

# Crafting the Classroom



Integrating Visual and Tactile Learning  
into Core Subjects

## **How to Use *Crafting the Classroom***

Houston Center for Contemporary Craft (HCCC) is a nonprofit arts organization founded to advance education about the process, product and history of craft. HCCC's major emphasis is on objects of art made primarily from craft materials: clay, fiber, glass, metal, wood or found/recycled materials.

Each *Crafting the Classroom* lesson teaches a science, math, social studies, or language arts objective, and a corresponding craft-based art project. Through integrating art into the core subjects, these lessons are designed to increase student engagement with the objective, promote higher order thinking and creative expression, and provide tactile learners with opportunities to excel.

Use these lessons to connect craft with topics that are meaningful to your students and curriculum. For example, many tools, vessels, furniture, clothes, and other items integral to daily life used to be made by hand. Learning about these objects, as well as the skills needed to make and use them, can be a unique way to study world history or other cultures. Replicating decorative patterns can give students a better understanding of geometry. Learning about how craft materials are made and used relates to chemistry, physics, and natural science. These are just a few of the connections that can be made.

Pair these lessons with a visit to Houston Center for Contemporary Craft, where your group can enjoy a free guided tour, visit the craft garden, and observe resident artists in their studios. Optional, hands-on workshops are available upon request.

Please share these plans with other teachers, parents, and administrators.

**For more information about HCCC, or to schedule your visit,** please visit our website at [www.crafthouston.org](http://www.crafthouston.org) or call 713-529-4848 Ext. 0

### **Leah Hamilton French**

Volunteer Manager & Education Coordinator

[lfrench@crafthouston.org](mailto:lfrench@crafthouston.org)

713.529.4848 ext. 0

### **Houston Center for Contemporary Craft**

4848 Main Street

Houston, TX 77002

Cover Art:

Weaver from Contemporary Handweavers of Houston

Photo by Kim Coffman

Lesson written and illustrated by Mary LeMaster, HCCC Fall 2015 Education Intern

© 2015 Houston Center for Contemporary Craft

Reproduction and distribution allowed only for educational purposes.

## HISTORY: WEAVING THE PAST WITH THE PRESENT

### LESSON OBJECTIVE

**History:** Students will learn about and discuss the lives of Colonial Americans, through weaving a homespun sample.

**Fine Arts:** Students will explore cultural heritage through craft by creating a homespun sample.

**Math Connection** (optional): Students will use ruler measurements to design the loom they will use to weave their homespun sample.

*Relating to craft media: **Fiber***

### MATERIALS NEEDED

- Yarn
- Scissors
- Large plastic needle (1 per each child)
- Piece of cardboard 6 ½" x 2 ½" (1 per each child)
- Rulers
- A piece of raw wool or cotton (for optional spinning demonstration)

### VOCABULARY

- **Shearing** - to remove wool from sheep using a large pair of scissors called shears.
- **Carding** - using two heavy brushes (like hair brushes) to brush out rough cotton or wool, to prepare it for spinning.
- **Homespun** - cloth that is made at home, and is usually rougher than store bought cloth. This fabric was used and worn by early European Americans.
- **Spinning** - the act of turning carded cotton or wool into yarn. Can be done by hand or using a spinning wheel.
- **Weaving** - to construct a piece of fabric by lacing together two or more pieces of yarn or thread, in an "over, under, over, under" motion.
- **Loom** - a tool for weaving threads into cloth. Looms come in a variety of sizes from handheld ones to large, industrial machines. The width of a loom determines the width of cloth it can produce.

### LESSON OVERVIEW

**Introduce the New Material:** Start the lesson by asking the students where they get their clothes from (the mall, online, their parents buy them, etc.) Explain that during the Colonial period (and also the early days of European settlers in Texas), people could not go out and buy their clothes. They had to make them. Wealthy colonists could

purchase commercial textiles imported from Europe, and hire a tailor or seamstress to sew it into clothing, but this was very expensive. A cheaper alternative was to make your own cloth, called **homespun**. Homespun cloth was usually made from cotton harvested from cotton plants, or wool taken from sheep; no synthetic fibers existed back then. Cotton and wool fibers had to be cleaned, spun into thread or yarn, and finally woven into cloth that could be sewn into clothing. All that took a lot more time than a trip to the mall!

**Introduce the Lesson:** Ask the students if they know how you get wool from a sheep. Explain that sheep do not have hair or fur; they have wool to keep them warm in winter. In the spring, when the weather is warmer, farmers cut their sheep's wool off, to help the sheep stay cool. Cutting off a sheep's wool is called **shearing**. The wool is then **carded**, or brushed between two brushes, to clean it. Once carded, it is turned into yarn through a process called **spinning**. A process called **weaving** is used to put the spun yarn together to make cloth. Nowadays, carding, spinning, and weaving are done on machines, but it used to be done by hand. This hand-woven cloth was called **homespun**. Ask the students how they think the clothes they are wearing were made.

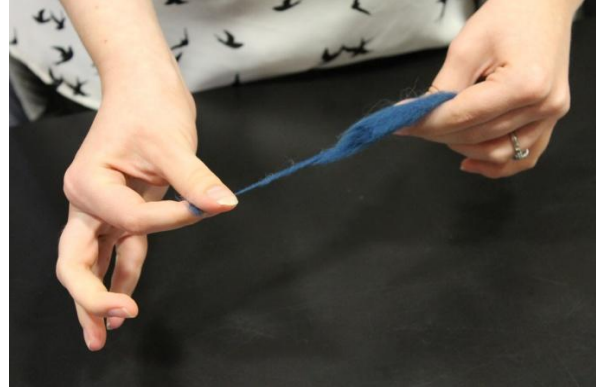


Cotton grows on a low shrub, as fluffy fibers surrounding the seeds of the plant. Once it is picked, it undergoes a similar process of carding, spinning, and weaving. Cotton is still grown commercially in Texas today. The above photo shows brown cotton growing in the fiber arts Craft Garden at Houston Center for Contemporary Craft.

Explain that today the students will be making their own homespun swatch that can be used as a bookmark or tied into a bracelet.

*For a more in depth explanation on how wool is turned to yarn, show this video from Colonial Williamsburg: <http://history.org/media/videoplayer/index.cfm?sort=vodcasts> (Scroll through to find "From Fleece to Loom").*

**Spinning Demo (optional):** If you have enough time, you can show the students how to hand-spin. Explain that hand-spinning is something that small children would have done to help their parents spin yarn when they were still too young to use the spinning wheel.

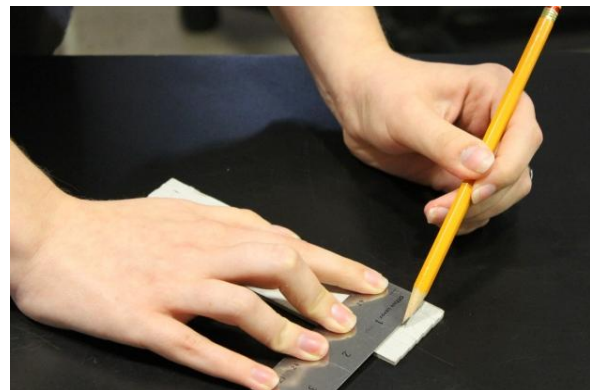


1. Place a piece of the raw wool or cotton between the thumb and index finger of one hand.
2. Using the thumb and index finger of your other hand, gently pull out a strand of wool, twisting the fiber to create thread.
3. Ask one or two of your students to come up to the front of the room and help you hand spin.
4. For more information and a demo video check out this website <http://joyofhandspinning.com/>

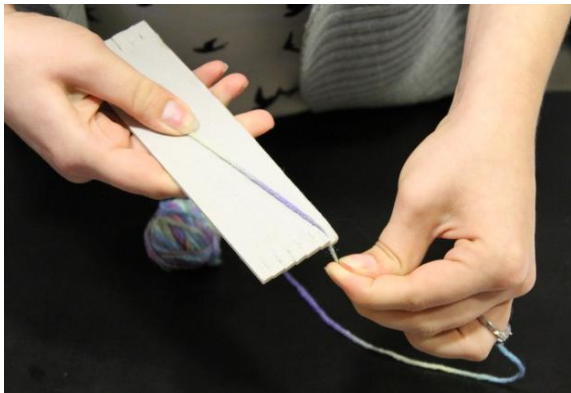
**Loom Making:** Refer to the video from Colonial Williamsburg or explain that before you can weave yarn to make homespun, you have to make a **loom**.

### INSTRUCTIONS

1. Make sure you have a piece of 6 ½" x 2 ½" cardboard.
2. Using a ruler, draw a line ½ inch inwards on the top and bottom of the loom.
3. Next start at the ½ inch line, and make marks every ¼ inch on the top and bottom of your loom.



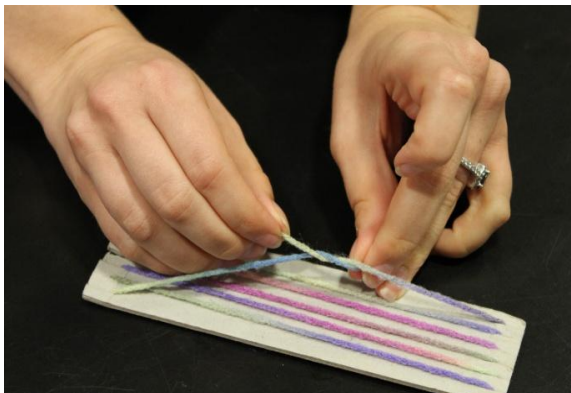
4. Once you have made your marks, cut each  $\frac{1}{4}$  inch mark in towards the middle of the cardboard, stopping at the  $\frac{1}{2}$  inch line, like you are cutting a fringe. These cuts will become the notches for your yarn.
5. Thread a piece of sturdy yarn into the first notch on the upper left side of your loom. Hold the tail end of the yarn by pressing it into the back of the cardboard loom with your thumb. (If this is difficult, tape it down for the time being – you will need to tie it off later).



6. Wrap the yarn around the loom, from the top notch to the corresponding bottom notch. Repeat – wrapping the yarn notch to notch – until the entire loom is threaded.



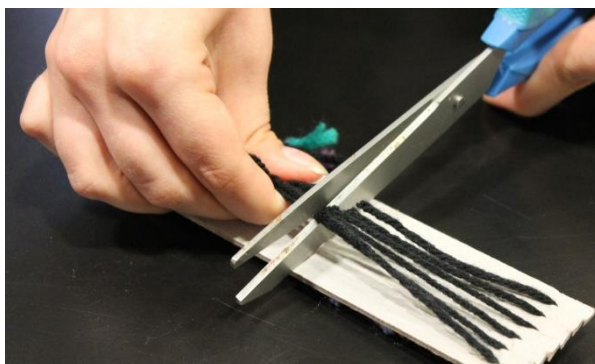
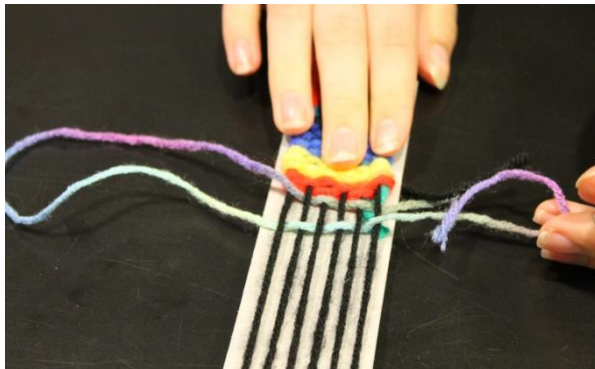
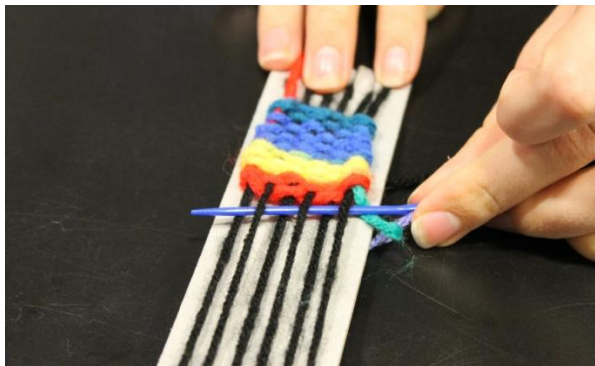
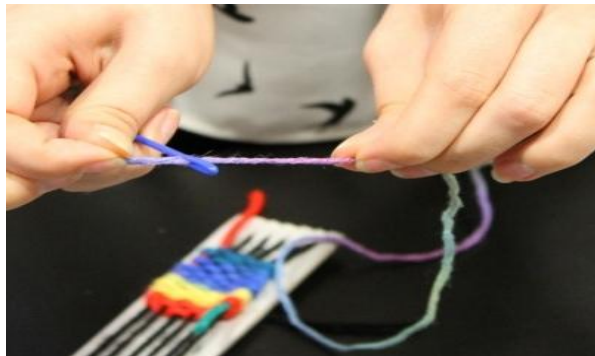
7. When the loom is threaded, tie the two tails together.



**Weaving Homespun:** Now that their loom is complete it is time to start weaving!

### INSTRUCTIONS

1. You will need a piece of yarn no longer than 2 feet, and a plastic needle.
2. Thread the yarn through the needle.
3. Thread the needle through the loom, over one thread and under the next. Do not pull too tight, or your loom will warp.
4. Make another pass through the loom, going over and under in the opposite direction.
5. Once you have completed two passes, gently push the yarn to the bottom of the loom.
6. Continue weaving for the remaining class time or until the one side of the loom is full.
7. When you have completed your weaving, turn the loom over and cut across the loom threads on the back.



8. Knot each end of the threads, to make a wrist band or bracelet, or simply tie off each end to prevent unraveling, and use the swatch as a bookmark.

