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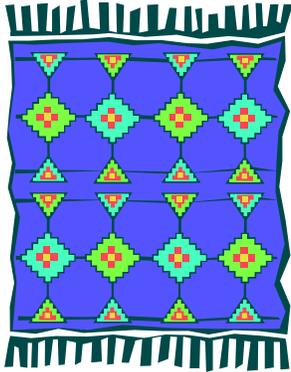
Level: Grades 3-5

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

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



Perhaps you have heard the saying, “Use it up, wear it out, make it do, or do without.” This motto was especially important in the days when store-bought items were not readily available or affordable to Maine families. Rather than throw away something that was broken, men, women, and children would figure out ways to repair it, or to use its parts for another purpose.

This was true of products made of yarn and cloth, as well. An outgrown or ragged sweater would be carefully unraveled and the yarn used for something else. A shirt or pair of pants that could no longer be used was cut into pieces and used to mend other clothing, or sewn into a patchwork quilt, or perhaps torn into strips that could be woven or braided into rugs. Recycled yarn or strips of old clothing could also be hooked into burlap feedsack fabric to make thick, sturdy rugs that would help keep out cold, damp drafts seeping between the floor boards in winter. In fact, rug-hooking is a form of fiber craft that had its beginnings in Maine and Atlantic Canada.

Sewing was an important skill, not just for girls, but also for boys. From the Colonial days until the mid-19th century, girls would work on samplers as a way of learning different types of useful and decorative stitches. Young men, particularly those who would work at sea or in the lumber camps, would learn to use needle and thread to mend their own clothes.

Samplers and hooked rugs from Maine and New England use fiber to tell a valuable story about what life was like long ago. Today, our state’s artists are reviving some of these traditions, using Maine-grown fibers to create colorful stitchery and hooked rugs.

