

# *LESSON PLAN & TEACHER RESOURCE*

## Teaching object-based learning with the DAR Museum's North Carolina Sampler

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### **Objectives:** Student will...

- Apply close-looking strategies to the examination of a historical artifact and use their observations to develop hypotheses about an object's maker, origin, and use
- Construct a timeline of the steps necessary to take daily goods from raw resources to finished products
- Compare and contrast elements of daily life, manufacturing, and education in pre-industrial America and today
- Pose and investigate questions about objects in their own lives to uncover the object's story, purpose, and impact

### **Goals:**

- Develop an appreciation for the value of objects in helping us learn about history
- Encourage discussion and reflection on the impact of region and place in early-American education and daily life
- Construct a holistic understanding of the complexity of creating household goods in the pre-industrial era
- Stimulate critical, higher-level thinking by posing and investigating questions, using students' natural curiosity to inspire student-directed learning
- Make abstract concepts in history relatable and real for students

### **Program Length:**

60 minutes (plus options for extension activities)

### **Target Age Group:**

Students in grades 5-8

### **Rationale:** Scholarship on the value of object-based inquiry...

- [https://us.corwin.com/sites/default/files/upm-binaries/7139\\_alvarado\\_ch\\_1.pdf](https://us.corwin.com/sites/default/files/upm-binaries/7139_alvarado_ch_1.pdf)
- <https://www.smithsonianmag.com/videos/05-object-based-learningmp4/>
- <http://inservice.ascd.org/unleash-the-power-of-objects-in-your-classroom/>

### **Artifacts & Supplies:**

- [Image] North Carolina Sampler
- [Optional Images] Additional Sampler examples (New Jersey and Massachusetts)

- Guide for Careful Looking (1 x student)
- Printed and cut out set of “nature,” “fiber,” “fabric” cards (1 deck per 3-4 students)
- Modern day “artifacts”: 1 for each student or group of students (or have students bring their own artifacts from home)
- “Questions to ask an Object” worksheet (1 x student)

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## Background:

*Samplers* are rectangular pieces of linen that are embellished with patterns of embroidery in silk thread. They were an important element of women’s education in 18th- and 19th-century America, peaking in popularity between 1740 and 1840. The art of making samplers likely dates to the Middle Ages and was extremely popular in England and much of Northern Europe in the centuries before colonization of the New World. Settlers to the Americas brought the artform with them and American samplers eventually took on their own style and technique. The *motifs* (*decorative images or designs, often repeated to form a pattern*) of American samplers reveal details about the life and values of the young ladies who made them. Studying the art on colonial-era samplers can show the landscape, resources, animals, and architecture of a region; the values, family tree, and social status of the maker, or the expectations and ideals of the time. Until the Industrial Revolution (around 1850), sampler-making remained a popular form of schoolgirl art used not only to teach needlework, but also spelling, verse, geography, religion, and family history.

In the 19th century, women’s responsibilities were primarily focused on tending to their husbands, their children, and their homes. It was typical for boys to attend school, if their families had the means. Subjects included reading (usually of religious texts), writing, spelling, grammar, geography, and arithmetic. During the summer months girls were permitted to attend school while the boys worked the farms; however, the curriculum for young women was drastically different than the curriculum for young men. They often learned no more than basic reading and arithmetic skills, and knitting and needlework during the summer months.

Needlework remained a prominent aspect of female education until around 1840. Teachers usually dictated the design of the samplers, which ended up producing distinctive regional styles over time. Most girls completed two samplers during their schooling, the first being known as a “marking sampler” where they practiced making letters, spelling words, learning numerals, and memorizing

poems promoting good virtue and morals. The second sampler was usually a finer piece of artwork in silk thread that was pictorial in nature.

Samplers were nearly always linen with multi-colored silk thread used to embroider the intricate designs and motifs. Linen, a fabric made from flax plant, was one of the earliest fibers used to make cloth. The process of making linen is complicated, involving many steps and much labor. The flax must be harvested, soaked in water (called retting), softened and separated (braking, scutching, and hackling), spun, and finally woven into cloth. Documents show that in America in the 1700 and 1800s, about half to two-thirds of households had a spinning wheel for making yarn, and considerably fewer (6%-10%) had a loom for making cloth. This shows us that most families were not making their own cloth at all, while others were spinning yarn or thread and then contracting someone else, a professional weaver, to weave it for them. Additionally, there are plenty of newspapers from the 18th and 19th centuries with advertisements for cloth and clothing. From this we infer that many American craftsmen had the skills to make linen for themselves and customers in the community, so the average school-teacher or family likely purchased this cloth at shops, trade-fairs, or markets.

## Lesson Plan:



(202) 879-3241 ★ [museum@dar.org](mailto:museum@dar.org) ★ [www.dar.org/museum](http://www.dar.org/museum)

*This resource is made possible by the generous contributions of North Carolina State Society, DAR.*

- 1.) Warm up Activity: Give each student a “Guide for Careful Looking.” Make available a large image of the North Carolina Sampler for students to view closely. Individually, or with a partner, students should make and record hypotheses about the material, origin, and purpose of the object without any hints from the instructor. (5 minutes)
- 2.) As a class, discuss the students’ first impressions of the sampler. Ask them to share their hypotheses and specific evidence (details from careful looking at the object) that led them to these conclusions. (5 minutes)
  - Potential questions for this discussion might include...
    - What did you see or notice about this object?
    - Does this object remind you of anything you’ve seen in your house or elsewhere?
    - What details might be important to help us determine what this object is? Who made it? Where is it from? How old is it?
- 3.) Share brief background information about the North Carolina sampler and the role of samplers in 18th- and 19th-century education. Students can complete the remaining, fact-based sections on their “Guides for Careful Looking” during this discussion. (3-5 minutes).
  - Ask follow-up questions to guide the lesson and record important responses on the board including...
    - What might a 19<sup>th</sup>-century student learn through the process of completing a sampler like this one? (*possible answers: spelling, the alphabet, family tree, poetry/verse, religion, geography, needlework, patience, concentration, graphing*)
    - This sampler was made in North Carolina in 1843. Does it tell us anything about the region during that time period? (*The pine tree, strawberries, and flowers might show the plant life of the area, it also gives us clues about school/learning for young ladies in this region at the time*)
    - If you were a student in one of the early-American states, what details about yourself or where you lived might influence the motifs and designs on your sampler? (*possible answers: regional plants and animals, landmarks, important buildings, religion, ethnicity/family background, your age, social status or level of education*)
- 4.) Explain to students that the fabric used to make samplers was traditionally linen. This sampler was made in the pre-industrial time period, which means that there were no factories or machines to make the linen cloth in mass quantities. Though most families did not make the cloth themselves, local craftsmen had to work through this complicated and time intensive process by hand.
- 5.) Explore the process of taking fabric from “soil to sampler” with the following group activity. Divide students into groups of 3 or 4 and pass out one of each set of cards: nature, fiber, cloth. (Optional: If possible, purchase samples of the raw fibers and spun cloth to use in place of the images. Students will benefit from the multi-sensory, hands-on experience of working with these objects directly.)

- 6.) In their small groups, ask students to arrange the different paths that the four materials take from nature to fiber to fabric. After they have arranged the correct timeline for each material, ask them to name the fabric and brainstorm where they might see each fabric in the world today. (5-10 minutes)
- 7.) Share the correct answers with the class. Discuss: Which of these fibers could be sourced in your state/region? How would the process of turning the raw material into fabric be different with or without machinery? Share as much or as little about the manufacturing steps as you think are useful for your students. They can also investigate the manufacturing process on their own as an extension project or homework. (5 minutes)
  - a. **Linen: Cards A, 2, Z** Flax fibers look like hair, but are actually from a plant. The plant grows like grass, with a long, straight stem. If you dry out this stem, you can separate the fibers that make up the outer part of it. This is a long process with many steps. Linen is the cloth that comes from the flax plant. [Flax to Linen Video](#)
  - b. **Silk: Cards B, 1, Y** Silk comes from the cocoon of the silkworm. It eats mulberry leaves as a larva, or caterpillar, and then spins a cocoon where it turns into a moth. You can collect the cocoon before the caterpillar turns into a moth, and use the cocoon to make silk. [How silk is made video](#)
  - c. **Cotton: C, 3, X** The flower of the cotton plant turns into a sphere about the size of a golf ball that eventually dries out and bursts open, showing the white cotton fibers with the seeds inside. These are harvested and processed to turn into cotton thread. [Cotton manufacturing video](#)
  - d. **Wool: D, 4, W** Sheep produce a type of hair called wool, which can be made into clothing. The sheep is not hurt when wool is cut off— it is like a haircut. Most sheep are sheared once a year, in the spring. [How wool is made](#)
- 8.) Application: Students have now engaged in close looking and have considered that seemingly simple historical objects have complicated origins and backstories, and they can tell us a lot about life in the time when they were used. Now that they've thought like today's historians in their examination of the North Carolina sampler, they will be asked to think like the historians of tomorrow. Using "artifacts" of the teacher's choosing (see teacher tips resource for ideas) they will engage in close looking at objects from today. In pairs, students will feel, smell, use, and listen to their objects. Have them walk through the "40 questions to ask an object" worksheet, discussing their answers as they go. (15 minutes)
- 9.) Instruct students to take on the role of a historian 200 years from now. They will write up a field report describing their findings about the object's origin, use, and how they think it was made. Tell them to forget what they already know about the object and use only observational evidence. In this field report, they should include a couple of paragraphs

explaining the clues the object gives about the life, environment, and values of the people who used it. (Remaining class time/homework)

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### **Extension Activities:**

- 1.) **[RESEARCH]** In small groups, or independently, students can research a machine or technology created during the Industrial Revolution that made day to day tasks (like spinning wool or separating cotton seeds) quicker and more efficient. Research can be presented in a poster, prezzi, powerpoint, or other creative visual display and shared with classmates.
- 2.) **[SCIENCE]** Students have discovered how the linen base of a sampler was made during the 19th century, but what about the colored thread used for the needlework? At home, students can find plants, animals, or minerals in their own backyards that are able to produce color, or dye. Engaging in botanical research, students can experiment and share their findings with the class. Hands on experiments can be attempted in or out of class to color paper, cloth, wood, and other materials.
- 3.) **[ART]** Students can use small lined graph paper or a printout to create their own samplers. Using colored pens, markers, or pencils, shade in one box at a time to represent a “stitch.” Map out how your grid-like stitches will flow together to create a visual design. Ask students to consider what unique elements of their region (plants/animals, landmarks, cultural components, people) they plan to use for their motif. The instructor can assign the main “needlepoint” design of the sampler (ie: state capitals, spelling words, equations, poetry) or students can choose their own.
- 4.) **[HISTORY/GEOGRAPHY]** Create a sampler as instructed above, but instead of using modern day content and personal experience, take on the persona of a student from one of the early American states. Research the motif designs that will reveal something about the region and its inhabitants to your classmates.
- 5.) **[WRITING]** As students have discovered in this lesson, every object tells a story. Build students’ narrative or creative writing skills by having them write a story about an object that is important to them or their family. Encourage them to think outside the box by writing from the perspective of the object.

# *RESOURCES*

## Sampler [North Carolina]

Susan E. Shuford (1843)

Lincolnton, N.C.

Silk on linen ground

19.75" x 19.25" (framed)

DAR Museum, Friends of Museum purchase and gift of North Carolina State Society, in honor of Rolfe Towle Teague, Curator General, 2001-2004; 2004.18



*(Click on image to download.)*

Susan E. Shuford attended Lincolnton Female Academy, where she likely stitched this sampler. Contemporary school advertising indicates embroidery and other needlework instruction was available at the school in the 1840s when Susan was a student. This household skill would later be used to repair and label family clothing and linens.<sup>1</sup> This is a precise example of a “marking sampler,” used by young girls to practice lettering, numbering, and prose. The inscription reads “Down in the green and shady bed/ a modest violet grew/ Its stalk was bent it hung its head/ as if to hide itself from view.” This is from a poem by Jane Taylor, an English poet who, with her sister, wrote *Twinkle, Twinkle Little Star*. The style and requirements of these marking samplers were usually dictated by the teacher of the school the student attended. This sampler was stitched by Susan “in her 11<sup>th</sup> year,” at age ten.

<sup>1</sup> Peck, A. A. (2003, October). American Needlework in the Eighteenth Century | Essay | Heilbrunn Timeline of Art History | The Metropolitan Museum of Art. [https://www.metmuseum.org/toah/hd/need/hd\\_need.htm](https://www.metmuseum.org/toah/hd/need/hd_need.htm)



## Additional Examples:

### **Sampler**

possibly Caroline Childs (1805)

Deerfield, Mass.

Silk and linen ground

17.5" x 16.5" (framed)

DAR Museum, gift of the Illinois State Society, honoring Mrs. Roland C. White, State Regent; 79.26



(Click on image to download.)

This sampler includes a family register that is unsigned, but may have been worked by Caroline Childs, the eleventh child and youngest surviving daughter of Samuel Childs (1742-1814) and Eunice Wright (1750-1830) of Deerfield, Mass. Caroline enrolled at Deerfield Academy on July 3, 1805, for a quarter term, which usually lasted only 11-12 weeks. Her instructor was Sally Williams. It is believed the sampler was worked on at more than one time and probably by more than one person due to the two shades of brown used in the lettering. The poem reads "Abroad in search of bliss we roam / Yet must confess it dwells at home / Where kindred mingle pain and joys / And thoughts of love each heart employs." This is one of many samplers that include family names, lineage and history. Because we know that samplers were often used to display culturally significant skills or knowledge of the maker, this sampler speaks to the importance of the family unit in 19<sup>th</sup> century society and the female role within it.

## Untitled, Sampler

Jane Elisabeth Smith (1842)

possibly New Jersey

Silk and natural linen ground

12.5" x 17" (framed)

DAR Museum, gift of Caroline Lareuse, in memory of Mrs. E. Townsend Look; Conservation adopted by Carole Belcher, Serrano Chapter, Calif.; 89.22



*(Click on image to download.)*

This rectangular sampler was made by Jane Elisabeth Smith in 1842 at the age of seven. The inscription reads "A sampler resembles an elegant mind whose passion by reason subdued and refined moves only in lines of affection and duty reflecting a picture of order and beauty." The sampler is bordered by a strawberry vine on all four sides. The top half of the sampler features a central long-tailed bird sitting atop a branch. Surrounding the bird are flowering trees, floral sprays, a dog and two baskets of fruit. The lower half of the sampler features the verse surrounded by floral sprays, a four-heart motif, a butterfly and a duck. Jane has stitched her name and age above the bottom border.

## ~ Guide for Careful Looking ~

### What is this object made of?

- Paper       Wood       Silk       Cotton  
 Leather       Metal       Ink       Linen

### Describe what you see.

### Analyze what you see.

	Your Guess & Why	Factual Information
Where is it from?		
When was it made?		
Who used it? Why do you think so?		
Why was it made?		
What messages/ details/symbols are included?		

### Further your thinking.

What questions do you still have about this object? Think like a historian: what can you ask about this object to discover more about its background and purpose?

## “Nature” Cards

*Instructions: Print and cut out cards, creating enough sets for 1 set per 3-4 students.  
Distribute in a deck with fiber and fabric cards.*



A.



B.



C.



D.

## “Fiber” Cards

*Instructions: Print and cut out cards, creating enough sets for 1 set per 3-4 students.  
Distribute in a deck with nature and fabric cards.*



1.



2.



3.



4.

## “Fabric” Cards

*Instructions: Print and cut out cards, creating enough sets for 1 set per 3-4 students. Distribute in a deck with nature and fiber cards.*



W.



X.



Y.



Z.

# 40 Questions...to ask an Object

Observational Questions: You should be able to answer these questions just by using your 5 senses

1. What does it feel like?
2. Is it hard or soft?
3. Is it hot or cold?
4. Is it sharp?
5. What color is it?
6. Does it have designs or decorations on it?
7. Can you see through it?
8. Does it have any moving parts?
9. Does it make sound when used?
10. What does it smell like?
11. What do you imagine it would taste like?
12. How big is it?
13. How heavy is it?
14. How many parts does this object have?
15. Are there any words on the object?

Inference Questions: The answers to these questions may not be as obvious as the questions above, but you should be able to answer them through educated guessing. Be sure to make note of your reasoning for each inference.

16. What is it made of?
17. Could this object come in other sizes?
18. Do you think this object was made by a person or a machine?
19. If the object has decorations, words, or designs do you think these were made by a person or a machine?
20. Has this object been used before?
21. What (if anything) is inside of this object?
22. Does the object have a front and back or top and bottom?

23. Is this object a part of a group or a piece of something larger?
24. Does this object have any symbolic or emotional meaning?
25. Is this object unique in any way from other objects of its kind?
26. Was this object designed to look good or is it purely utilitarian?

Hypothesis Questions: You may not know the answers to these questions, but using the evidence you've gathered you should be able to make a hypothesis or propose a theory. Be sure to state the evidence that you're using for your conclusions.

27. How old is this object?
28. Who used this object?
29. How was this object made? (Explain the process)
30. Where was this object made?
31. Where was this object used?
32. Did the owner care about this object?
33. What is this object's purpose?
34. How is this object used?
35. Why does it look the way that it does?
36. What was this object's path to get here, to this classroom?
37. Can this object represent something?
38. What does this object tell us about the society from which it came?
39. What does this object tell us about the life or values of its owner?
40. What does this object tell us about the historical time period when it was made or used?



## Teacher Tips & Resources: Picking objects for “40 questions to ask an object”

Option A: Choose cheap but durable everyday objects for students to consider in new ways. These should be objects that you don’t mind getting dirty, grubby, or even broken. They can be used year after year for this activity, or upcycled after you’ve done this lesson. Consider objects like...



Option B: Do a little research to find historical or foreign household goods or technical/mechanical gadgets that your students may have never seen before. Find inexpensive goods you can purchase online and reuse year to year. This will require students to rely exclusively on their observations and inferences to determine what the objects are. Cooking tools, gardening tools, health/beauty gadgets, machinery, and home décor are good places to start.

Option C: Have a little fun with it and choose “artifacts” from the 70s, 80s, and 90s. Students will be familiar with the objects, but may not use them day to day. They may get a kick out of talking about objects made during their parents’ lifetimes as “historical artifacts.” Consider...



Option D: Have students bring their own objects from home. They can use their own, or trade with a classmate. Don’t tell them what the object is for when asking them to select. Tell them only to choose something from their own house that isn’t valuable and that they don’t mind other people touching or using.