



# WANDERING WARDROBE



## LESSON 1.1: EXPRESSION & EMBROIDERY

Observation and analysis of the garment is supplemented with contextual and historical information to teach students how the material and embellishment elements of clothing is used to communicate status, wealth, and respectability. The activity asks students to use embroidery to communicate something about themselves by designing an original embroidery motif.

**Associated garment:** 1780's Court Coat

**Associated web page:** [onstead.unt.edu/1780s-court-coat](http://onstead.unt.edu/1780s-court-coat)

**Subject Areas:** Theatre, Visual Arts

**Grades:** Adaptable for any grade

**Topics/Themes:** Art observation, fashion design, drawing, embroidery

**Set-up:** Place the display box with garment on a table in the classroom that students can gather around and see easily; remind students not to touch

**Materials:** Court coat, projector and screen, paper, pencils, embroidery hoops, cloth, and thread (optional)

**Note:** This lesson may take 1-4 class periods depending on which activities are completed

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## GOALS

Students will be able to:

- Recognize and describe the use of pattern, symmetry/asymmetry, line, and color in an embroidery design
- Design a basic embroidery pattern which incorporates conceptual or representative imagery
- Explain artistic choices related to their embroidery design

## TERMINOLOGY

- **Concept:** an abstract or generic idea generalized from particular instances or the imagination; or something created to illustrate this idea ([Merriam-Webster](https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/concept))

- **Embroidery:** the art of applying decorative designs onto fabric using a needle. These motifs are traditionally rendered in thread and are composed of different kinds of stitches. ([MyModernMet](#))

## DAY 1: OBSERVATION USING ARTFUL THINKING (SEE, THINK, WONDER)

- Give each student a chance to look up at the garment up close
  - **See:** While gathered around the garment, ask students to share observations of what they see. Ask students to identify the use of pattern, symmetry/asymmetry, line, and color in the embroidery and shape of the garment.
  - **Wonder:** Have students share (in pairs or as a group) questions they have about the coat. Discuss with the entire class.
  - **Think:** Have students discuss (in pairs or as a group) a question from the students or one of the following: What do the flowers represent on this coat? Why would someone decorate their coat in this way? What kind of person might wear this coat, and what are they trying to say about themselves by wearing this coat? Have a student or students consider how they would stand if they were wearing the coat. (shoulders would be pulled back because of the design of the garment)
- After allowing students to discuss their initial observations, provide some contextual information:
  - **Coat History**

This coat was made in Europe around the 1780's. This garment was designed to portray the wealth and power of the man who would have worn it. We can see this from the complexity of the embroidery design and the brilliant colors used in both the base material and the embroidery threads. The embroidery would have been painstakingly hand-stitched, and the bright colors would require expensive dyes to make. The flower motifs may have represented allegiance to a particular leader or family.

[1.1.1 MensSuit Support File](#)  
[Liverpool Museum: 19<sup>th</sup> Century Men's Dressing](#)
  - **Embroidery History**

During the 18<sup>th</sup> century, embroidery was a means to communicate the status of the wearer, which included wealth, rank, or family nobility or respectability. Embroidery in the 1780's would have been done by hand. The thread would all have to be dyed by hand to create the various colors. ([GoogleArtsSlideShow](#))

[1.1.2 V&A embroidery pattern Support File](#)  
[1.1.3 V&A embroidery print Support File](#)  
[1.1.4 V&A embroidery vest Support File](#)

Let students know the lesson will continue with designing and executing their own embroidery project.

## DAY 2: EMBROIDERY PATTERN ACTIVITY

- Briefly recap previous days lesson. Prompt students to share something interesting they remember from the first day: Where do you see embroidery on clothing today? What kind of person would have worn the coat?
- Discuss/demonstrate the embroidery design and execution process:
  - Engage students by asking what they think step one might be in the process of embroidering the coat from the 1780's. How would the embroiderer get started? Would they embroider before or after sewing the garment?
  - Share the process for the coat: Before the embroiderer could begin they would often have a pattern often created by a separate artist, and the embroidery would be done on the fabric before it was cut and sewn into the coat.  
[MET Embroidered Waistcoat Panel](#)
  - The embroidery in these examples uses fine, delicate threads, but for a beginner embroidery can also be executed with thicker threads that are easier to control.
  - Show short clips of [stitches](#) so that students understand the capabilities of marking with stitches. (Video - running stitch at 0:57, back stitch at 2:42). While these are simpler stitches, there is a lot you can do with them!
- Begin the activity by having the students brainstorm what simple design they could use to express themselves, working through the steps on the **Day 2 Handout**. Use the **example Day 2 Handout** as an example, or work through the process along with the students as a demo.
  - Ask students to brainstorm words to describe themselves, or how they like to express themselves. For example: smart, creative, athletic, etc.
  - Have them write 8 words on their handout. If they get stuck, can have students share out what they have written to help get wheels turning.
  - Next, have students sketch **6 thumbnails** in the boxes on the handouts of possible designs representing these words. REMIND them to keep it simple to avoid frustration later if they will be embroidering. Set a time limit for 2-3 minutes per sketch, and give more time as needed. *Note: for theatre students, this could also be done in relation to a character they are developing.*
- Before class ends, each student will choose one idea to execute in embroidery. Have them sketch this out as a final pattern in the circle on the back of the paper.
  - Optional: Colored pencils, markers, etc. can be used to show color choices
  - Optional: ask students to draw the piece of clothing they could imagine their design on. Where would it be located on the clothing (i.e. on the sleeve, collar, pocket)?

## DAY 3-4: EMBROIDERING ACTIVITY

- Using the resources below show examples of how to set up the hoop, the needle and thread, and to execute embroidery stitching:
  - [YouTube Video](#)
  - [1.1.5 Sewing EmbroideryHoop](#)
  - [1.1.6 Sewing SetUp](#)
  - [1.1.7 Sewing FinishingKnot](#)
  - [1.1.8 Sewing Embroidery RunningStitch](#)
  - [1.1.9 Sewing Embroidery SatinStitch](#)
  - [1.1.10 Sewing Embroidery CrossStitch](#)
- Prepare fabric for embroidery by drawing pattern directly on fabric using a pencil. Drawing lightly will show less underneath the finished product but drawing darker will be easier to follow.
  - Suggestion: pencils for older students, markers for younger*
- Demo how to stretch fabric over hoop and tighten, how to make a knot, how to thread and use a needle. Some additional pointers:
  - Knot yarn at the end of the yarn to start; this will keep it from pulling out
  - Make sure your yarn is not too long or it will tangle as you stitch
- Stitch away!
- At the end of the last class, have each student present their work to the class or have students walk around to see each student's work laid out on a table. Discuss the process of embroidery, how the designing process felt, and how they view embroidery and clothing after working through the project.

## ADDITIONAL EMBROIDERY RESOURCES

1. [Top 15 stitches in hand embroidery](#)
2. [Example](#) of embroidery from the Texas Fashion Collection
3. [Embroidery stiches video](#)
4. [Embroidery for beginners](#)
5. [Using an embroidery hoop video](#)
6. [Counted Thread Embroidery: Does it Have a Place in the Classroom?](#) (article)

## ADDITIONAL HISTORICAL RESOURCES

[Colonial Williamsburg, "A Day in the Life: Dress the Part"](#)

[Kunstgewerbemuseum, National Museums in Berlin,](#)

["The Elegant: Men's Fashion of the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> Century"](#)

[Los Angeles County Museum of Art, "Reigning Men"](#)

[National Museums Liverpool, "Getting Dressed in the 18<sup>th</sup> Century"](#)

[Metropolitan Museum of Art, "Dangerous Liaisons: Fashion and Furniture in the Eighteenth Century"](#)

[Dressed Podcast, "Rose Bertin, Fashion, and the Reign of Marie Antoinette: an interview with Kimberly Chrisman-Campbell"](#)

## SUPPLIES

[Plastic needles for younger students](#) (Amazon)

[Steel large eye blunt needle](#) (Amazon)

[Needle work fabric](#) (Amazon)

[Embroidery hoops, 5 sizes](#) (Amazon)

Yarn or other thick thread can be used

### Needle and Fabric Recommendations

To get the best sewing or embroidery results, it is important that the needle style and fabric work well together. Below are some recommendations with links to find them online, along with suggestions for the age group most appropriate to use each:

[Plastic needles](#): These are the safest, bluntest needles and are best used with [felt](#) or paper. Ideal for the youngest students.

[Size 16 Tapestry Needles](#): A step up from plastic needles, these needles are a bit smaller but still safely blunt. Easier to use on [plain muslin](#). When hand-sewing multiple layers a more open-weave fabric such as [this](#) or [this](#) is easier. Good option for all students, as they are large and blunt but still sleek enough to enable students to be successful.

[Yarn Darners, size 14/16/18](#): These are sharper/pointier, but also large in size making them easier to handle and see. Better for older elementary or high school students. These would work well with [muslin](#) and most basic cotton fabrics such as [this](#).

[Embroidery Needles, sizes 3-9](#): These are the best for embroidery, and work well on [muslin](#) and other similar fabrics such as [this](#). Appropriate for older elementary and high school students.

[Cotton darners, sizes 1-5](#): These would be good for both embroidery or hand-sewing as they are both sharp and large in size. Due to their sharpness, recommended for high school students. Would work well with [muslin](#) and medium weight woven fabrics like [this](#).