

The Thames Heritage Tapestry

Resource Pack and Technical Brief

What the Resource Pack Contains

1. The Starter Kit of materials and implements

The **Starter Kit** includes the metre square of carpet canvas, many exciting yarns and materials and sets of needles, knitting pins, crochet hooks etc.

2. The Technical Brief

Welcome to the Thames Heritage Tapestry! We hope you thoroughly enjoy working on your own metre square of textural embroidery and find many exciting and imaginative ways of using the materials to express how you want to interpret your subject brief.

Throughout my life I have had many occasions to bless those who taught me to sew, to knit, to crochet and to use all the other skills needed to make a textural embroidery. I have always believed that children everywhere should have the same opportunities as I had to learn these skills. I hope the Thames Heritage Tapestry will give children in schools along the Thames the chance they might not otherwise have had to learn them, from teachers, and from parents, grandparents and many other members of their community. They will learn how to express themselves creatively, using skills that will help them throughout their lives. But, more than that, they will learn how to work cooperatively, sharing ideas with each other to achieve a common aim. Above all, I hope they have fun.

Although we want to give you as much freedom as possible in creating your own tapestry square, in order to make the whole Thames Heritage Tapestry work there have to be certain rules.

1. How to Develop and Choose the Images You Want to Use

All the children in your school will have ideas, and we would like to see all of the children have the opportunity to express these ideas so that the best of them can be used as the images that make up your metre square of canvas.

The first thing, then, is to tell them about the subject that their school has been allocated, and to explore the ways in which all this can be translated into visual ideas.

What we would like each of the children to do at this stage is to draw or paint on a single piece of paper (say A4) a picture of what the theme and subject mean to them. If they want to use more than one piece of paper, that is up to you to decide. It doesn't matter a great deal how proficient they are. It's the ideas that count. And our experience is that there will be some surprising, remarkable and original insights. Don't be afraid if some images are non-representational or completely abstract. They may well work very successfully.

You may find it best to introduce the Thames Heritage Tapestry project to them in an assembly of the whole school, and talk to them about the theme that makes up your school's individual subject. Or you may prefer to work on a class-by-class basis, which would give you the opportunity to pitch the briefing at a level most appropriate to the age group of each individual class.

Once all the pictures have been completed, we suggest that they are displayed together, perhaps on a wall, and the best images or combination of images are chosen to be the basis for the design of your actual square of tapestry. Who chooses and how they choose is entirely up to you, but it would be good if there emerges a general consensus so that all the children can feel happy they have contributed in some way.

This stage should take only a few days, and possibly only an hour or two of actual work.

2. **Some Rules and Guidelines**

Although we want to give you as much freedom as possible in creating your own tapestry square, in order to make the whole Thames Heritage Tapestry work there have to be certain rules.

- 2.1 Please keep the postal tube in which your resource pack arrived safe. Do not allow it to be thrown away or used for other purposes. You will need it to send your completed canvas back to us.
- 2.2 Please check the materials and tools contained in the postal tube, and let us know immediately if anything is missing. There should be: one square of carpet canvas; one bag of miscellaneous materials; two bags of wool and yarns; one bag of metallic embroidery cottons and threads, and scissors; one bag containing felt, embroidery cottons, knitting and sewing needles, crochet hooks and a tape measure.
- 2.3 Please make sure your completed canvas is as nearly as possible an exact one metre square, so that it will fit perfectly within the displays.

You will notice that the square of carpet canvas in your resource pack has a selvage, like tape, on two sides opposite each other and cut – ragged – edges on the other two sides. The length of the canvas from selvage to selvage and the width from cut edge to cut edge are both approximately 1.14 metres.

Measuring very carefully, please fold each of the edges back by 0.07 metres (7 centimetres), that is 9 holes on the ragged edges and 7 holes on the selvage edges, so that you leave one metre between the two folds in both cases. Tack down the 0.07 metres turn to prevent the canvas from fraying and to give you a good firm edge. Turn the canvas over so that the turned pieces are on the underside of your tapestry. We have made the first fold to help you. Please *do not cut the canvas*.

Then make your textural embroidery using *all* of the metre square between the folds. This will then allow us to fix your completed work to a wooden frame. To help you, we have included a tape measure in the resource pack.

- 2.4 We would like you to make use of all the materials we have sent you, please, as their colours and textures will help create a unity throughout the whole Thames Heritage Tapestry. How you use them is entirely your decision.

However, we should also like you to add as many materials as you wish. These materials will give the tapestry a richness and diversity. However, we would ask you *not* to include any foodstuffs, including such things as dried lentils and pulses or dried pasta, as they might encourage insects or mice!

- 2.5 Please stitch everything to the canvas, or attach it securely with thread, and please do *not* use glue or gum.
- 2.6 Remember that you will need to roll up your finished tapestry square and return it to us in the postal tube. So while we would like to encourage you to make it as three-dimensional as you wish, it must not be so thick that it won't fit in the tube.
- 2.7 The creation of the Thames Heritage Tapestry is an important event, and we are anxious to keep an archive of how it was achieved. So when you return your finished tapestry square to us, please include with it, or better still e-mail to us at thamestapestry@btinternet.com, a short description of the different images you have included and how you worked on it.

If you are able, please also take photographs of the children working on the tapestry and of anything else you think would be interesting, and again include them in the postal tube or e-mail them to us.

3. How to Cover the Square of Canvas

The Thames Heritage Tapestry is strictly speaking a textural embroidery and not a tapestry in the sense that it involves only very intricate stitches. But, whatever you call it, it is a medium that gives children the freest rein to express their ideas visually without being hampered by lack of technique or experience.

The canvas you have is carpet canvas, with three holes to the linear inch (that's about twelve holes per 100mm), which means it can be filled relatively quickly and easily with a variety of materials. So start by covering the canvas as fast as you can, using appliqué, knitting, crochet or areas of fabric painting.

The whole tapestry has to be made fire resistant, so we would ask you to restrict your use of non-permeable materials so they don't take up too much of the whole area of canvas. Please do not use plastic bags or anything you know to be highly flammable. Above all please do not use any foodstuffs - even dried foodstuffs - which might attract mice or insects. When attaching anything, please always sew it to the canvas or to anything on the canvas - don't use glue or gum.

The starter kit contains big-eyed needles. So please use as many strands of yarn in each stitch as possible (and be inventive in twisting different colours together to give different effects) when you want to cover ground quickly. If you want to add more detailed work, that will be wonderful, but bear in mind it will take longer.

Remember your canvas will be one of several, so make it as big and bold in appearance as you wish, though people do still like to look at tiny details. Remember colour theory to make your images stand out. Contrast primary colours with their opposite secondary colours to make your canvas sing - navy blue and orange, scarlet and green, canary

yellow and violet. But use the more muted colours too to allow the principal images to stand out. Your children will have an innate sense of colour too. Allow them to use it.

Please don't arrange your whole design on diagonal lines (although it's fine to use some diagonals) as it makes it very difficult for one canvas to lead easily into the next.

Use whole strips of material to suggest the sky, for example. So long as everything is sewn on there are no rules. And why not sew on your school badge or anything else that will identify who made this particular canvas? Or you may like to embroider your school's name in words.

Don't be afraid to experiment. You can always undo anything that doesn't work.

Try as far as possible to allow all the children in your school or group to play a rôle in making your canvas. Making a piece of knitting or crochet, painting, arranging, stitching on, or just making suggestions. They also serve who only stand and wait.

Above all, have fun.