try to make the stitches and the gaps about the same length as the stitching on the rectangle. You can use a ruler or guide to measure, but you should be able "see" how long the stitch needs to be and what a good space in between the stitches should look like. Keep comparing your circle stitches to stitches you used for your rectangle.*

**FIG. 9-7**  
Chalk works better than a pencil because it fades away. A pencil mark is somewhat permanent.



1. Using a piece of chalk draw a circle on your burlap. The chalk line really helps them to maintain that circular shape.
2. Tie a knot in the yarn and start stitching from the back side of the burlap.

3. Using the running stitch, make a complete circle.
4. Tie a double knot on the back side when finished, and trim the extra yarn.
5. Allow early finishers to use white yarn. Suggest they make either a second circle or fill-in the gaps of the first circle.

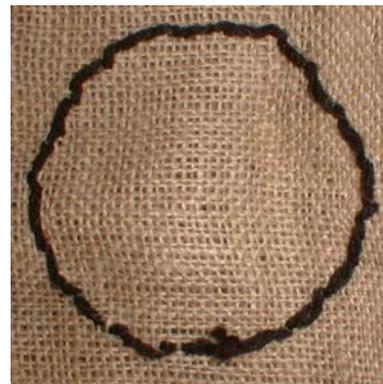


*Be prepared for some rather crude looking circles.*

**FIG. 9-8**  
This over-achiever made a black circle with a white fill and then a white circle with a black fill. That's some sweet stitchin'.



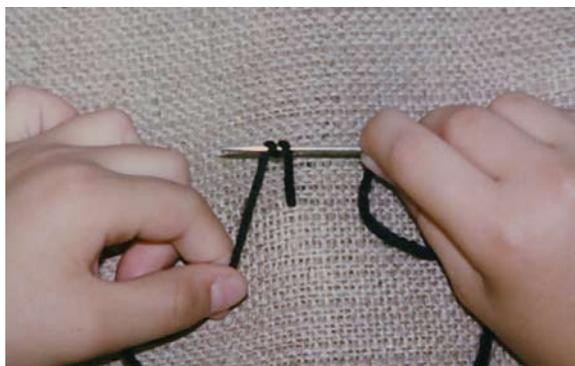
*If the running stitches used to make the circle are pulled too tightly, the burlap inside the circle will form a dome that you won't be able to flatten. Just remind your students to keep things nice and loose.*



### Step 7: French Knots

The only other stitch I teach is the French knot. French knots are tricky at first, but once your students have mastered the technique, they will crank them out by the dozen. French knots will come in very handy when the students work on their seat covers.

1. Tie a knot in a new piece of yarn. Bring the needle up through the back of the burlap. Pull the yarn through until the knot rests against the back side of the burlap.



2. Form a circle with the yarn.
3. With your left hand, grasp the yarn about three inches above the burlap. Hold the needle in your right hand.
4. Wrap the yarn around the tip of the needle two or three times. (The more you wrap, the larger the French knot.)

5. Poke the needle back down through the burlap. Try to go down one space away from where you came up. (If you go back down in the same space, your French knot will get pulled through to the back side and disappear.)
6. Continue holding the yarn with your left hand as you reach around to the back side and pull the needle and yarn through the burlap.



7. You should end up with a fluffy little ball of yarn sitting on the burlap.



After the students have mastered the French knot, have them make 10 of them inside their circles. As with the rectangle and circle, allow students to use white yarn and make even more French knots.

*Ask one of your overachievers to make a number of French knots in a small area. Have the student put them as close to each other as possible. This “bunching” technique makes for a nice three-dimensional textured effect which students will want to apply to their actual seat covers. By having a student make a sample, the others will begin to see the possibilities.*



### **A Word About Extending the Basics...**

As I mentioned on page 1 of this eBook, the sampler should take about two weeks to complete. In that time, just about everyone will have been able to complete the main stitchery tasks:

1. Learn how to tie a Chinese coil knot.
2. Learn how to thread the needle.
3. Learn how to make a running stitch.
4. Make a rectangle using running stitches.
5. Make a circle using running stitches.
6. Learn how to make a French knot.
7. Make ten French knots inside the circle.



Here are a few suggestions for those students who are capable of doing more than the basic requirements and would like to further develop their skills.

### **Names, Initials, or Student Numbers**

Since they are going to need to stitch some kind of identification on their actual seat covers, having early finishers attempt to stitch their names, initials, or student numbers on the sampler is a good way to redirect their energy.



*Use chalk and write the letters—just a couple at a time—on the burlap.*

The best stitch for letters or numbers is a fill-in stitch. The solid line of the fill-in stitch makes it easier to read than the typical running stitch with its gaps.

**FIG. 9-9**

The SH was done using the basic running stitch.

Notice how Ben's name appears to be more "finished" due to the fill-in stitch he used to complete each letter.



*If you know you are going to end up doing a fill-in stitch for letters or numbers, we've found it's best to use a different over-and-under formula for the running stitch. Instead of the standard "over 5...under 2" we use a simpler "over 3...under 3." This makes for a more uniform look to the final stitch.*

### **Border Treatments**

The first stitching task students will be facing on the actual seat cover is the construction of a border. To help avoid the natural tendency of most students to make a simple running stitch border, encourage the early finishers to experiment on border variations.



By combining running stitches, fill-in stitches, and the occasional French knot, students will soon discover that they can create a wealth of border designs.



### Finished Samplers

As I mentioned earlier, two weeks should be sufficient for your students to finish the sampler. Although some of them will do just the bare minimum, others will create works of art. Here are two such examples from the early years when I allowed them to choose the colors they wanted to use for making the sampler.



**FIG. 9-10**  
Two completed samplers showing different levels of effort. Both, though, show mastery of the stitching, knot tying, and needle threading.

*Reality:* The problem with letting them use any color was that some of the students went kind of crazy on the sampler. It became more than just a practice piece in which they learned how to stitch: it became an art project in itself. They ended up expending so much energy on the sampler that they were a bit “stitched out” when it came time to make the seat cover.

*Better:* By restricting them to just two colors—a dark one for the basic stitching and a lighter one for the bonus stitching—I was able to keep them focused on the mechanics of stitching.

Later on, when I released them to use any color they wished on the seat cover, they were energized and excited to do more stitching. The freedom to use new colors proved to be a huge motivator.



## The Seat Cover

Having made a sampler, the students should be well prepared to create a seat cover.



*Think about creating a bulletin board that displays their completed samplers.*

### Seat Cover Materials

Each student will need:

- ✓ a piece of burlap, approximately 24" X 20"
- ✓ a steel yarn needle
- ✓ a pair of scissors
- ✓ a towel which will be sewn to the finished seat cover

Your class will need:

- ✓ chalk
- ✓ an organized supply of yarn



*Check the public library for stitchery books that show sample stitches and design possibilities.*

### Preparing the Burlap

Each seat cover needs to be approximately 24 inches wide and 20 inches deep. Since the roll of burlap is 40 inches wide, you'll be able to split it down the middle and make 2 seat covers for every 24 inches of material.

**FIG. 9-11**  
The selvage is the finished edge of the burlap. Since it won't unravel the way the cut edges will, the selvage is used for the bottom edge of the seat cover.



### Keeping the Yarn Organized

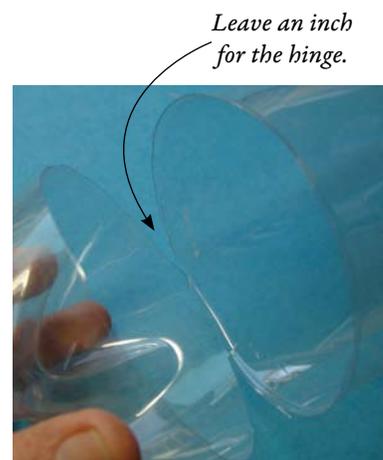
It is critically important that you keep the yarn organized and accessible. If you just toss balls of yarn into a box, you'll soon end up with a big, tangled mess.

Let me show you a slick alternative. It's something I saw in another teacher's classroom and have used for years.



### Yarn Storage Made Easy

1. Wash and dry a two-liter soda bottle.
2. Using a razor blade or utility knife, cut around the base of the bottle. Leave an inch of plastic to act as a hinge.
3. Grab a skein of yarn and locate the end of the yarn that comes from the center of the skein. (This is the end that will allow you to pull yarn freely without it getting tangled. Dig around in one end or the other until you find it.) Pull about a foot yarn from the skein.
4. Hold back the hinged base of the soda bottle and slide the skein inside the bottle so that the end of the skein that feeds the yarn out is at the neck-end of the bottle.
5. With a finger, fish inside the neck of the bottle and pull the yarn through the neck so that it hangs out eight to ten inches.



**Fig. 9-12**  
A two-liter soda bottle is all you need to make a handy yarn dispenser.



6. Place six bottles in the kind of cardboard box in which large bottles of wine are shipped. You can find these at just about any grocery store.



**Fig. 9-13**  
If you tie a pair of scissors near the boxes, you'll make it easier for your students to cut a new piece of yarn.

## Tracing the Chair Back

Students should work with partners for this task.

### If chairs are different types and sizes:

1. Lay the burlap on the floor.
2. Place the student's chair on the burlap so that the selvage, or finished edge of the burlap, is adjacent to the seat.



**FIG. 9-14**  
Working with a partner makes this an easier job to complete.



*If the chair is wider at the top than the bottom, as the example to the left illustrates, make sure that the chalk line stays as wide as the widest part of the chair back. If the sewn seat cover doesn't fit over the widest part of the chair, you will end up with some very disappointed little stitchers.*

3. While one student holds the burlap in place, the other student makes a chalk outline around the back of the chair. (*Note: It's a slippery affair which will take some trial and error on the part of the students. If you have carpeted floors, the task will be much easier.*)
4. Repeat this procedure for the other student's chair.
5. After the partners have chalked both chairs, have them bring both pieces of burlap to you for inspection.



*It is incredibly important to the success of this project that the students have the selvage as the bottom edge. Don't expect them to be able to do this on their own. You will need to check each one. Rechalk the line if necessary.*

### If chairs are all the same:

1. Make a cardboard template for the students to use for tracing.
2. Repeat steps 1 through 5 shown above using the template for the tracing.



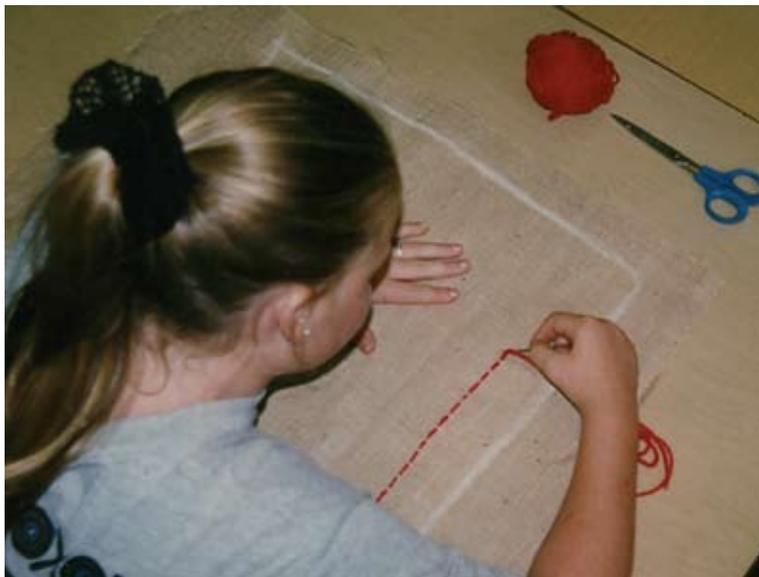
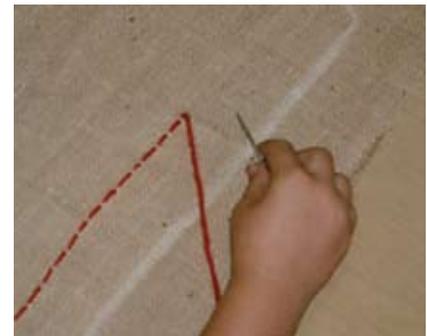


*If your chairs look similar to the one at the right, you need to be careful about your tracing or template making. The problem arises from the fact that the chair back is thicker where it meets the seat. This requires that you allow some extra width in this area or the sewn seat cover won't be able to slide all of the way down the chair back. You might want to use a trash can liner and make a dummy seat cover so that you'll know how wide your template needs to be.*



### **Stitching the Border (Time: One week)**

The first stitching task the students will need to complete for their seat covers is the border. The border should start approximately an inch or so inside the chalk line. (Since the chalk line represents where the seat cover will be sewn to the towel, it is important to allow a margin. Otherwise, the sewing will obscure part of the border.)



**FIG. 9-15**  
The border goes up one side, across the top, and down the other side. The border can also go across the bottom if the student wishes.

Plan on scheduling one week for border stitching, and don't let them do anything else during this week. Working on the border for one week will cause two things to happen.

**Number 1:** The slower stitchers won't be overwhelmed by the fast pace set by the overachievers. It's important to make sure that everyone has a chance to stay with the project and not fall behind.

**Number 2:** Any student who made a simple border in one day will soon figure out that the only thing that can be worked on the first week is the border. So, what do they do? They begin to add to what they made. You'll see them make another row of running stitches or fill in the gaps with a contrasting color. They'll add French knots and create elaborate little corner designs and all kinds of additional touches. And what was once a simple, one-line border will blossom into a thing of beauty.

### Border Designs

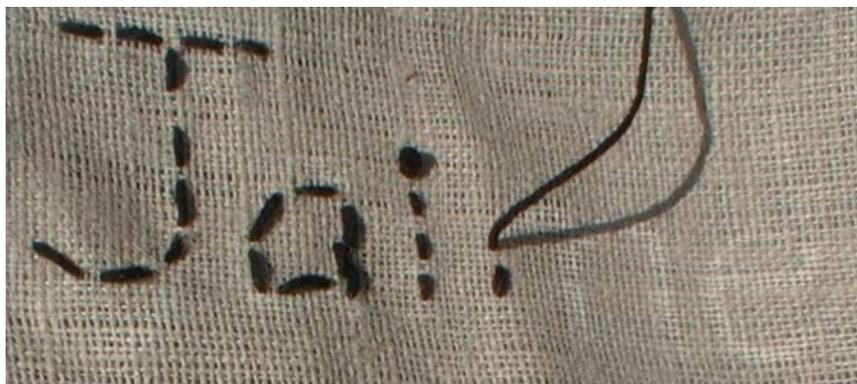
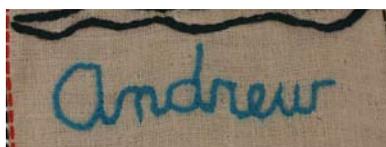
Encourage your students to use a variety of stitch combinations and a range of colors.



*We used colored burlap one year. It didn't showcase the colors the way the natural burlap does.*

### Stitching a Name (Time: One week)

The second week of stitching is devoted to adding names, initials, or student numbers. Names look best if they are made with the fill-in stitch. Also, the letters will not only look better but will be easier to stitch if they are first made in chalk.

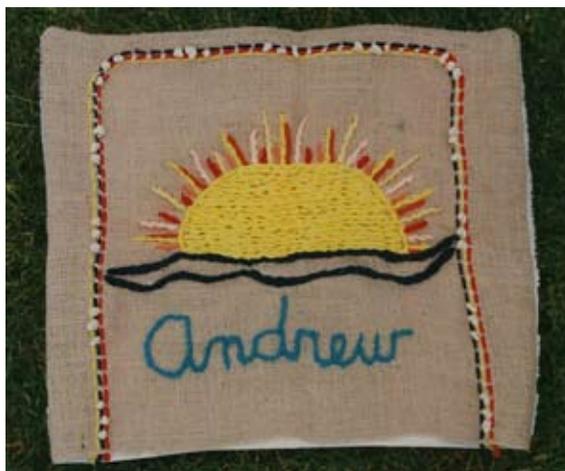


*It doesn't do much good to chalk the whole name. By the time they've finished the first letter or two, the other chalk letters have faded away. I normally chalk just one or two at a time.*

### **Stitching a Design (Time: Two to four weeks)**

The last stitching assignment is the most difficult and time-consuming. It's the creation of the main design. Either the students have done some kind of prior plan and know what they want to do, or they're merely going to fill in the empty spaces with whatever design they feel appropriate.

Regardless of their approach, give them plenty of time to finish. There's no rush now. Impress upon them that the seat cover will be hanging on their chair for the remainder of the year. It will be there for everyone to see. Putting in the extra effort now will be worth it in the long run.



*Since students will be finishing their seat covers at different times, it might be a good idea to announce a date when you will begin to do the sewing. This will help encourage some of the laggards to bear down and get the job done.*

### **Design Extension**

You might want to plan ahead and have your students complete a series of rough draft sketches of their planned seat cover design. This design work is best done during the second week of sampler work. After a week or so of stitching, they'll be more realistic about what level of detail they'll be able to produce. Consequently, you'll see rough drafts that more accurately reflect what's achievable with needle and yarn.

A dramatic bulletin board can be constructed by placing the finished stitchery seat cover next to the original paper design. It makes for a very striking image.

### **A Word About Towels...**

As you already know, each student is going to need a towel in order to produce a finished seat cover. Since it usually takes them a bit of time to bring them in, you'll want to get a head start on the collection. As you begin this final stitching assignment, encourage your students to bring in a towel. (*Note:* A normal towel is large enough to cut in half and thus provide two students with enough material. This will be especially helpful for the half dozen kids who, for whatever reason, won't be able to bring in a towel on their own.)

Have the student write his name on a 3 X 5 index card and staple it to the corner of his towel. Fold it up and put it away until it's time to do the actual sewing.

*One last thought:* Make sure your students are aware of the fact that they should be checking with a parent before grabbing a towel and bringing it to school. I'd hate to cut Mom's favorite towel because her son didn't bother to ask for permission to take it.

### **Assembling the Seat Cover (Time: About a week to sew them all)**

This part of the project is the most satisfying. It's always a great feeling to watch the students trim their sewn seat covers, invert them, and place them proudly on their chairs.

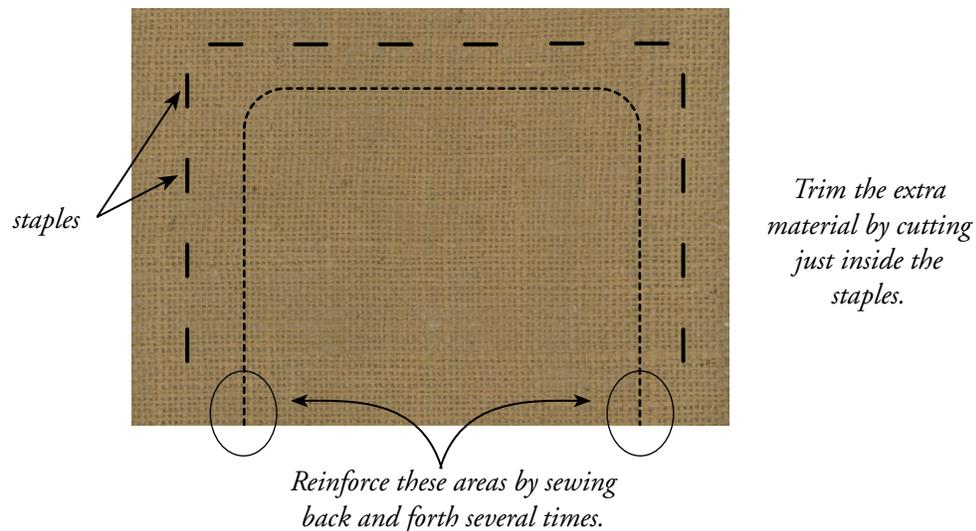
Here is the basic procedure we follow:

1. Check over the stitchery for loose bits of yarn or areas that need a bit of work. Feel free to request a fix if one is needed. They'll be so motivated this near the finish line that they'll do just about anything you ask so that they can get it sewn.
2. Retrace the chair outline with chalk on the WRONG SIDE of the stitchery. (The right side is the side that will be facing out when the seat cover has been assembled.)
3. Cut the towel so that it matches the burlap. Place the stitchery on top of the towel, RIGHT SIDES together. Try to line up the bottom of the towel with the selvage.



*Important: Make sure the bottom edge of the towel, the side that won't be sewn, has a finished edge.*

4. Staple the burlap to the towel. Leave plenty of room for the sewing machine to follow the chalk line. You won't want the machine sewing over staples.



5. Sew from the bottom of one side around to the bottom of the other side. Reinforce the areas where you begin and end. Repeat this procedure by sewing over the first seam.
6. Trim the excess material.



*Leave at least an inch of burlap between the sewing and where you're cutting so that the seam will hold up to the wear-and-tear of being on the chair.*

7. Invert and hang on chair. Pat yourself on the back. That was a job well done.

## Odds & Ends

### SUPPLIES (PURCHASING)

- Needles:** Needles can be purchased at any arts and crafts store. Size 13 needles come two to a pack and retail for \$1.35.
- Burlap:** Burlap sells for a low of \$.99 a yard up to \$3.99 a yard. It depends upon where you buy it. Try a fabric upholstery outlet for the best price. Feed and grain stores can sometimes be counted on for free grain bags.
- Yarn:** Yarn sells for about \$1.50 a skein. Parents, though, will usually donate all the yarn you can use. You don't need a wide variety of colors; a dozen or so basic colors will suffice.

### SUPPLIES (ORGANIZING)

- Needles:** These are best kept in a small container in your desk. You'll need to keep them under wraps so that no one helps himself to an extra one. However, you will want them to be readily accessible when a student in need comes to you. Keep the written I.O.U.'s in the same container as the needles.
- Yarn:** Although I prefer the soda bottle method of organizing yarn, there is another easy way to go. Have each student keep a ball of yarn on his desk. Whenever a student is in need of a new piece of yarn, he goes to the student who has the color he needs.

### NEEDLES IN GENERAL

- “Lock ‘em up!”** The only problem with students using needles is that they have a tendency to lose them. The best insurance against this is to teach your students how to “lock” their needles when they've finished stitching. We've never lost a needle that was properly “locked.”



**FIG. 9-16**  
It's almost impossible to lose a needle that has been properly secured to the burlap.

*How to lock a needle:*

*From the top side of the burlap, stitch under a couple of threads and then pull the needle so that it is hanging from the burlap by the yarn.*

*How to unlock a needle:*

*Pull the needle until the free end of the yarn has been pulled through the burlap. Remove the needle from the yarn and pull the yarn back through the burlap.*

### BURLAP IN GENERAL

- Sampler** The sampler will unravel a bit as the students stitch, but it is nothing to worry about. You can apply masking tape to the edges, but it is not really necessary.

Seat Cover The only critical thing about the seat cover burlap is that you must insure that the selvage, or finished edge, is at the bottom.

## YARN IN GENERAL

Sampler Using just two colors for the sampler work, black for basic stitching and white for bonus stitching, will make it easier for students to concentrate on the stitching skills they need to develop. Too many colors will just confuse them.

Seat Cover Provide enough colors so that they have a range of values.

Length of piece A workable length of yarn measures from an outstretched hand to the chin.



*If students use longer pieces (because they don't want to have to tie a knot on the back side and start a new piece) they'll end up spending a lot of time just pulling the yarn through the burlap with each stitch.*



*This has proven to be the easiest way for students to measure the length of the yarn.*

## STITCHING IN GENERAL

Length of stitch For much of the stitching, students will be using one of the simple formulas such as over 5...under 2. However, when they are working on the graphic for their actual seat covers, they're be engaged in a more free-form style of stitching. Generally speaking, shorter stitches are better than longer ones. Long stitches have a tendency to hang loosely from the burlap and get caught on things.

Chalk first Using chalk really helps, so have plenty handy. Students should make a chalk mark before attempting to stitch circles, letters, or numbers.

Easy does it Try to keep the stitches relaxed and tension-free. There should almost be a fluffy look to the stitch. Pulling too hard will cause the burlap to gather and pucker. This is especially noticeable when making circles.

French knots Keep a bit of tension on the yarn after you wrap it around the needle. This will help to hold the knot together as you push the needle back through the burlap to complete the stitch.

How much time? Due to the fact that it takes a bit of time to get yourself and your materials organized, it is usually better to provide them with at least 30 minutes of uninterrupted stitching time. Two 30-minute sessions would actually be more effective than three 20-minute ones. Bear in mind, though, that they will supplement those sessions with their own. You'll find them working on their stitcheries whenever they finish their assignments.

Storing materials? There are several ways to go. They could roll them up and keep them inside their desks or they could fold them up and place them on top of their desks. Cubbies or mailboxes work well if they are large enough. You might want to purchase some freezer weight, quart-size zip-lock baggies for holding everything.

Doing your own I've found it's best if I make a sampler and a seat cover along with the students. Teaching by example is not just one way of teaching, it's the only way. By working on my own, I'll encourage the students to stick with it. Also, I'm a bit more lenient about the length of time I allow them to stitch if I'm doing my own because I realize how quickly time goes by. A thirty minute stitching session seems much shorter if I'm doing my own than if I'm watching them do theirs.

## Frequently Asked Questions

### *Do backpacks hung from chairs cause problems with the seat covers?*

Unfortunately they do. The weight of the backpack will cause the burlap to wear out within a couple of months. You can either request that the students place their backpacks under their chairs, or just plan to do this stitching project later in the year when they won't undergo so much backpack abuse.

### *How do the boys feel about doing a seat cover?*

For the most part, they thoroughly enjoy it. You'll see them incorporate their interests and hobbies in the design of the main graphic. Sports, skateboards, surf logos, and basic implements of war and destruction are favorite themes. The yin-yang symbol is also big.

### *Should I allow my students to take their stitcheries home to do extra work?*

That's entirely up to you and your students. My only concern about sending them home for extra work is that sometimes parents get their hands on them and do more than a bit of stitching. Nonetheless, if you feel someone is falling behind and could use the extra time to catch up, by all means send it home. Just try to get a commitment from the student that he will be the only one to work on it.

### *How can I keep the cost of this project to a minimum?*

Ask your P.T.A. to sponsor it by having a committee of students submit a proposal for a learning activity grant. Most P.T.A.'s are very supportive of these kinds of special activities and will either pay for the materials or help defray the cost.



**FIG. 9-17**  
Students love to work on their seat covers when they have completed their daily assignments.

