

# Art Techniques Student's Guides *Sewing & Fabric Arts*



**Curated by  
Ms. Mila Vasconcelos**



# Introduction:

I have always believed that art is not limited to paint and canvas. Sewing, embroidery, weaving, and customizing fabrics have been central to my creative journey since my teenage years. This guide is a combination of my passion for fashion design, styling, and customization, together with the work of incredible artists who use fabrics in their artistic practice.

I share my own story of how a science fair project grew into a fashion movement in my hometown, and how I continue to use fabrics in my teaching and art-making. Alongside that, you will explore techniques, artist case studies, and student challenges designed to help you connect fabrics with identity, memory, and culture.





# My Background – Escola Fashion Project

Back in 2002, I joined a science fair in high school with my friends. We never imagined that our small idea — customizing old clothes with recycled materials — would grow into something much bigger. We called it the Escola Fashion Project.



Over the years, what started as a student project became famous in my city, with fashion shows that brought together designers, models, DJs, makeup artists, hairstylists, scenographers, and producers. It was about collaboration and talent discovery.

# My Background – Escola Fashion Project

My specialty was upcycling: cutting, sewing, and adapting old garments to give them new life. I combined fabrics, embroidery, beads, and unusual materials, always aiming for something fresh and creative. Looking back, I realize how much this connected with what IB calls CAS (Creativity, Activity, Service). It wasn't just about fashion — it was about community, sustainability, and expression.



Jornal "O Fluminense"(2002)

4 PROFISSÕES  
MUNDO FASHION

O FLUMINENSE

Domingo, 14 e segunda-feira, 15/07/2002

## Moda se aprende na escola

Colégio Estadual Machado de Assis tem projeto para mercado alternativo

BERNARDA VIVAS-SALES

Alunos dos últimos anos do Ensino Médio do Colégio Estadual Machado de Assis, no Fomeca, já pensam no futuro profissional. E a carreira escolhida tem grandes chances de estar vinculada a um mercado alternativo: a Moda. Há um ano eles criaram o Projeto Escola Fashion (PEF), uma iniciativa destinada a ajudar os jovens na escolha do campo de trabalho. Desde então têm feito desfiles em colégios, shoppings, feiras de Niterói e São Gonçalo durante o ano letivo, mostrando seu trabalho e buscando novos talentos — em dez meses, já produziram 14 eventos do tipo. O projeto conta com cerca de 25 participantes, envolvidos nas mais diversas funções, como produção, assistência de produção, estilismo, maquiagem, divulgação, modelo. Ao longo do trabalho, os jovens procuram indicações sobre cursos de aperfeiçoamento na área e formas de iniciar a carreira em agências.

Um dos criadores do PEF, Miguel Macedo, 20 anos, estudante do 3º ano do Ensino Médio, explica a origem e os objetivos da iniciativa. "Eu sempre fui interessado na produção de eventos, e já tinha um trabalho em algumas lojas, inclusive no colégio. Mas eu vi que muitos alunos ainda ficavam indecisos sobre qual caminho seguir",



Os integrantes do Projeto Escola Fashion usam a experiência da



Iniciativa para decidir que caminho seguir no mercado

curso superior em Produção Cultural. "A ideia da Escola Fashion é mostrar aos jovens alternativas no campo de trabalho e ajudá-los a seguir para o mercado. E a Moda, nesse sentido, é uma área interessante, porque reúne pessoas nas mais diversas funções", acrescenta. Atualmente, os participantes contam com o apoio de entidades na comunidade e

tos na produção para os eventos. Mas os primeiros momentos do projeto foram difíceis. "Nós agora estamos nos organizando melhor, buscando os apoios certos. Antes não tínhamos muita estrutura e acabavam acontecendo alguns tropeços. Apesar disso, é uma boa experiência, pelas informações que se consegue", avalia Miguel Macedo. No PEF, a produção

prios integrantes. A tarefa fica a cargo das estilistas Camilla Duarte e Cíla Bastos, ambas de 17 anos e estudantes do último ano do antigo 2º grau. Na hora de fabricar novas peças, impõe a criatividade: no processo de criação, as estilistas usam roupas não aproveitadas originadas, em parte, de doação e materiais recicláveis, como jornais e revistas, plásticos, lã, entre outros.

Em agosto, um novo desfile no Fomeca vai mostrar a nova coleção. Camilla e Cíla revelam um pouco do que preparam para o evento. "Nosso trabalho está baseado na cultura indígena. Para compor as peças, usamos materiais naturais como penas, plumas, sementes, etc", afirma Camilla. "Temos ainda peças inspiradas no movimento do Tropicalismo", complementa Cíla.

**Serviço**  
Quem quiser contactar os integrantes do Projeto Escola Fashion para eventos ou para doação de roupas pode ligar para os telefones 8001-6776 (Miguel Macedo) e 9255-3732 (Karoline Nogueira).

# Why Sewing & Fabric Arts Matter in Visual Arts

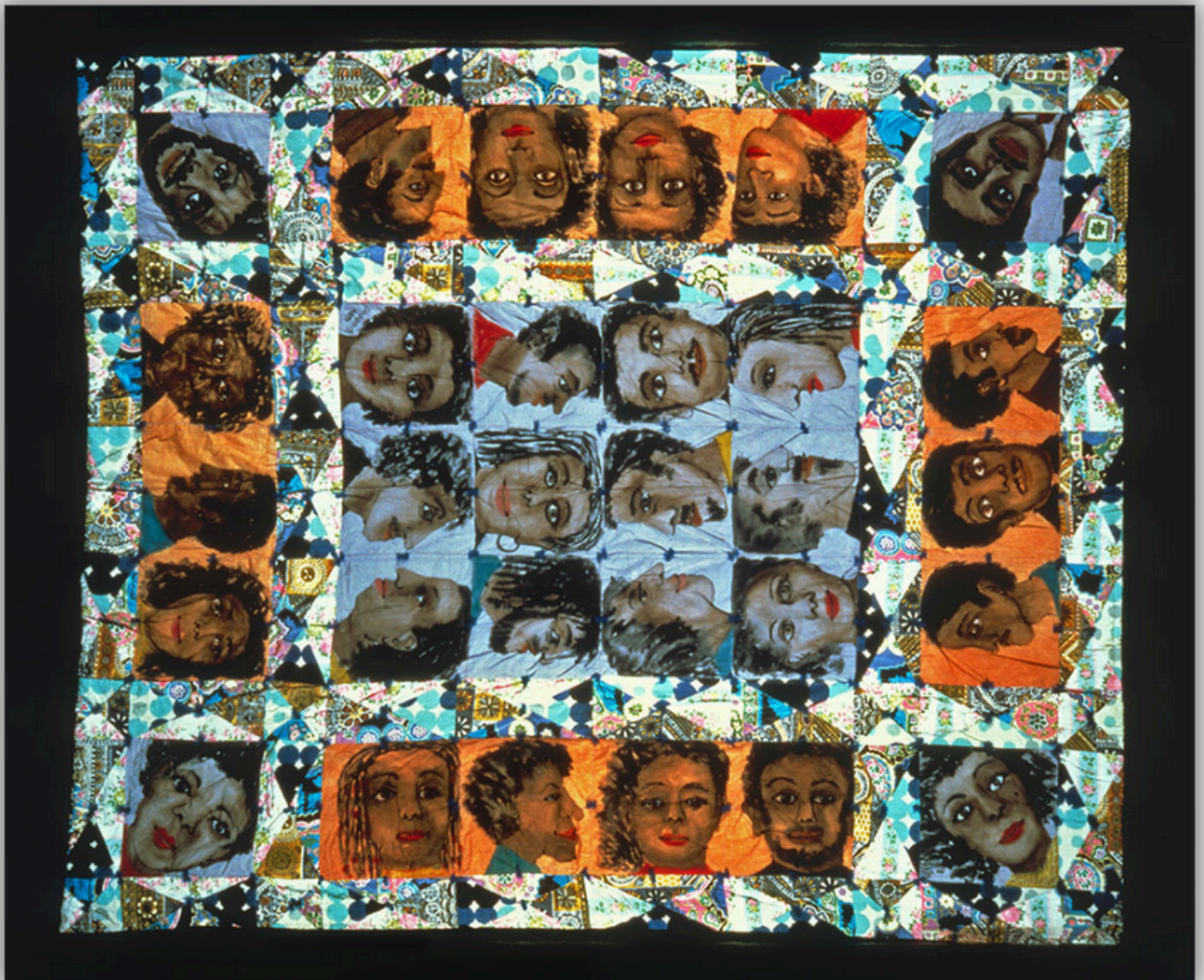
- Sewing and textile arts push the boundaries of what is considered “fine art.” They invite us to think about:
- Identity: Clothes and fabrics are worn on our bodies — they become personal and cultural statements.
- Memory: Textiles often carry history, such as quilts, heirloom garments, or recycled fabrics.
- Tradition vs. Innovation: Many cultures use embroidery, weaving, or dyeing in their traditions, and contemporary artists reinterpret these practices in new contexts.
- Sustainability: Sewing and recycling are ecological practices, turning old materials into something meaningful.
- For IB, textile arts are powerful because they connect material experimentation with global and personal context.



# Artists Who Work with Fabric

Here are some artists I encourage you to research:

**Faith Ringgold (USA):** Story quilts mixing painting, fabric, and narrative.



Faith Ringgold, "Echoes of Harlem", 1980.

Hand-painted cotton, 80 1/2 x 89 1/2 in. (204.5 x 227.3 cm). The Studio Museum in Harlem; gift of Altria Group, Inc.

2008.13.10



# Artists Who Work with Fabric

**El Anatsui (Ghana/Nigeria):** Monumental “textiles” made from recycled bottle caps.



El Anatsui, “Hovor 2”, 2004. Object made out of bottle caps and copper wire  
505 x 612 cm. Presented at the Expo Centre, 8th Sharjah Biennial, 4 April – 4 June 2007



El Anatsui, “Untitled”, 2024. Aluminium, copper wire, and nylon string. 345 x 466 cm x 135 7/8 x 183 1/2 inches. Goodman Gallery



# Artists Who Work with Fabric

**Sheila Hicks (USA/France):** Fiber-based sculptures exploring color and texture.



Installation View Sheila Hicks: *Seize, Weave Space. Sentinel of Saffron*, 2018. Photos by Kevin Todora. Courtesy of Nasher Sculpture Center



# Artists Who Work with Fabric

**Yinka Shonibare (UK/Nigeria):** Dutch wax fabrics in installations questioning identity and colonialism.

Yinka Shonibare. "How Does a Girl Like You Get to Be a Girl Like You?", 1995. Dutch wax print cotton on mannequins. 68" (172.7 cm)

Credit: Gift of Agnes Gund



Yinka Shonibare CBE RA, in collaboration with The Fabric Workshop and Museum, Philadelphia, Space Walk, 2002. Fiberglass, silkscreen print on cotton sateen and cotton brocade, and plastic. Dimensions vary with installation. Edition 1 of 2





# Artists Who Work with Fabric

**Teresa Margolles (Mexico)**: Fabric as political and social witness.



Teresa Margolles, "Papeles: (Papers), 2003.

92 sheets, Fabriano paper soaked with water that was used to wash the corpses after the autopsy, each 70 x 50 cm (27.6 x 19.7 in.), Unique





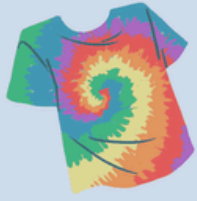
# Techniques & Practices

From my early guide on customization, and adapted for IB practice, here are key techniques you can experiment with:

**Fabric Dyeing & Tie-Dye** – creating unique color palettes.



# How to Tie-Dye T-shirts from the spruce



You will need:



Fabric to Dye

+



Rubber Bands or String

+

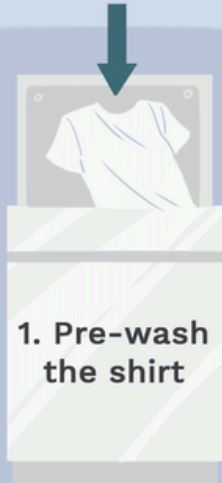


Dye

+



Bucket



1. Pre-wash the shirt



2. Fold, twist, & tie the shirt



3. Prepare dye according to instructions



4. Start with the lightest color & start dyeing!



## Folding



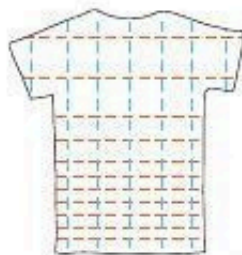
Evenly accordion fold garment



Bind with rubber bands



Purple 1-Color

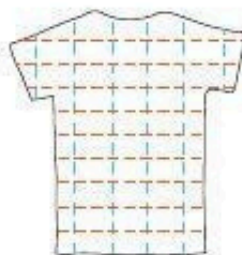


--- = Accordion folds  
--- = Rubber bands

Accordion fold shirt lengthwise; wrap with 12 rubber bands according to diagram at left, and apply single color overall



Ultimate 5-pack



--- = Accordion folds  
--- = Rubber bands

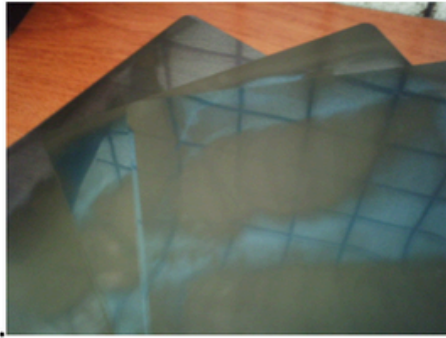
Accordion fold shirt lengthwise; wrap with 9 rubber bands according to diagram at left and apply 3 colors as shown





# Techniques & Practices

**Stencil Painting on Fabric** – transferring designs using old X-rays or acetate.



Clean the X-rays using bleach. It is recommended to leave it soaking overnight. Use gloves to collect the cleaned sheets and use rubbing alcohol to finalize the cleaning



Decide which design you will use to create your stencil and use a Sharpie to trace the drawing.



# Techniques & Practices

## Stencil Painting on Fabric



Using a X-knife, cut the lines of your design, recoving only the bold outlines



Clean again with rubbing alcohol the remaining Sharpie lines



# Techniques & Practices

## Stencil Painting on Fabric



You can create stencils with more than one layer. A good way to mark what paint first is to cut the tip of each sheet with a "V" mark. The first one to be painted should be the largest color part; second, the subsequent color, and last the outlines/details.

# Techniques & Practices

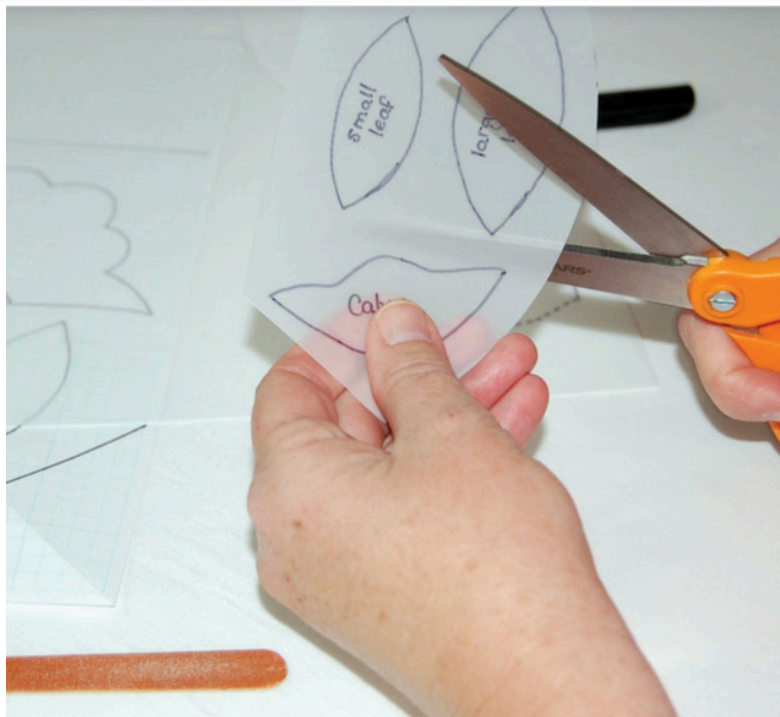
**Appliqué & Collage** – layering different fabrics for texture.

*Image Source: Quilting Company*

In this method you prepare all your appliqué shapes before you stitch them to your quilt blocks. That way you aren't struggling to turn your seam allowances under while you stitch. With a few simple preparations, making appliqué blocks can be both relaxing and fun!



Template plastic, liquid starch, and a good stencil brush are handy materials to have on hand when practicing appliqué.



Cut the template out and smooth the edges using a nail file.



# Appliqué & Collage

Image Source: Quilting Company



Use fabric marker to trace your applique shape. Once the shape is cut, brush starch on to the fabric allowance.



Brush the seam allowance toward the template and press seam allowance.



## Appliqué & Collage

You can also collect interesting designs and patterns from other fabrics and apply them to your own pieces. This is a pair of jeans that I created using this technique:



And here some designers who used the same techniques in a diversity of Fashion Shows:

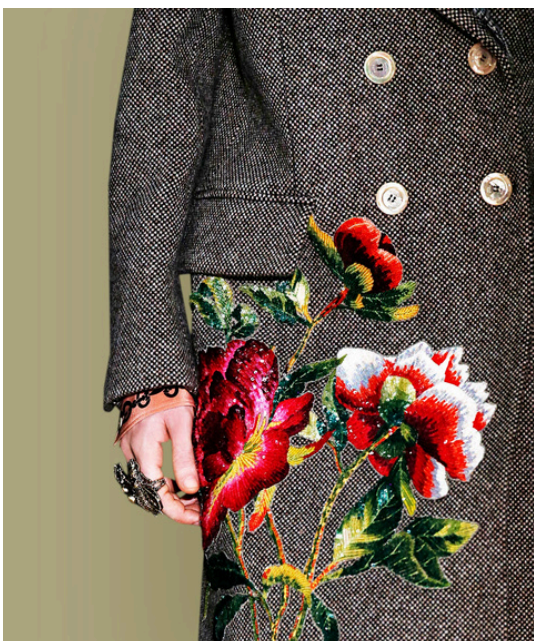


Image Source: Mueller Undsohn

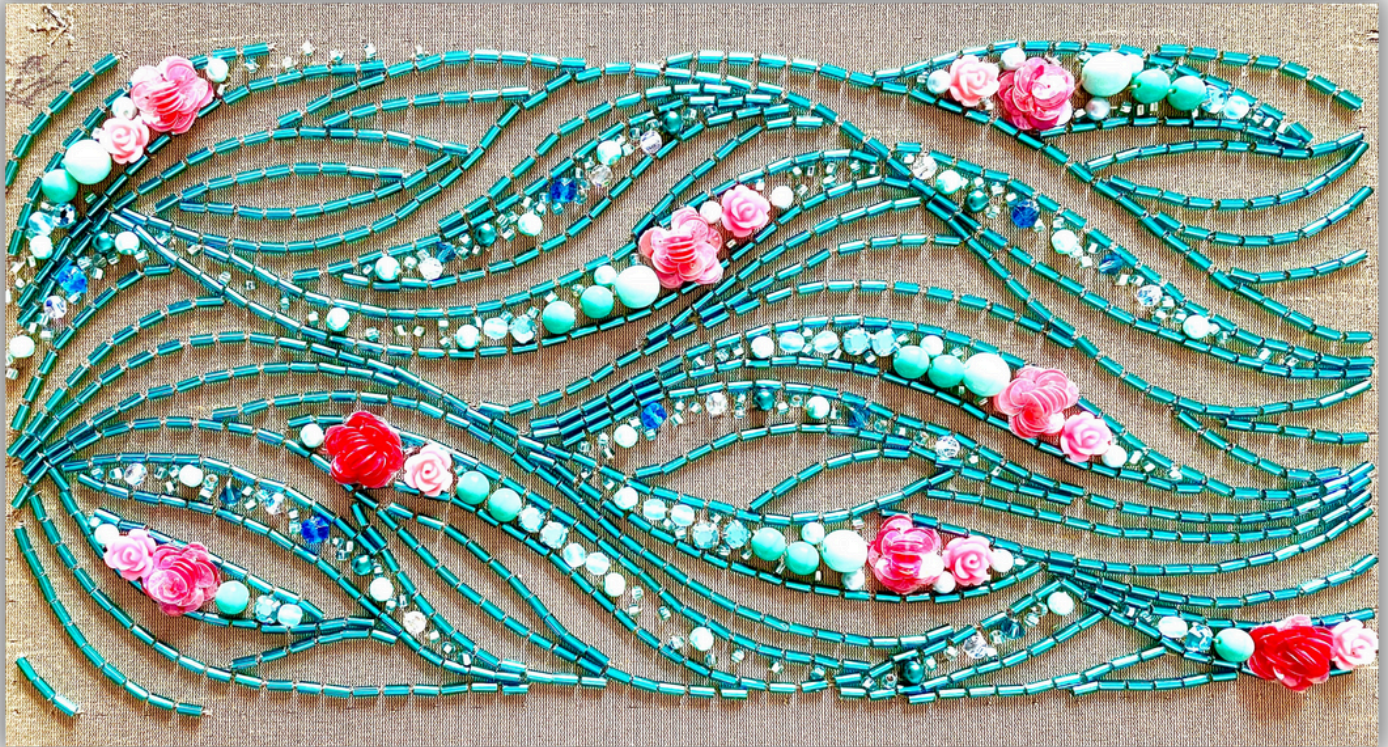


Image Source: The Cutting Class

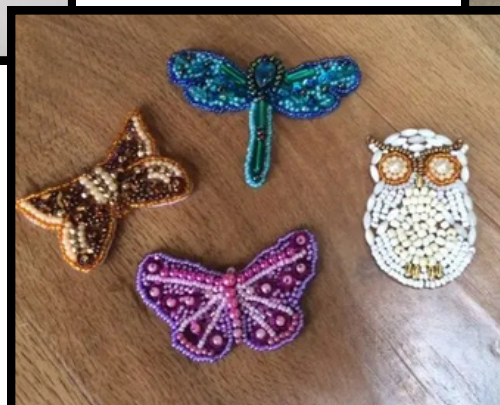


# Techniques & Practices

**Embroidery & Beadwork** – adding symbolic details to your fabric artworks.

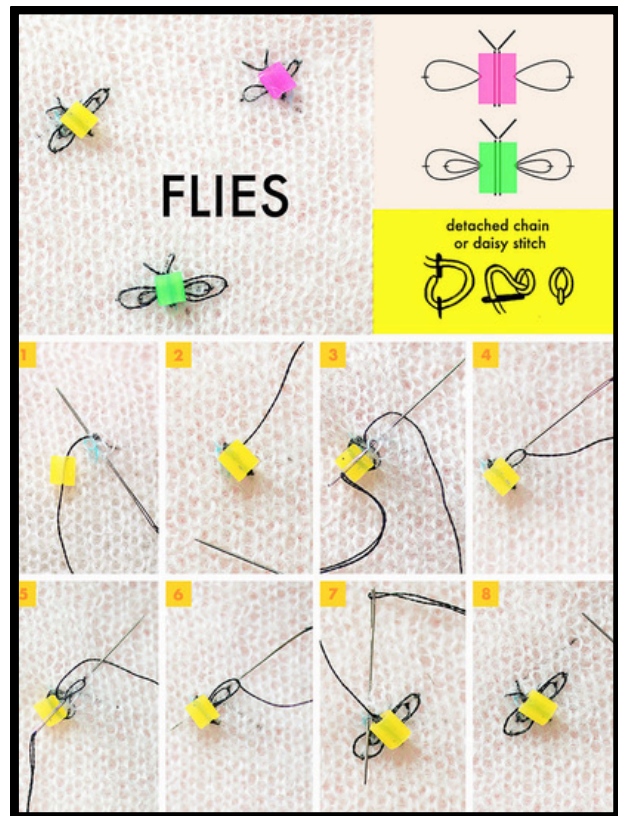
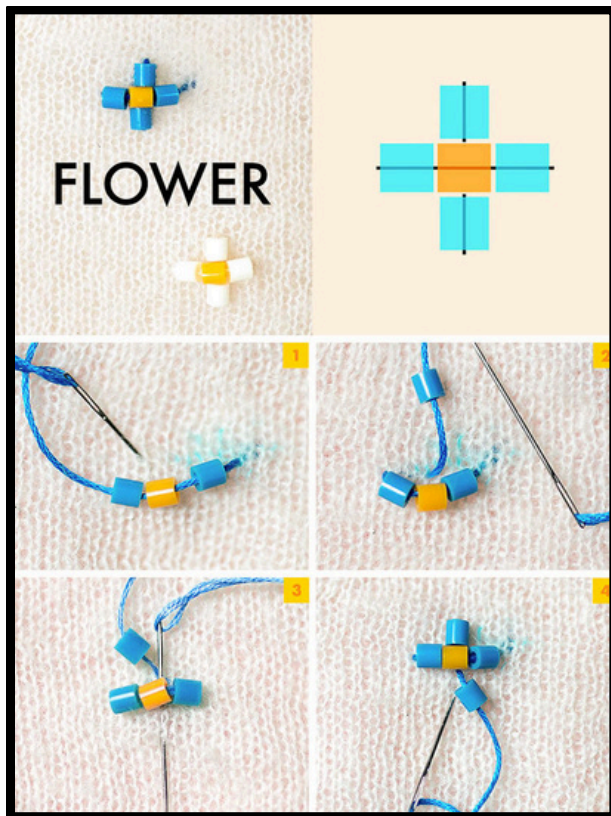


*Image Source: Beading Embroidery Kit*

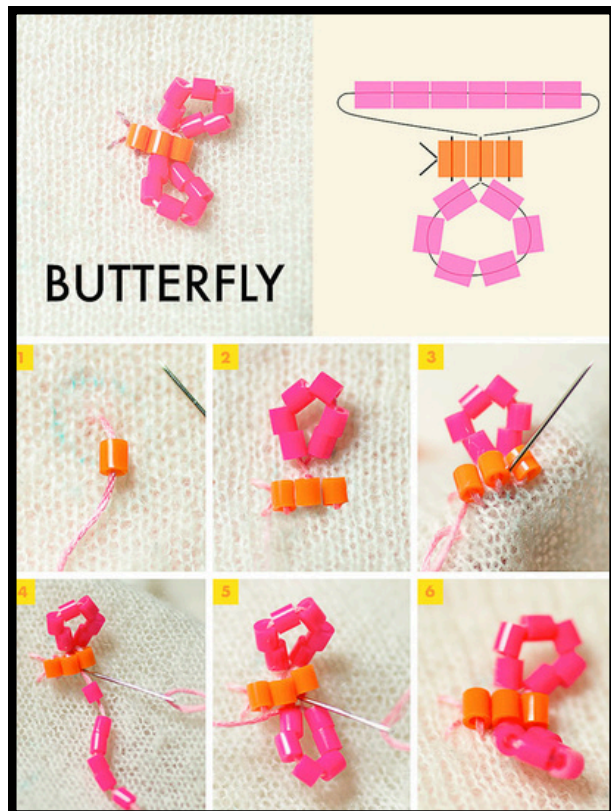




# Embroidery & Beadwork

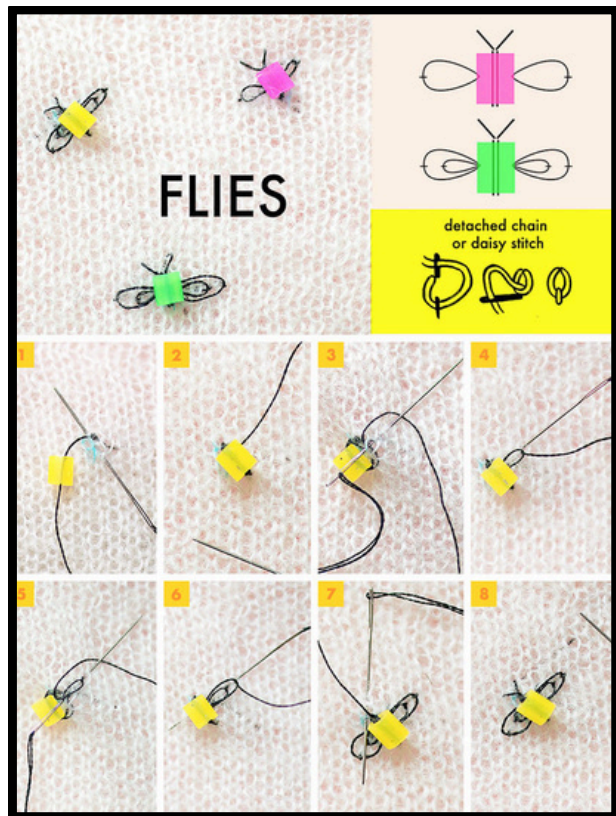
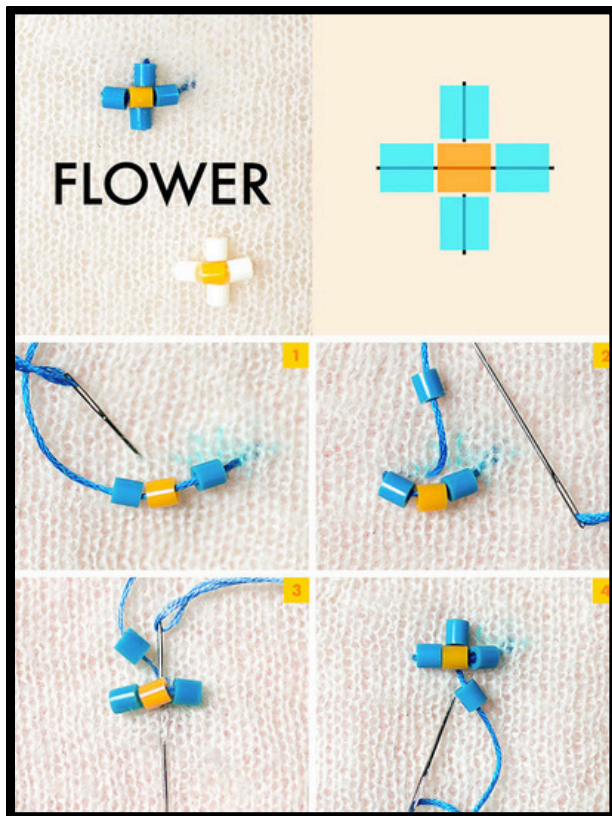


*Image Source: Handmade Charlotte*

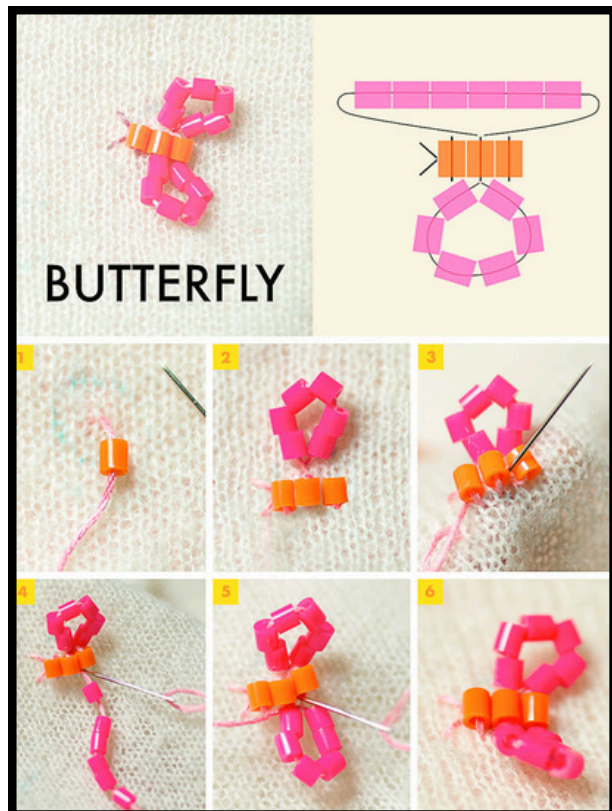




# Embroidery & Beadwork



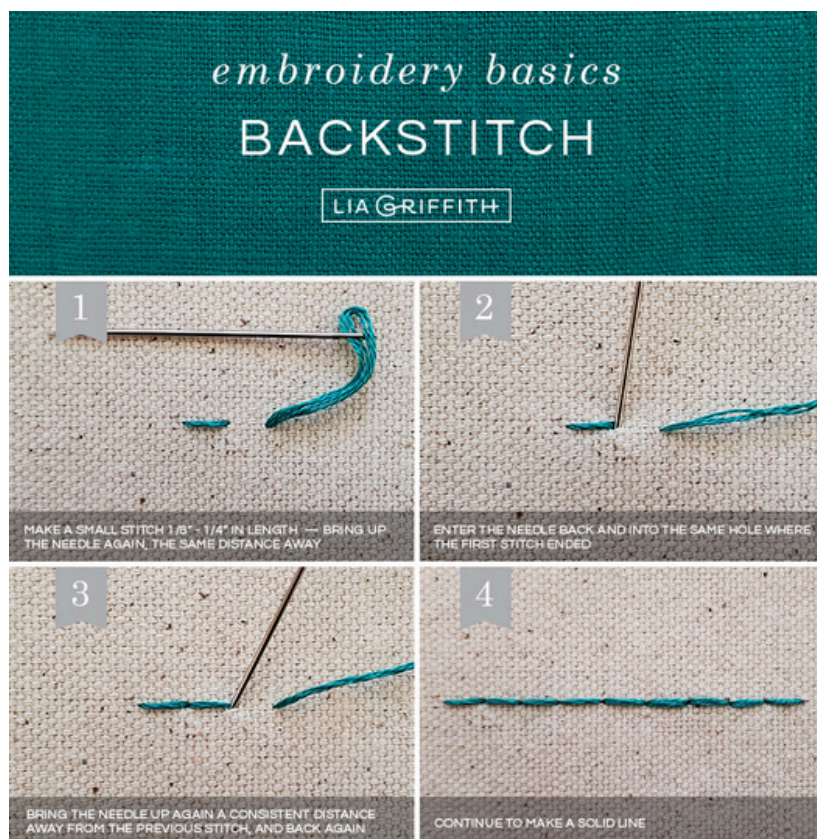
*Image Source: Handmade Charlotte*





# Embroidery Basic Stiches

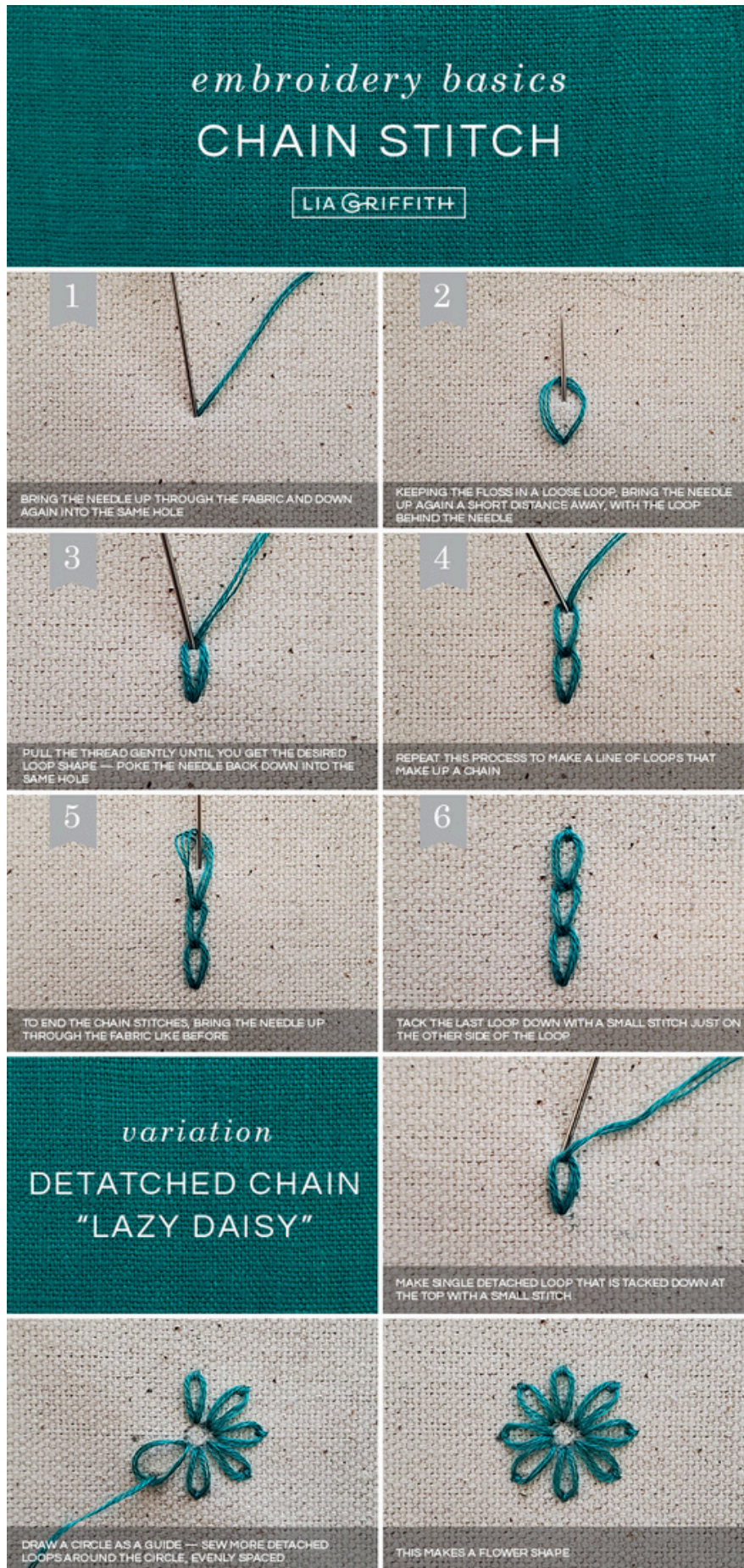
Image Source: Lia Griffith





# Embroidery Basic Stiches

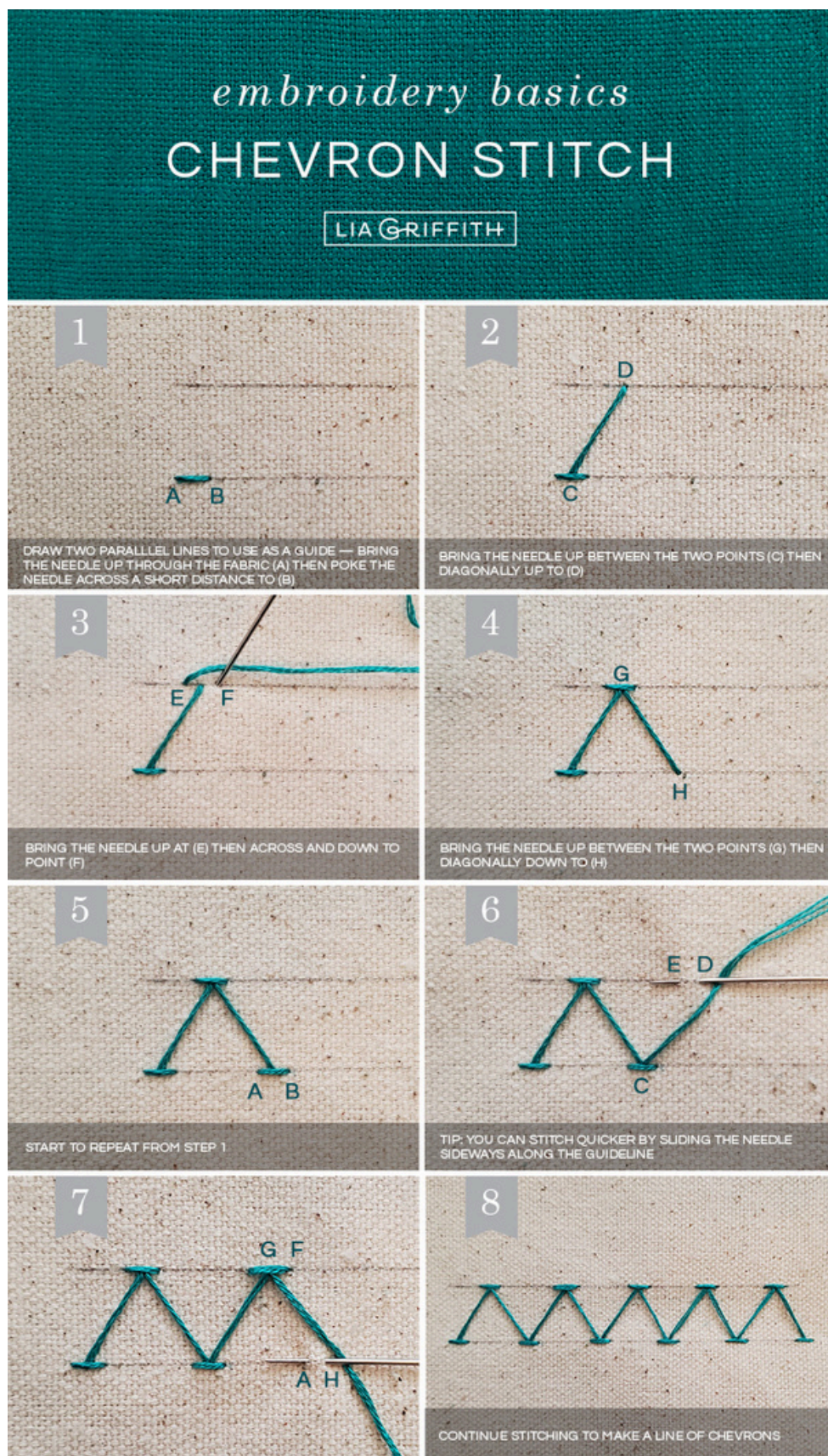
Image Source: Lia Griffith





# Embroidery Basic Stitches

Image Source: Lia Griffith

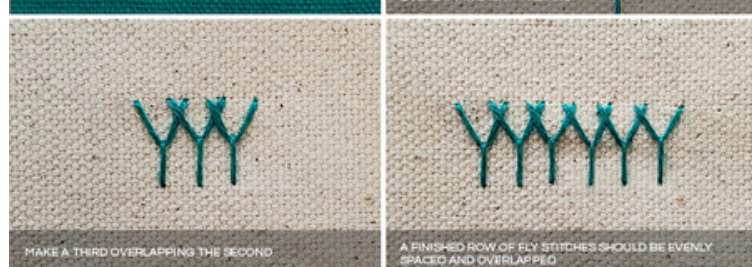
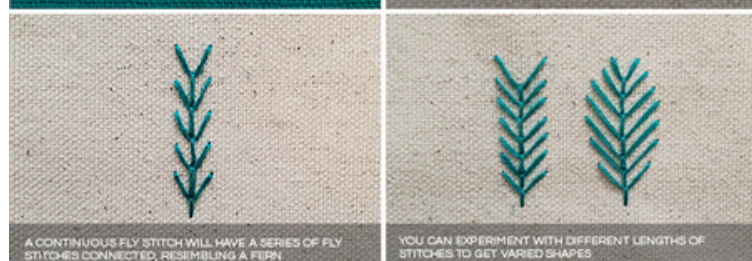




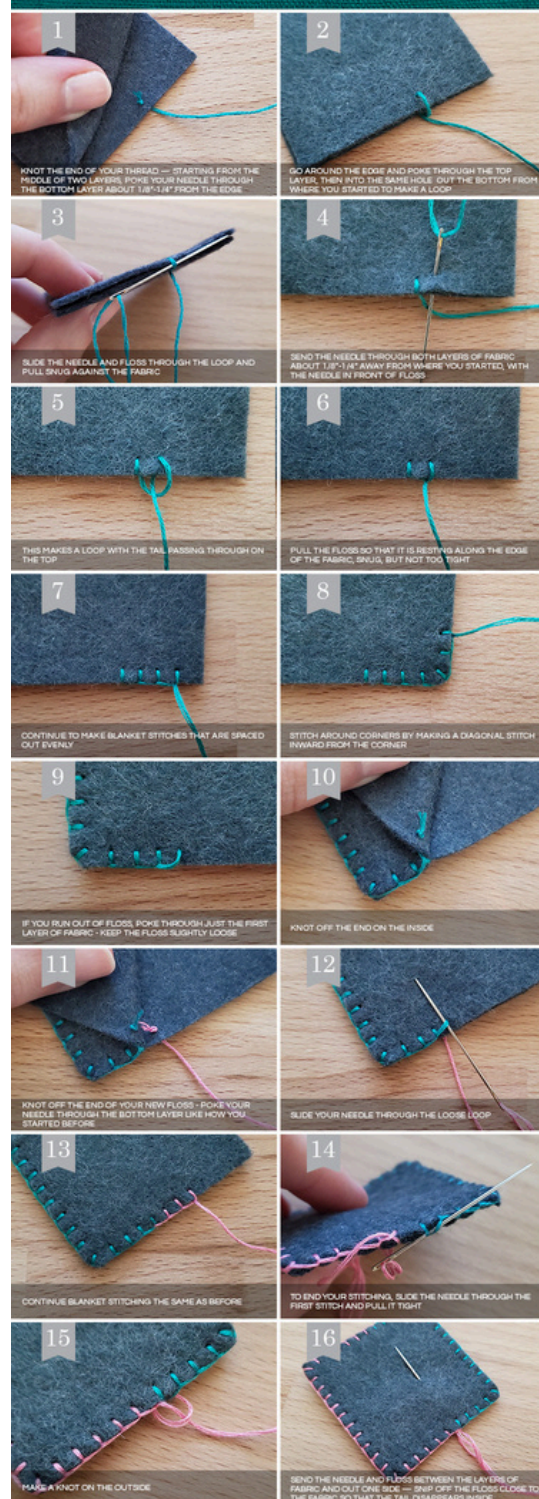
# Embroidery Basic Stitches

Image Source: Lia Griffith

## embroidery basics FLY STITCH LIA GRIFFITH



## embroidery basics BLANKET STITCH LIA GRIFFITH





# Techniques & Practices

**Patchwork** – weaving memory into fabric with a combination of fabrics



Image Source: Tierney Creates



Image Source: Patchwork with Achide



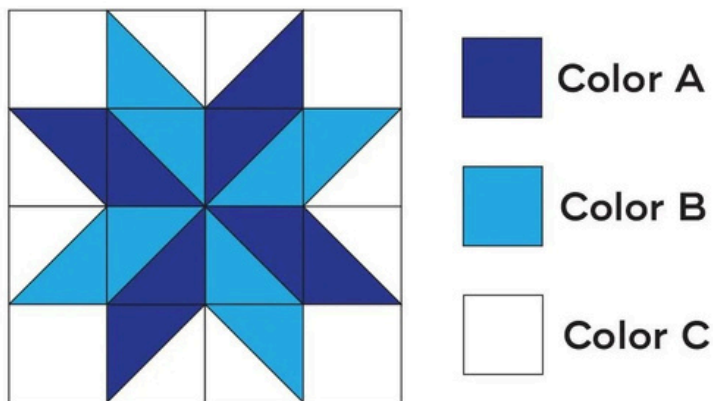
# Techniques & Practices

## Patchwork

Image Source: [sewdiy.com](http://sewdiy.com)



### HOW TO MAKE A TWO-COLOR PATCHWORK STAR



To make two 3" blocks, cut:

Color A: 2 squares 3.75" x 3.75"  
Color B: 2 squares 3.75" x 3.75"  
Color C: 2 squares 3.75" x 3.75"  
8 squares 1.25" x 1.25"

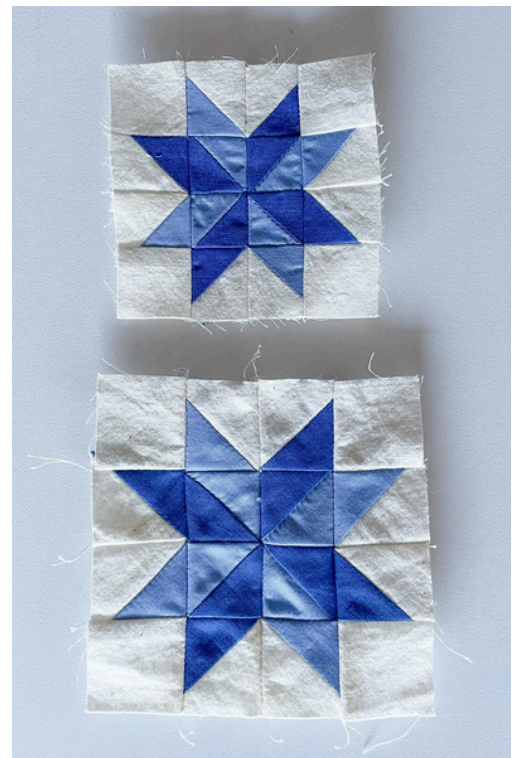
To make two 4" blocks, cut:

Color A: 2 squares 4.25" x 4.25"  
Color B: 2 squares 4.25" x 4.25"  
Color C: 2 squares 4.25" x 4.25"  
8 squares 1.5" x 1.5"

To make two 5" blocks, cut:

Color A: 2 squares 5" x 5"  
Color B: 2 squares 5" x 5"  
Color C: 2 squares 5" x 5"  
8 squares 1.75" x 1.75"

If you want more wiggle room when you trim down the HSTs, cut your squares 4", 4.5", and 5", respectively.



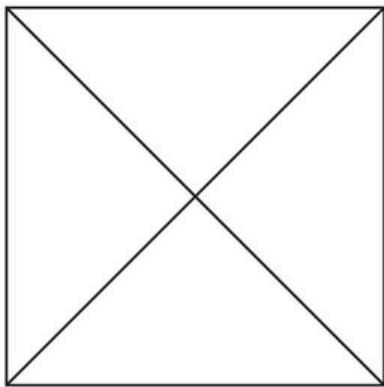
# Techniques & Practices

## Patchwork

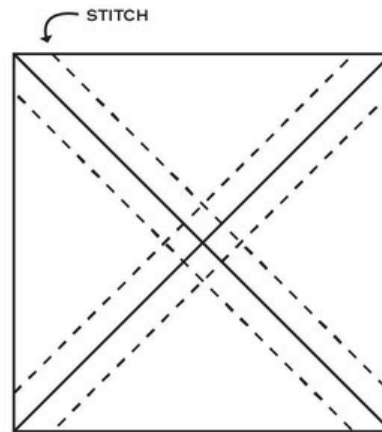
Image Source: [sewdiy.com](http://sewdiy.com)



### MAKE HALF-SQUARE-TRIANGLES (AKA HSTS) USING THE 8-AT-A-TIME METHOD.

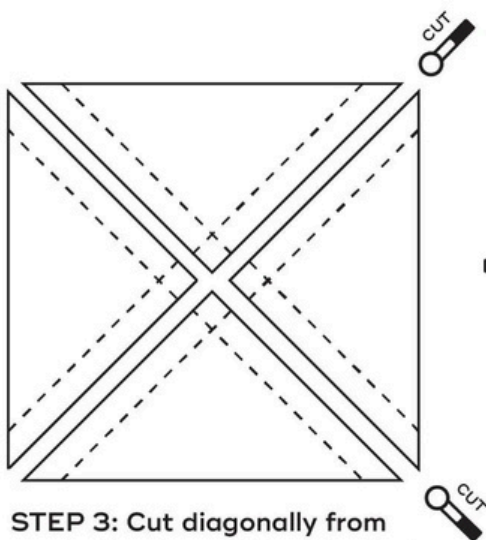


STEP 1: Place two pieces of fabric right sides together. On the top piece of fabric, draw lines diagonally from corner to corner.

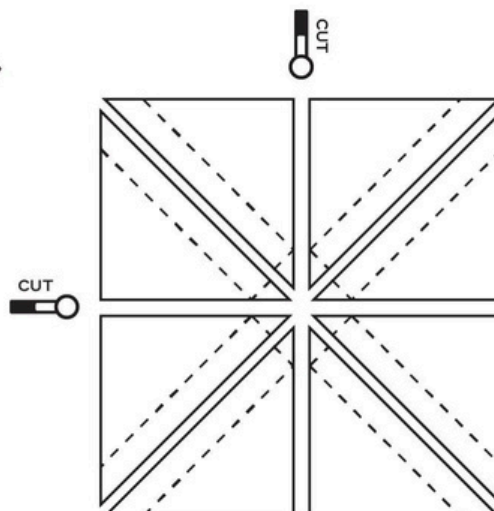


STEP 2: Then, using a ruler, draw a second line .25" away from each side of the diagonal lines.

Stitch along the second set of lines.



STEP 3: Cut diagonally from corner to corner along the first set of drawn lines.



STEP 4: Cut again through the center of each triangle, to create eight equal pieces.



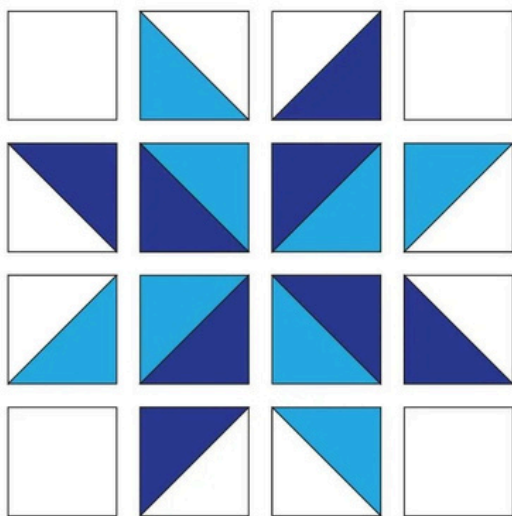
# Techniques & Practices

## Patchwork

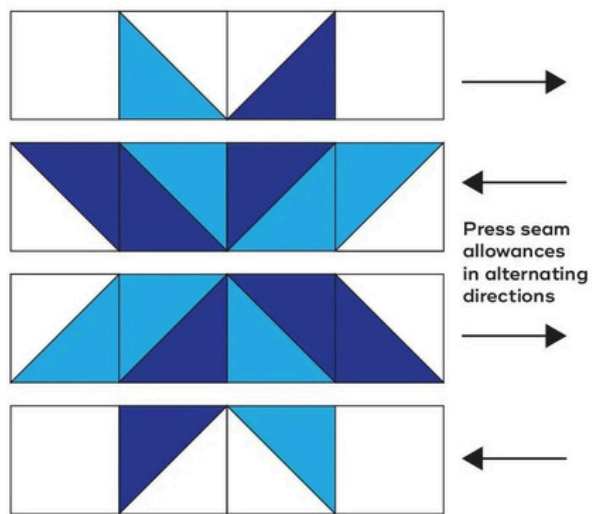
Image Source: [sewdiy.com](http://sewdiy.com)



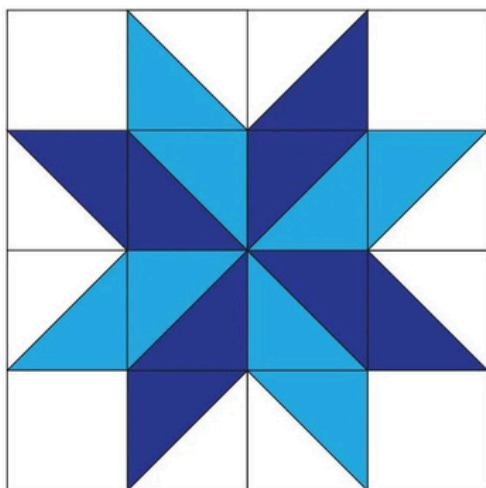
### ASSEMBLE THE PATCHWORK STAR BLOCK



**STEP 6:** Arrange the blocks in order.



**STEP 7:** Stitch together the columns. Press the seams in alternating directions.



**STEP 8:** Stitch together the rows and press. (I find it easier to press these seams open.)



# Techniques & Practices

**Recycling** – customizing clothes and combining different recycling materials to create artworks.



Use old fabric squares to create this style. Fold the fabric diagonally and cut a half circle at the top of the fabric, like is shown in images 1 and 2. Once the half circle is cut, make the final details with back stitch to make it firm. Adjust the size at the waist area and shoulders.





# Techniques & Practices

## Recycling

### Newspaper/Magazine handbag



Using strips of newspaper or magazines, make several straws, rolling the strips and finalizing with a little bit of glue in the end.



# Techniques & Practices

## Recycling

### Newspaper/Magazine handbag



Now make rolls with the strips. You can use a circular shape or a square shape, as you prefer.





# Techniques & Practices

## Recycling

### Newspaper/Magazine handbag



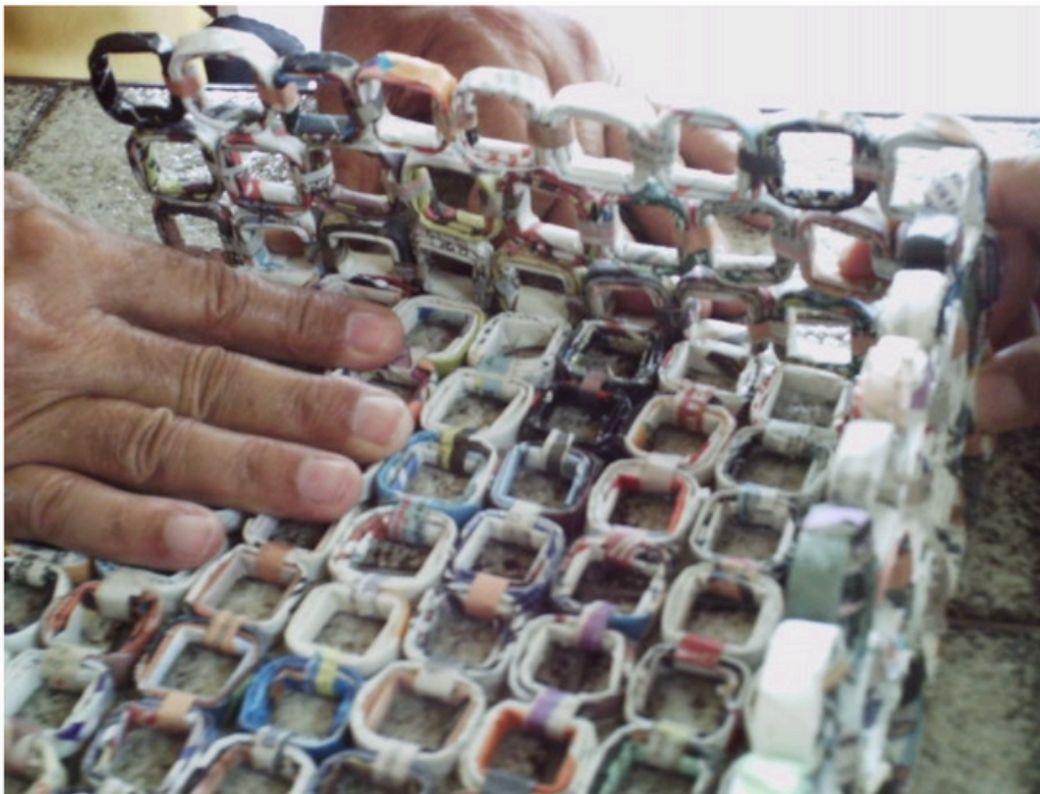
Now using a string, start to connect the rolls. The sides of the handbag should be having the measure of the picture.



# Techniques & Practices

## Recycling

### Newspaper/Magazine handbag



Add the sides, using the same process.



# Techniques & Practices

## Recycling

### Newspaper/Magazine handbag



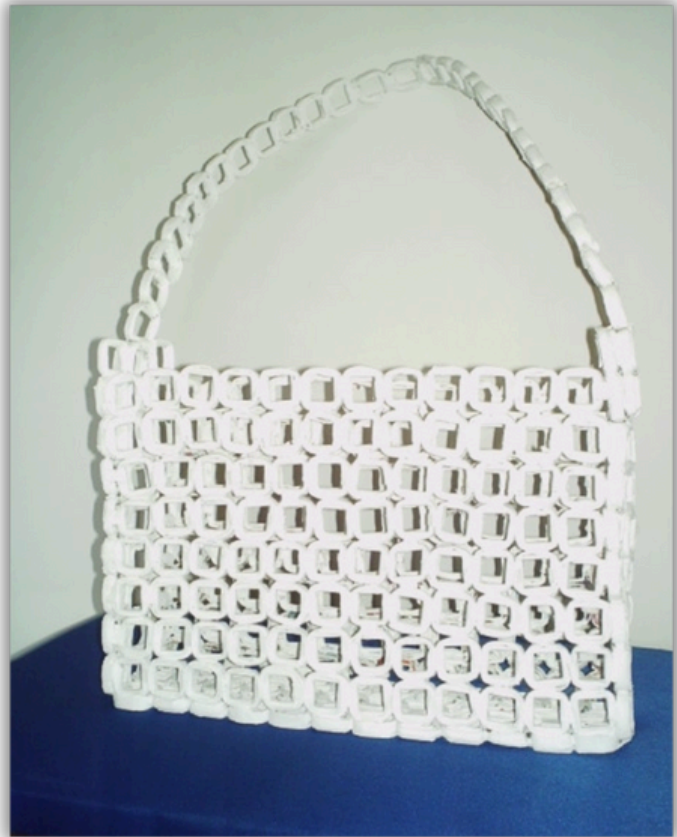
To color your handbag, make sure to add a layer of white beforehand, so the newspaper does not show in your final result. But if you prefer the newspaper magazine design, I am sure it will look good too! Just make sure to add a layer of finalizer to avoid water and damages.



# Techniques & Practices

## Recycling

Newspaper/Magazine handbag





# Techniques & Practices

**Felt Needling** - uses specially designed barbed needles to repeatedly stab and tangle loose wool fibers, causing them to interlock and forming shapes.

*Image source: Lia Griffith*





# Felt Needling technique step- by - step:

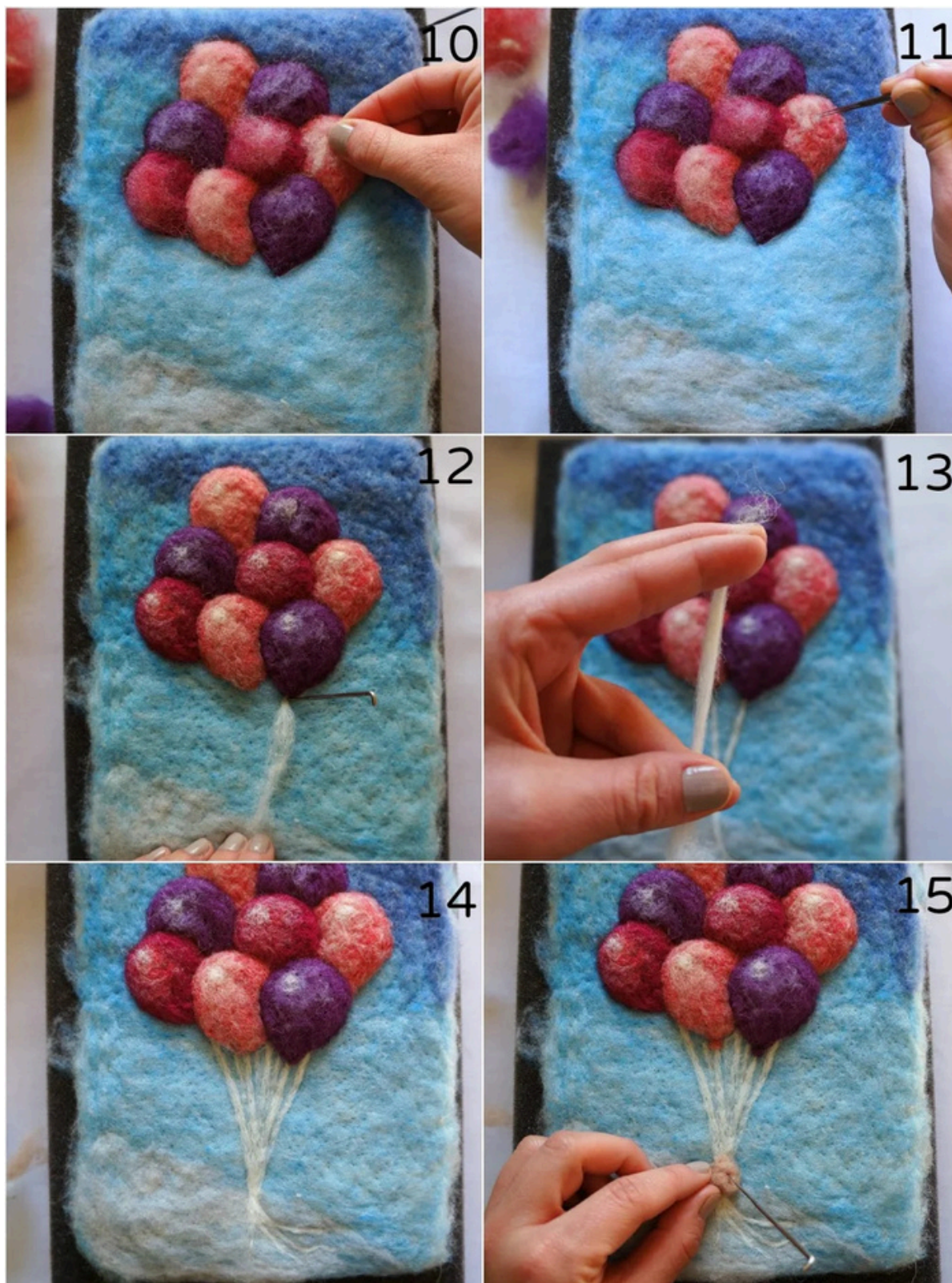
*Image source: Dani Ives*





# Felt Needling technique step- by - step:

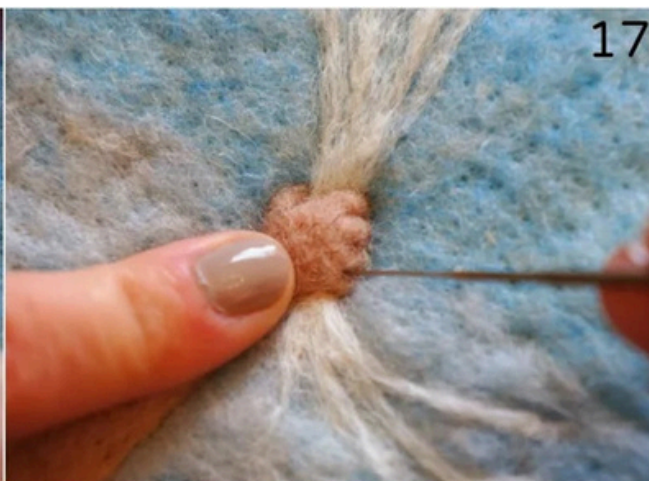
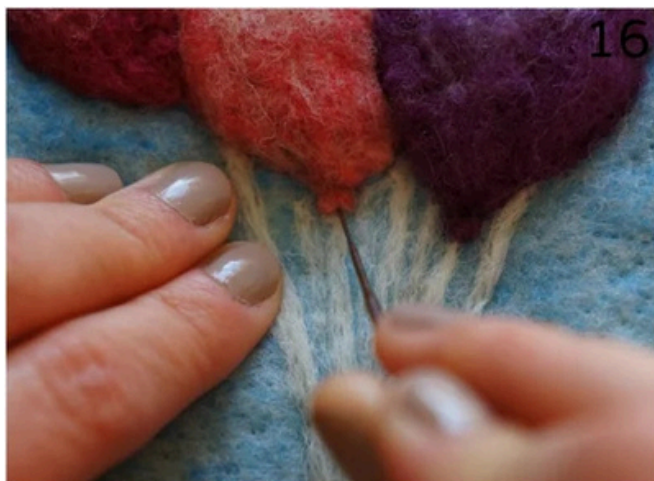
*Image source: Dani Ives*





# Felt Needling technique step- by - step:

*Image source: Dani Ives*





# Student Art Challenges

## **"Wear Your Story"** – Customized Garment Project

- Choose an old piece of clothing.
- Customize it with sewing, embroidery, appliqué, or dyeing.
- Focus on expressing identity, culture, or values.

***IB Reflection Prompt: How can clothing become a form of visual storytelling?***



# Student Art Challenges

## "Fabric as Memory" – Textile Collage

- Collect fabric scraps from different sources (home, travel, donations).
- Assemble them into an artwork (wall piece, book, or installation).
- Focus on memory, layering, and symbolism.

***IB Reflection Prompt: What do these fabrics carry in terms of memory or cultural identity?***



Image Source: Textile Artist



# IB Reflection Prompts

- *How do sewing and fabric arts challenge the boundary between art and craft?*
- *How can customization and recycling be a form of cultural or political expression?*
- *How does wearing art change its meaning compared to displaying it in a gallery?*

# Student Worksheet

- Name: \_\_\_\_\_
- Date: \_\_\_\_\_
- Project Planning
- Project Title:  
\_\_\_\_\_
- Chosen Garment / Fabric(s):  
\_\_\_\_\_
- Techniques I Plan to Use:  
\_\_\_\_\_
- Sketches & Notes
- (Use this space for sketches of your garment, fabric collage, or embroidery pattern)

## Reflection Prompts:

- *What is the cultural or personal significance of the fabric or garment you chose?*
- *Which technique was most effective in expressing your intention?*
- *How does your final work balance tradition and innovation?*
- *What could you improve or explore further in your next piece?*



