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**Level: Grades 3-5**

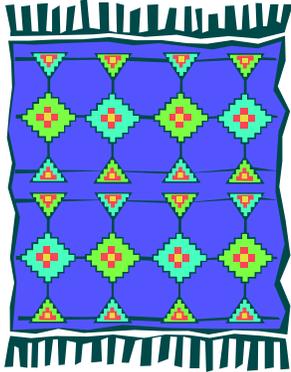
**Subjects:** English Language Arts, Social Studies, Visual and Performing Arts

**Skills:** Following directions, describing, drawing, explaining, creating, presenting, internet researching

## Lesson 6 Stitches and Stories

### Activity: Traditional Rug Hooking

*Mary Dickinson Bird, PhD, author - Created through the MAITC Ag Literacy Grant made possible by the Ag License Plate*



Rug hooking in Maine and Atlantic Canada is believed to have begun sometime shortly after 1800. By 1850, it had become a popular way to recycle worn out yarn and clothing. Feed sacks made of loosely-woven burlap would be cut open and laid flat, and a design drawn on the surface. In the earliest rugs, these designs were flowers of geometric shapes. As time went on, rug hookers got more creative and began to draw animals and landscapes. Once the design was drawn, yarns or cloth would be chosen or dyed to suit the picture. The rug maker would then use a hook to pull loops of yarn or cloth strips up through the spaces between the thread of the burlap. Little by little, the spaces would fill with loops of color, and the picture would take shape.

Hooked rugs, especially the pretty ones, would begin life in the parlor. As they wore out, they'd be moved to the kitchen, and finally to the doorstep. Because burlap does not resist water very well, the doormats would eventually disintegrate. This is one reason that so few early examples of Maine's hooked rugs have survived.

#### For this activity, you will need:

- a small square of burlap
- masking tape
- a pen or marker
- a hook
- colorful yarn or cloth cut into very thin strips

#### What to do:

1. Cover all the edges of your square with masking tape to keep them from fraying.
2. Use the pen or marker to draw a very simple design on the square of burlap – a heart, star or other simple shape will let you develop the skills you need without frustration.
3. Hold the hook like a pencil. The hand with the hook will be on top of the burlap, and your other hand beneath the fabric.



4. Choose your yarn and hold it below the fabric. Now push the hook into a space between the threads of the burlap. Aim the tip of the hook to one side of the yarn and use it to scoop the tail of the yarn up through the fabric. This tail should only be an inch or two long.
5. Now move your hook to the next hole, push the hook down, and catch the yarn again. Pull up a little loop – no more than ½ inch tall. Be sure to hold onto the yarn with your underneath hand, so that the loop doesn't pull all the way up.
6. Move to the next hole and pull up another loop the same size. Then on to the next hole, the next one, and so on. Soon there will be many little loops crowding together on the top surface of your burlap. You don't have to go in a straight line, unless your pattern requires it. You can turn your fabric as needed to keep the hooking movement comfortable for your hands.
7. When ending a color, just pull the tail through to the front side. Start a new color just as you did with the first yarn, by pulling the end through to the top of the burlap.
8. When you have filled in your design, use scissors to carefully trim any tails that are hanging so that they are the same height as the loops. They won't pull out because they are held tightly in place by the loops crowded around them.

*To read more about the history and design of rugs hooked in Maine and maritime Canada, see *Hook Me a Story*, by Deanne Fitzpatrick, Halifax, NS: Nimbus Publishing, 1999.*

*To learn more about Maine Samplers and see a virtual exhibit, visit [www.mainememory.net/sitebuilder/site/209/page/468/display?use\\_mmn=1](http://www.mainememory.net/sitebuilder/site/209/page/468/display?use_mmn=1)*

Some of the instructions for this activity were adapted from "Rug Hooking Instructions" by Mary Klotz, Harrisville, NH: Harrisville Designs [no date].

