



Domestic Arts Unit



"Weaving" ceiling mural by Art-James, acrylic on canvas, United States Capitol Building, 1993 – 1994 (Murals)

Unit Introduction

Unlike today, families in the past made many of the things they would use in their daily living. There were few local markets to purchase their necessities or wants. Trade required a several day journey to places like Winchester, Virginia, for goods such as salt, black powder, and lead. Cloth was often made in the home in the late 1700s by spinning wool from animals or from plant fibers, such as flax. The wool was spun into thread and that thread was then dyed and woven into cloth that became the fabric for clothing as needed. Each step in that cloth production process is a creative process.

The domestic arts also included basketry which was done using similar weaving skills, but certainly different raw materials. Baskets were made by pioneers and the American Indians using many different natural materials; one of the most common in this area was white oak splints. White oak trees had to be just the right size and age for splitting strips suitable for weaving baskets. Basketry became a domestic art out of the creative skills and vision of the weaver and the necessity for utensils for gathering and carrying. The art emerged as the individual artisan made his or her basket stylized according to his/her own skills and talents.

The domestic arts were then more specifically honed to include tatting of lace, basic sewing, clothing construction, and embroidery. The domestic arts were certainly born of necessity but were a means for the individual artisan to add a personal touch and creative artistry to the craft. The lessons in needle arts also refer to samplers that were used to teach young daughters to embroider and that sampler became a decorative piece in the home.

A later needle art that emerged with the rhythms of change in the late 1800s, as in the Job Prickett homestead, was that of quilting. The lesson on

quilting focuses not only on pieced quilts, but also on the art of making coverlets, as had been the skill brought from Europe. The lesson on coverlets and the lesson on quilts will present the artistic design and the creative talent of each artisan.

Young ladies were not the only ones who were taught or who needed to use needle arts. When young men went off for long hunting trips and then later to war, they carried a small pouch which they called a "housewife." In it were needle, thread, buttons, and any other items deemed necessary to repair clothing as they were on the move. A young man could repair a tear in his clothing, replace a button or whatever was needed in the art of needle and thread. He certainly was not as accomplished as was the young lady at her sampler, but he performed the task out of necessity.

Student Learning Outcomes

Students will understand the roles, techniques, materials, processes, and artistic expression of the craftspeople:

- Weaver
- Spinner
- Basketmaker
- Quilter
- Needleworker

Differentiated Instruction

As needed for exceptional students, students will be paired to facilitate activity successes. As needed for gifted, use resource list for additional information and challenges.

Unit Guiding Questions

- How did early settlers prepare their own threads for cloth in the late 1700s?
- How did the early settlers prepare and dye cloth?
- How did cloth production change in the 1800s?
- How did early and later settlers use needle arts?
- How did the early and later settlers create baskets?

UNIT PRE-VISIT SUGGESTIONS

Read the introductory units on Folk Art and Pricketts Fort History.

Examine the maps to understand the geographic boundaries of the frontier and the colonies in the late 1700s and the states in the late 1800s.

Works Cited & Resources

"Trades" www.history.org/Almanack/life/trades/tradehdr.cfm

"Murals: United States Capitol Building" <http://www.art-james.com/murals/weaving.aspx>

VISIT

Visit activities are outlined in individual lessons.

UNIT POST-VISIT SUGGESTIONS

Suggestions for Extended Learning

Find a contemporary artist working in one of the discussed areas and write a profile.

Interview the artist if possible and document your findings. How is his or her artwork, process, and work environment similar and different from the 18th and 19th century?

Create a visual presentation such as an exhibit or video about the artist and artform.

Have students interview a grandparent or other elderly member of their community about a "domestic arts" activity that he or she remembers. Document the interview and share with the class.