

Residency Dates: _____

For Students in Grades: _____

History through Fabric: Plant Dyes & Embroidery

Suzanne Herbert-Forton



Introduction

Students will learn about the historic use of plant dyes and how they interact with plant and animal fibers. This residency is particularly suited to the study of colonial America and trade with England. It is also adaptable to the study of other cultures. Students will dye pieces of wool and cotton and use them to create a mini embroidered sampler. Suzanne has been embroidering ever since she could thread a needle by herself. She has been a working artist in Baltimore for over 30 years, creating and exhibiting her own art and teaching students of all ages. Suzanne also works in theatrical wardrobe as a seamstress and dresser for professional touring productions.



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Program Description

In this residency students will have the opportunity to examine dye plant materials such as indigo leaves and rose madder roots. Varieties of these two plants have been used for centuries by cultures around the world. If time permits, students may assist the artist in preparing the dye baths and prewashing the fabrics for dyeing. Incorporating this step will add a day to the residency.

Students will begin by dyeing wool felt and cotton fabric in two different colors of dye. While the fabric sits in the dye bath, students will explore fabric and fiber samples. They will look at sheep wool, woven wool, felt, cotton and linen. They will discuss the economic and cultural history of the fibers for the period or region of study.

Students will be guided by the artist in making a simple sketch for their embroidered piece. Then students will learn basic embroidery stitches to use in their work. The wool felt will be used to create one main shape in the embroidery that will be appliquéd to the cotton background. The finished embroideries will then be stitched to a commercial felt backing.





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Inside this guide:

- Artist Bio
- Standards
- List of Additional Resources
- Content Examples
- Culminating Examples
- Professional Development Strategies
- Teacher Prep

General Information:

Inclement Weather

DON'T WORRY! Artists will follow school closings and delays and will work with you to reschedule the performance if necessary.

Young Audiences Contact Number: 410-837-7577

Call 410-837-7577 and follow the prompts to be connected with a staff member on call for After Hours or Emergency.

Artists Bio:

Suzanne Herbert-Forton has been a working artist in Baltimore for over 30 years. She creates and exhibits mixed media pieces using hand embroidery, ceramics and found objects. The work is inspired in part by the artisans of the middle ages and by her Russian orthodox heritage.

Her background in fiber arts and abiding interest in costuming has also led to a simultaneous theatrical career working with wardrobe for professional touring companies.

Suzanne enjoys sharing her skills, working with children and adults, and teaching in a wide range of settings both in and out of the classroom. She has worked as a teaching artist for many years, with a passion for arts and arts integration.





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Standards:

Maryland State Curriculum Standards for Fine Arts:

1.0 Perceiving and Responding: Aesthetic Education -- Students will demonstrate the ability to perceive, interpret, and respond to ideas, experiences, and the environment through visual art.

2.0 Historical, Cultural, and Social Context -- Students will demonstrate an understanding of visual arts as an essential aspect of history and human experience.

List of additional resources:

Weaving the Rainbow by George Ella Lyon, illustrated by Stephanie Anderson. This is a great book to read aloud to K-3, and it follows the process of making cloth from raising the sheep to dyeing to weaving.

There are a host of additional texts on plant dyes. These are a few of my favorites. They are written for adult readers and will serve you best as reference materials for lessons.

The Dyer's Companion by Elijah Bemiss - Available from Dover Publishing. This is a reprint of a book published in 1815 sharing trade recipes for making dyes with ingredients available in the United States. In it he gives dye recipes and procedures. It is interesting for the descriptions of the extensive labor that was required to add color to fabrics.

(A note about Dover Publishing: If you are not familiar with this company, you are in for a treat. Dover publishes a host of historic, otherwise out of print books. They also publish books on a wide variety of topics, including several books on plant dyes. They print paperbacks and are very affordable.)





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Harvesting Color by Rebecca Burgess - This has great images and information about dye plants and how to use them. She also includes information about preparing fabric for the dye process.

The Complete Guide to Natural Dyeing by Eva Lambert and Tracy Kendall - This is another nice reference for plant stuffs and the colors they will produce. It also contains useful information about preparing fabrics for the dye process.

Content Examples:

Simplified Colonial Sampler - Students will learn about the fabrics and plant dyes used by American colonists. They will learn how embroidered samplers were used as an educational tool. Students will dye plant and animal fibers and compare the results. They will then use the dyed fabric to create a simple version of a sampler.

Culminating Examples:

Student work may be shown in an exhibit for the grade level or school community.

Professional Development Strategies:

Once they have learned the techniques, teachers could extend the project by asking students to create sampler images with educational content that is relevant to modern times.

Teacher Prep:

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