

Textiles Tell Our Tales



Since the beginning of time, humans have needed textiles to survive. People need textile for warmth, clothing, shelter and comfort, for protection and for celebrations.

Fibres are used to make homes, coverings, bed linens, carpets, furniture and thousands of other items used in our daily lives. They show a person's geography, religion, climate, historical timeframe, economic standing and identity.

Our fabrics show who we are, and what we believe !

These on-line textile blocks are designed to be an exploration of 'fabrics', art styles, techniques of world and Canadian cultures. They allow students to explore different fabrics and to examine these cultural practices close-up.

Each textile block can lead to further exploration, discussion and creativity.

You will find suggestions for further learning possibilities in red beneath each block.





SEALSKIN

Textile:

Sealskin has been used for centuries to make Inuit clothing in the bitter cold Arctic and it is still used today. Differing Inuit groups may use different decorative patterns on the clothing, but it has been key to the survival of the people because it is waterproof, warm and does not crack when it freezes.

Dig Deeper:

Where, geographically, does sealskin get harvested and when?
 Why is it still such a valuable 'fabric' for making Arctic clothing?
 Often designs are made from different coloured parts of the sealskin, as seen in the Inuvialuit block above. What techniques are used?
 Sinew is the traditional 'thread' used to sew sealskin. How was it prepared, and what makes it so special?
 What conflicts have surrounded the seal hunt in recent times?



WEAVING with GOLD THREAD

Textile:

Metal threads have been used in making rich cloth for centuries, mostly in Europe, Asia and the Middle East. It is especially used for royalty and important occasions. Even today, gold and silver, whether real metal thread or imitation, are valued decorations on fabric. Can you see how the gold thread is woven into the main cloth to make a pattern?

Dig Deeper:

In past times, real gold and silver were used. How did the value of these 'threads' affect the production of clothing?

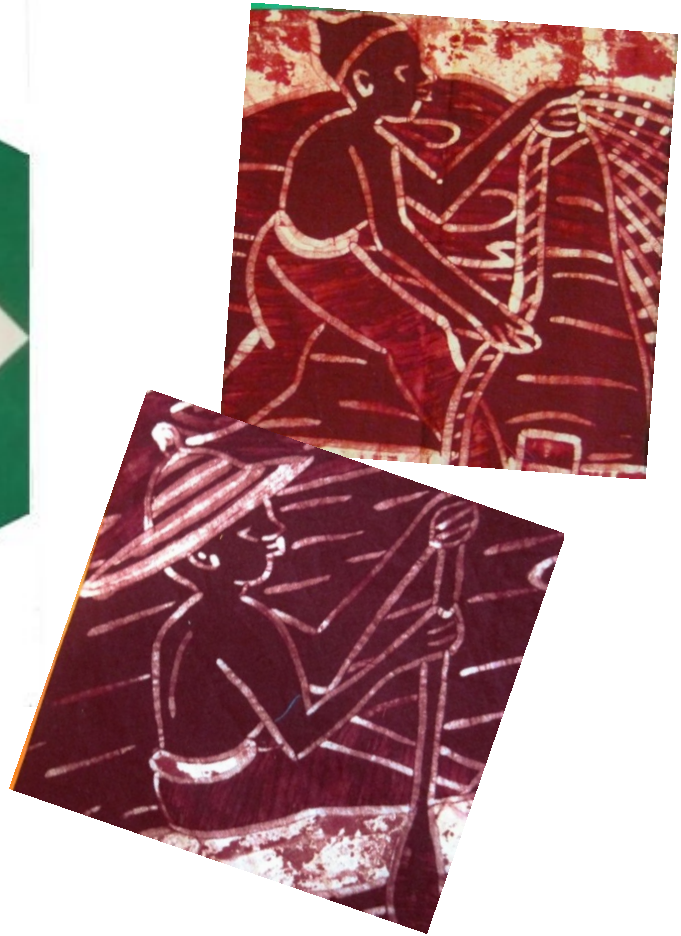
Who were the clients who could afford these status symbols?

What symbolic meanings does gold have in fabric?

Who still uses cloth woven with gold and for what purposes?



BATIK



Textile

These African examples from Niger and Cameroon portray traditional village life. Batik, a technique for adding designs to fabric, has been practiced for centuries in many countries of the world. It consists of applying hot wax to fabric to make an image or pattern. When the entire fabric is then dyed, the waterproof wax retains the original colour. To add more colours, the wax can be added or removed or reapplied and then the fabric re-dyed.

Dig Deeper:

Research the history of batik in other parts of the world.

What kinds of fabric are used for making batiks? Do synthetics work?

What tools and practices are used in batik production?

Explore how this wax resist technique is used to make elaborate Easter eggs in European countries.



needle lace



crocheted lace



tatted lace



HANDMADE LACE

TEXTILE

Lace is made in many parts of the world, but especially in Europe. In the 16th and 17th century, hand-made lace was so valuable that rich people paid huge sums of money for the finest lace. It was often more valuable than castles or gold because it takes so many hours to make even a small piece. Homes and clothes in the 18th, 19th and 20th centuries were often decorated with lace; collars, doilies, table cloths. The bobbin lace on the Belgium block took a year to complete.

Dig Deeper:

Research how different kinds of lace are made.

Look for lace on the clothing of people in portraits by famous European paintings by Dutch masters of the 17th century.

Research the art of making of Irish lace and the valuable role it played during Ireland's Potato Famine.



KNITTING with WOOL

TEXTILE

Notice the unspun fleece on the knitting sample on the right. To make yarn for knitting, first the wool fleece from sheep or other animals such as alpaca, certain goats and even muskox is shorn off and is cleaned well. It is then carded (combed), dyed and spun into yarn. The yarn is then knit or woven into clothing blankets or rugs. For centuries, the knitting was done by hand with knitting needles, but now most is done by machine. Many of today's clothes such as T-shirts and socks are finely knit with thin synthetic yarn. Look closely at how the clothes you are wearing are made into cloth.

Dig Deeper:

Do all sheep produce the same coloured fibre or thickness of wool?

What properties of natural wool make it special?

What are the different types of sheep that produce the best wool?

What other animals can you find that are used for making yarn and where are they found?

Research how fleece becomes yarn with carding and spinning.

Research the importance of wool to the Industrial Revolution.