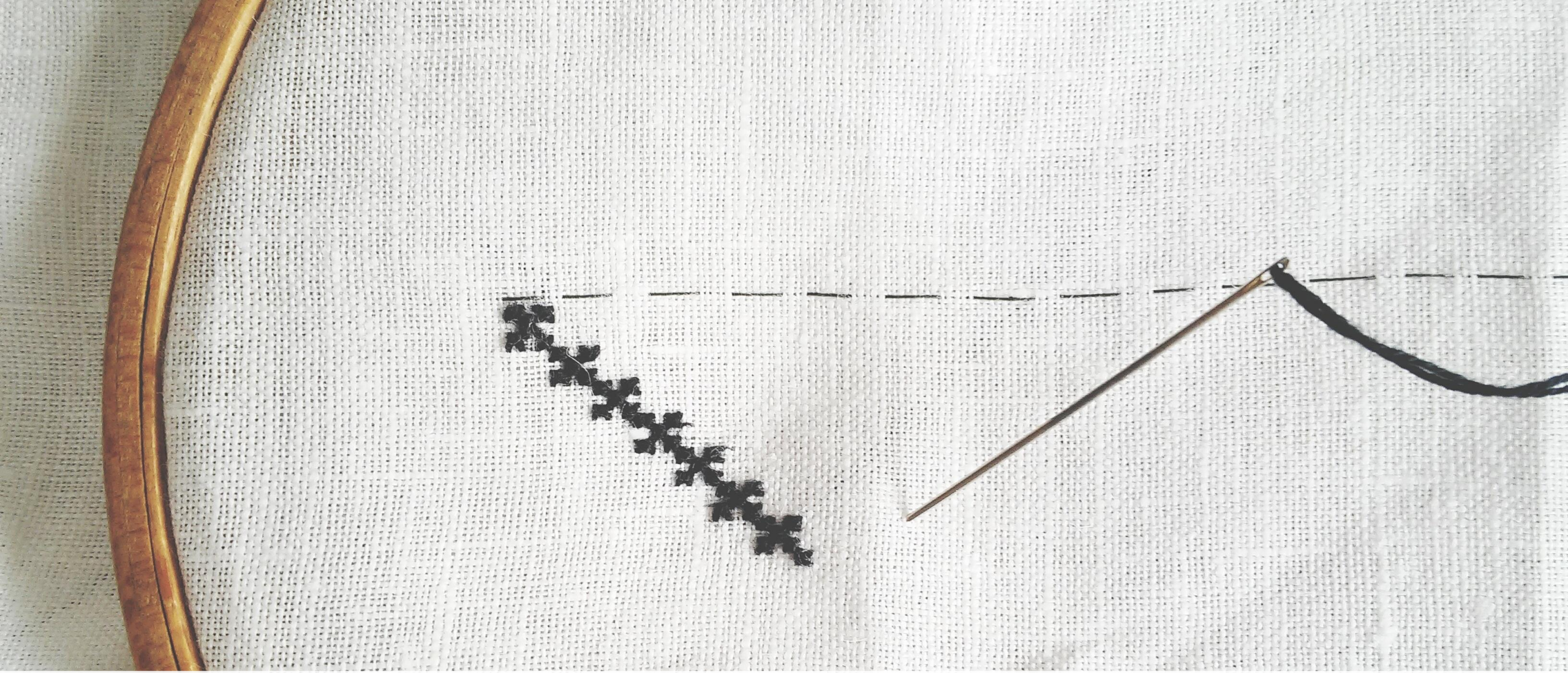
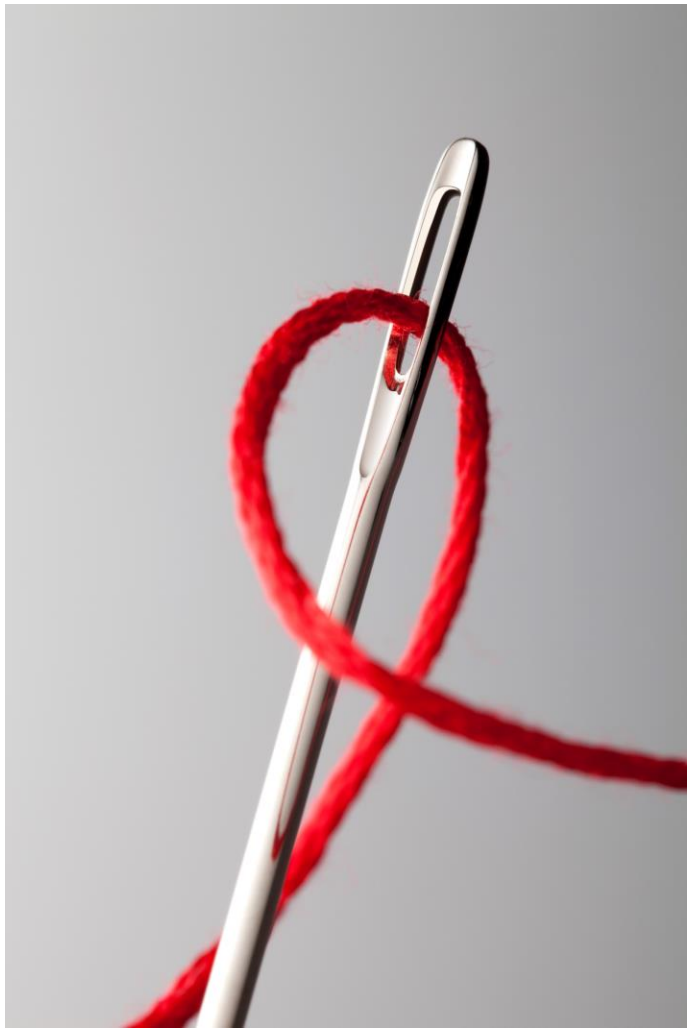


Cross-stitch

What is cross-stitch?

Cross-stitch is a specific kind of embroidery where little X's are stitched on gridded fabric.



History of Cross-stitch

Use of ‘X’ as a stitch in embroidery samples dates back to the 6th or 7th century AD.

Cross-stitch embroidery flourished during the Tang dynasty in China (618-906 AD). It is quite likely that the art of cross-stitch spread westward along the Silk Road, which is the modern term for a series of transport routes used as a way to transport goods from 200BC to the 1340s. These routes also served other purposes such as the trade of ideas, skills, and art.

The use of cross-stitch as a sole stitch for embroidering a whole pattern is a more recent development.

Sampler

The English word 'sampler' derives from the Latin ‘exemplum’ or the old French term 'essamplaire', meaning 'an example'.

The making of samplers was a common activity for girls during the 19th century.

Samplers were used as a way to help teach basic needlework skills while including the alphabet, numbers, important quotations, and family history.

Today, we still refer to cross-stitch pieces as samplers despite the fact that cross-stitch designs have changed dramatically since the 1800s.

The earliest surviving dated cross-stitch sampler is held at the Victoria and Albert Museum in London.

The sampler was stitched by Jane Bostocke, in 1598.

The inscription commemorates the birth of a child, Alice Lee, in 1596, who was her cousin.

The sampler contains a variety of patterns, rows of border motifs, and also randomly placed motifs.

Courtesy of the Victoria & Albert Museum

Modern Cross-stitch

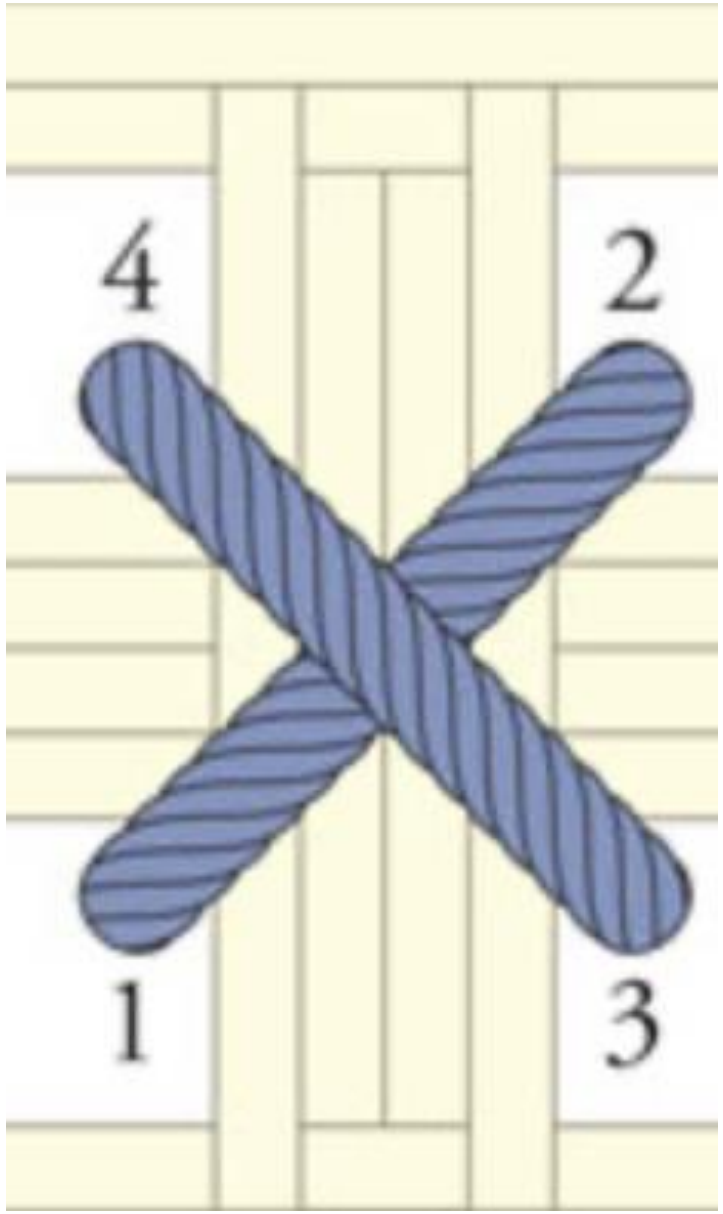
- Stamped cross-stitch is manufactured with the pattern already stamped, in color, onto the aida cloth. You simply follow the color patterns that eventually make a scene or a picture. This type of cross-stitch is usually sold in kits with matching thread colors provided.
- Counted cross stitch is based on a paper pattern and a piece of clean aida cloth or linen, where the x's on the pattern are counted by the stitcher and then the "counted" pattern is re-created onto the cross-stitching cloth.
- These forms of modern cross-stitch were brought back into style in the 1960's then saw another great resurgence in the 1980's.
- Recently, a new generation of stitchers has emerged. Cross-stitch is no longer the past-time for prim ladies of yesteryear, who showed off neat stitches in their samplers. The current trend is known for retro images with contemporary, feminist sayings added to them. A nod to the old, but today's stitchers bring new flair to the traditional art form.

Thread

Embroidery threads, also known as stranded cottons or skeins, are available in hundreds of different colors.

Each thread comprises six individual strands, which can be separated.

Usually the pattern key will tell you to use two of the six strands together to do standard cross stitches.



Because every cross-stitch is composed of just two tiny stitches, it’s quick and easy to master the basics, which is why cross-stitch for beginners is easy to pick up and progress with quickly.

Aida Cloth

Aida cloth is an open, even-weave fabric traditionally used for cross-stitch embroidery.

This cotton fabric has a natural mesh that facilitates cross-stitching and enough natural stiffness that the crafter does not need to use an embroidery hoop.

Here are some cross-stitch examples courtesy of the Tides Institute & Museum of Art

Dating back to 1846, this large (24” x 20 1/2”) was made by Sarah Ann Cheney of Eastport, Maine when she was just 11 years old.

The sampler, in remarkable conditions for its age, is silk on Penelope weave linen and features cross and straight stitches.

Within the sampler, Sarah included information about her parents and their children, even adding her baby brother below the verse years after she had finished the piece.

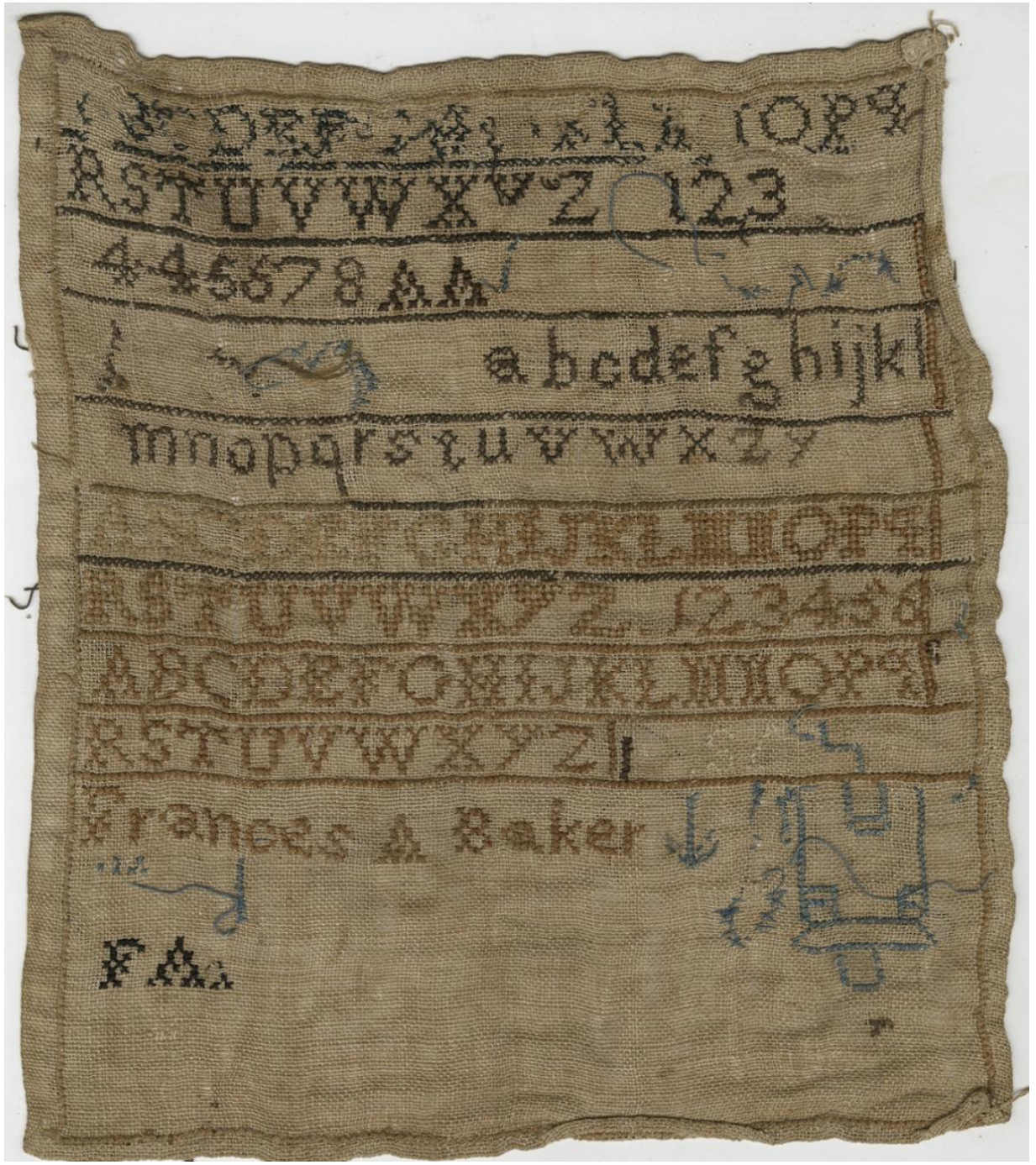
The sampler was part of an exhibition of early to mid-19th century federal period Maine needlework samplers held at the Saco Museum in Maine in 2013. The curator of the exhibition, Leslie Rounds, wrote in the accompanying exhibition catalogue: “Sarah Cheney's sampler is the ‘newest’ of all the samplers in the exhibition and shows many signs of the new styles of needlework that were emerging at the time. However, it also continues to demonstrate stylistic elements that clearly tie it to the earlier works in the exhibition, with its lavish rose border and family register format that appears to be a near-copy of many Portland samplers. She was mimicking the Berlin work that was quickly becoming the needle arts rage of the era”

The Tides Institute acquired this sampler in 2022 from a dealer in Connecticut that specialized in antique needlework samplers.

This sampler was made by Francis A. Baker, who eventually married Edward Starbird Paine of Eastport.

She was the grandmother of Doris Paine who was secretary of the Border Historical Society in the 1950's and 1960's.

Baker was born December 4, 1824 and died February 2, 1881.



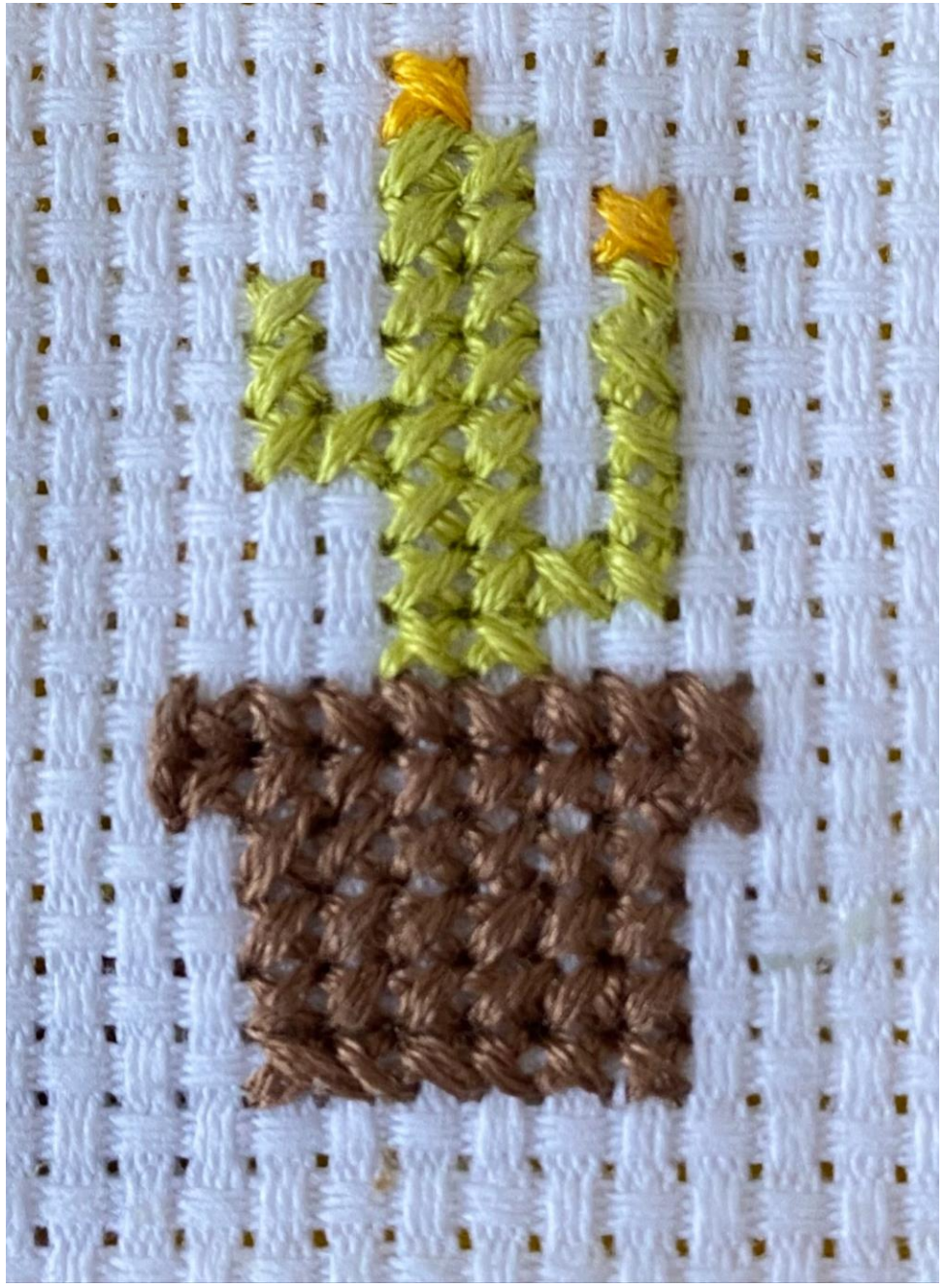
A mid-19th century hand stitched sampler that, according to stitched writing, dates to 1847 and was made by 11 year old Margaret Ann Dunkerton of Eastport, Maine.

There appears to be some discrepancy as to Margaret Dunkerton's actual age at the time she made the sampler as records indicate she was was born in 1838 in Windsor, Nova Scotia. (Soon after Margaret's birth, her family moved to Eastport.) This would put her age at nine and not 11 when she made the sampler.

There is what might represent the family house and fence at the bottom of the sampler, a quotation from the King James version of the Bible (the Book of Numbers, Chapter 13, Verse 23), and above the quotation two men in period clothing with a hawk in a tree branch on either side. Three sides of the sampler are framed with a vine like scroll.

Margaret went on to marry James Lawrence in 1855 and together they had six children. She lived the rest of her life in Eastport until 1935 when she died at the age of 97. She is buried in Hillside Cemetery in Eastport.

The sampler was handed down through later generations of the Dunkerton-Lawrence family and eventually turned up for auction in California in 2008. The Tides Institute acquired the sampler at this auction.



Try this!

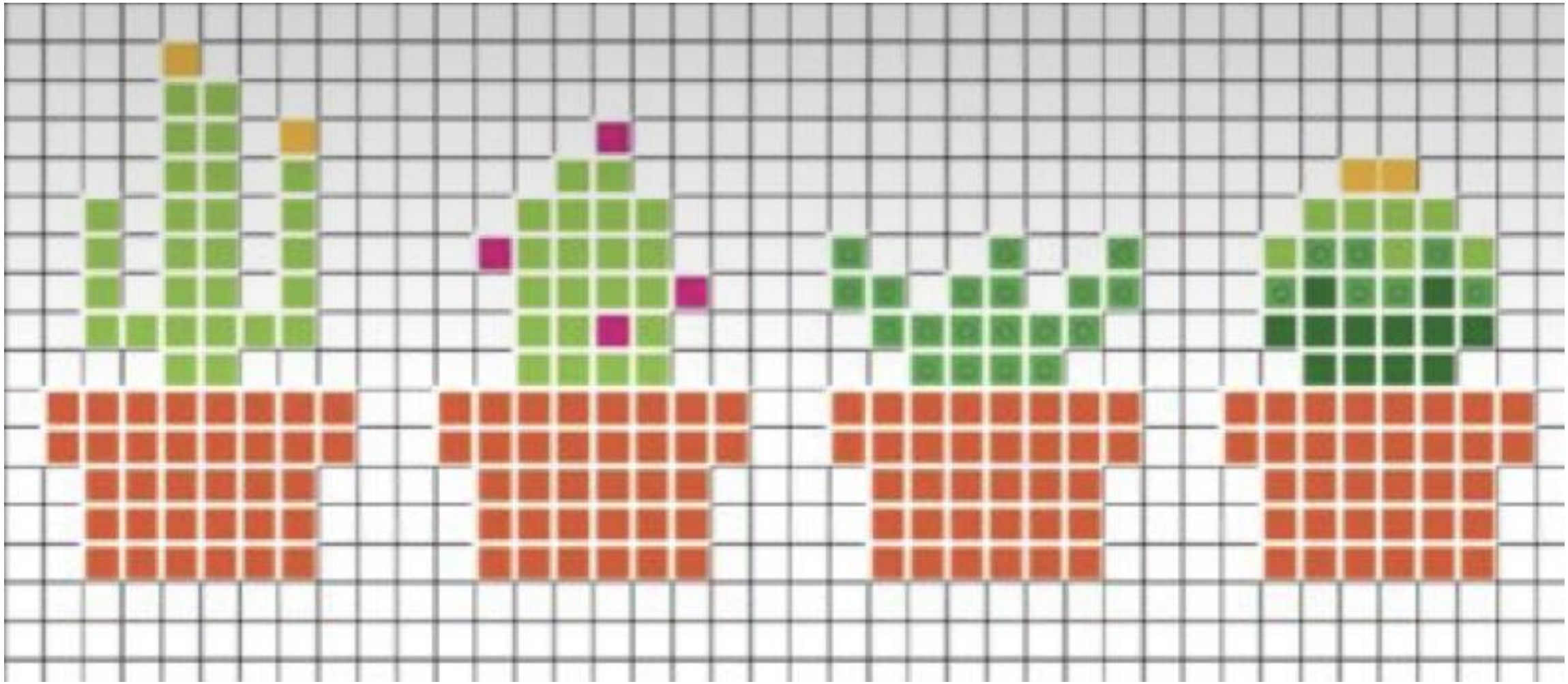
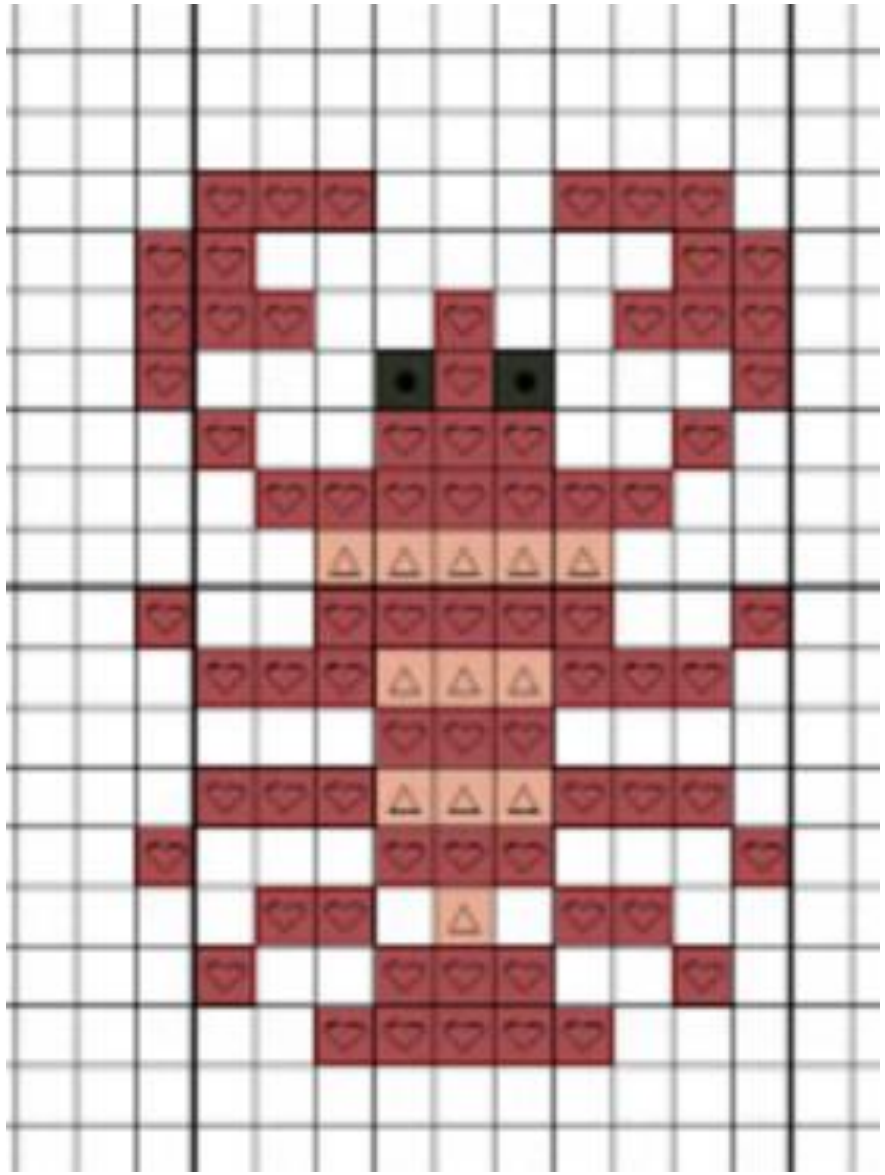
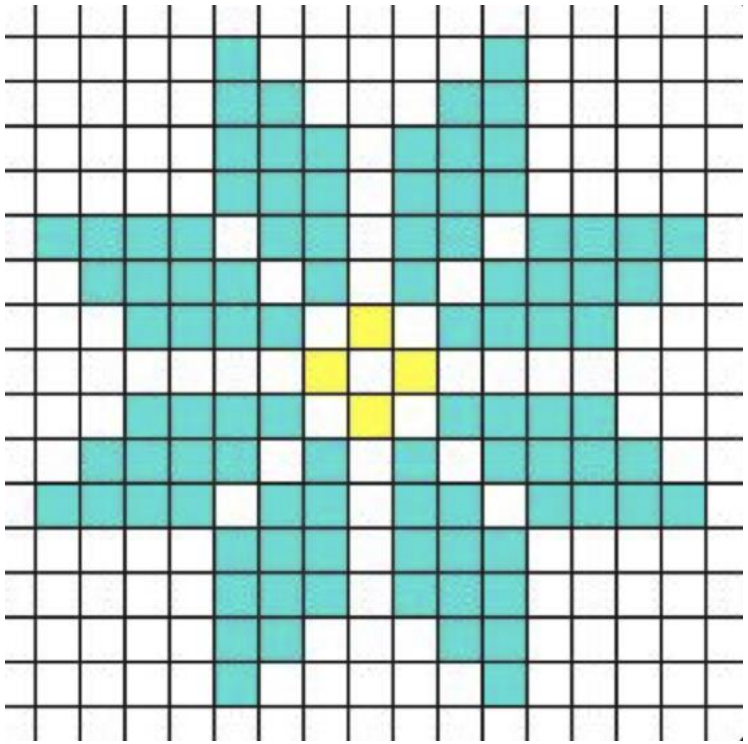
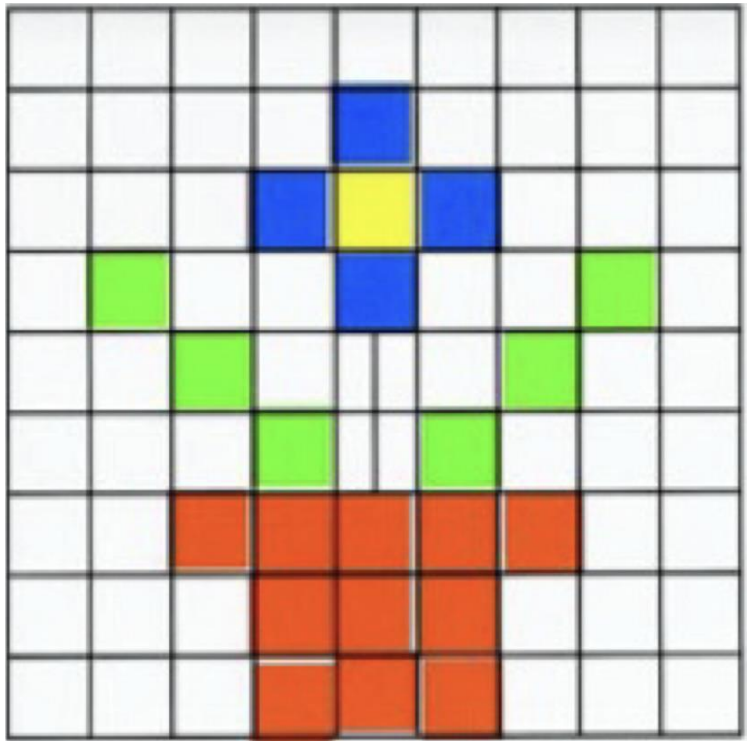
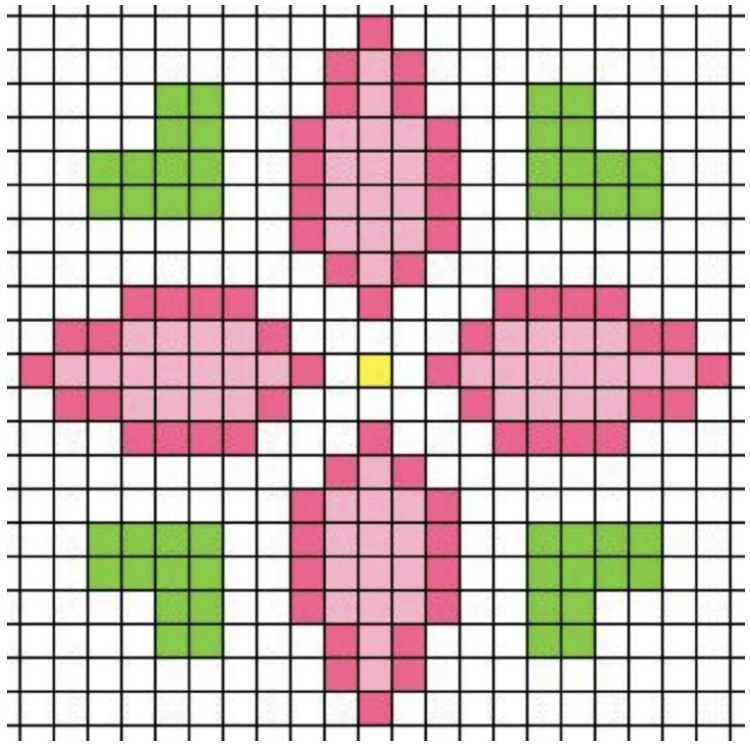
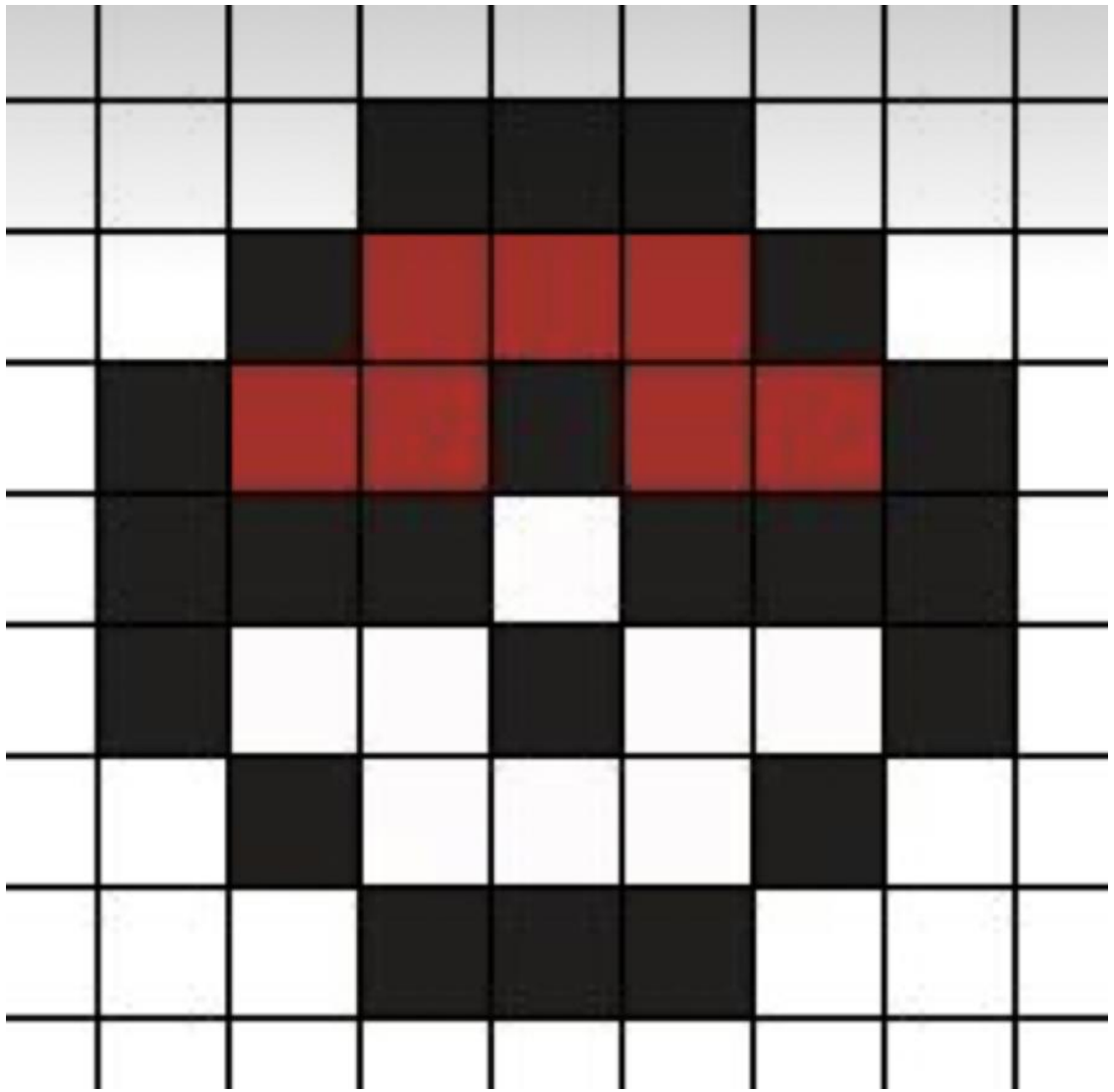
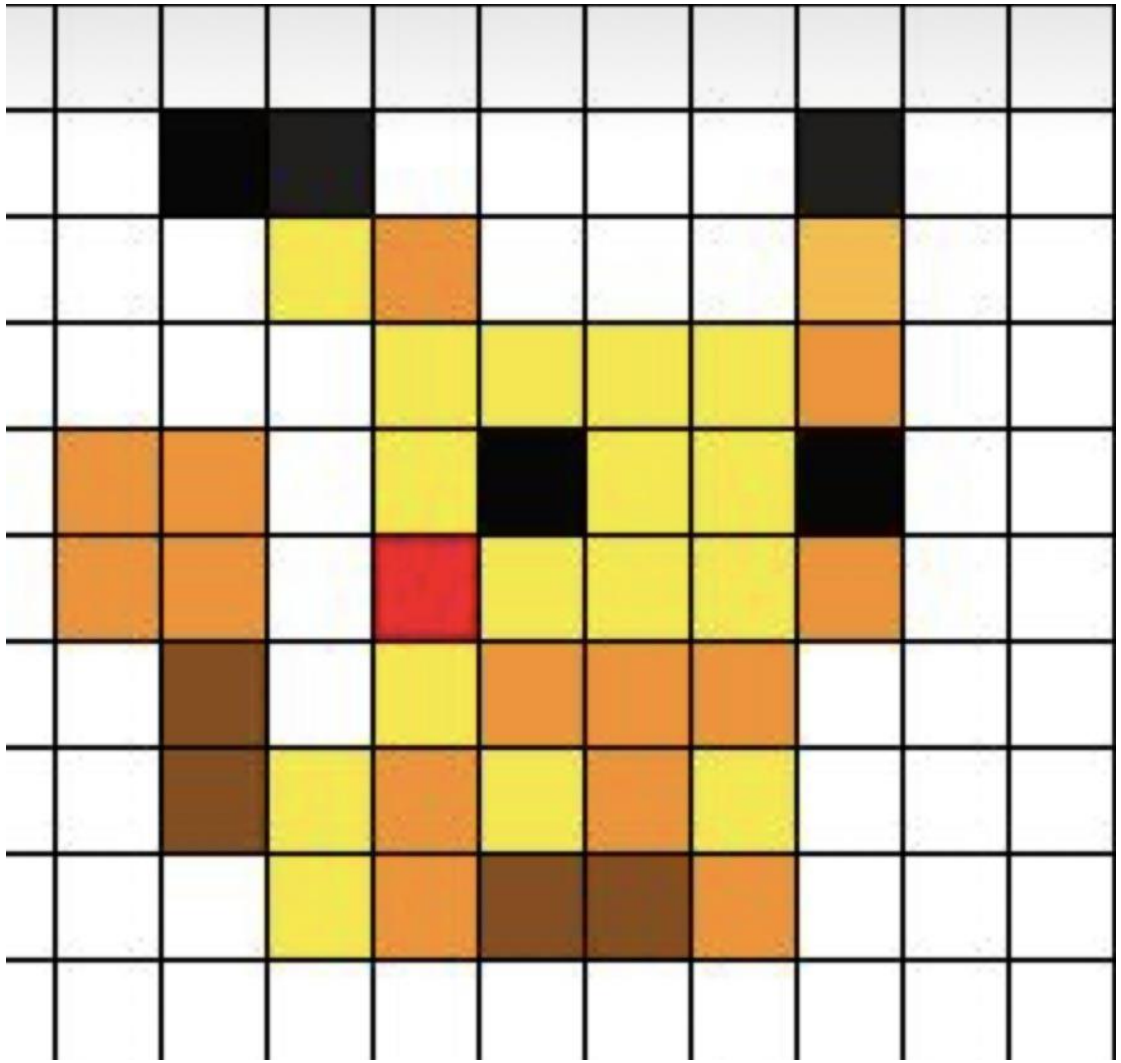
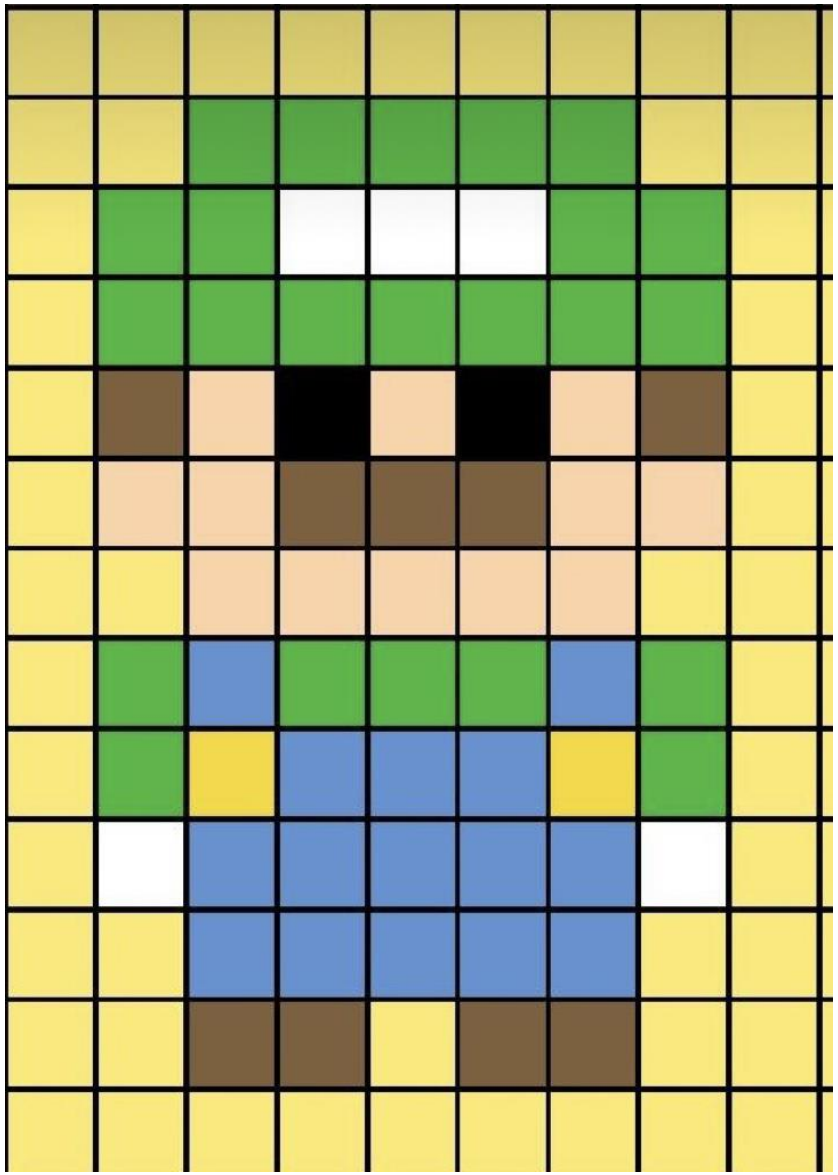
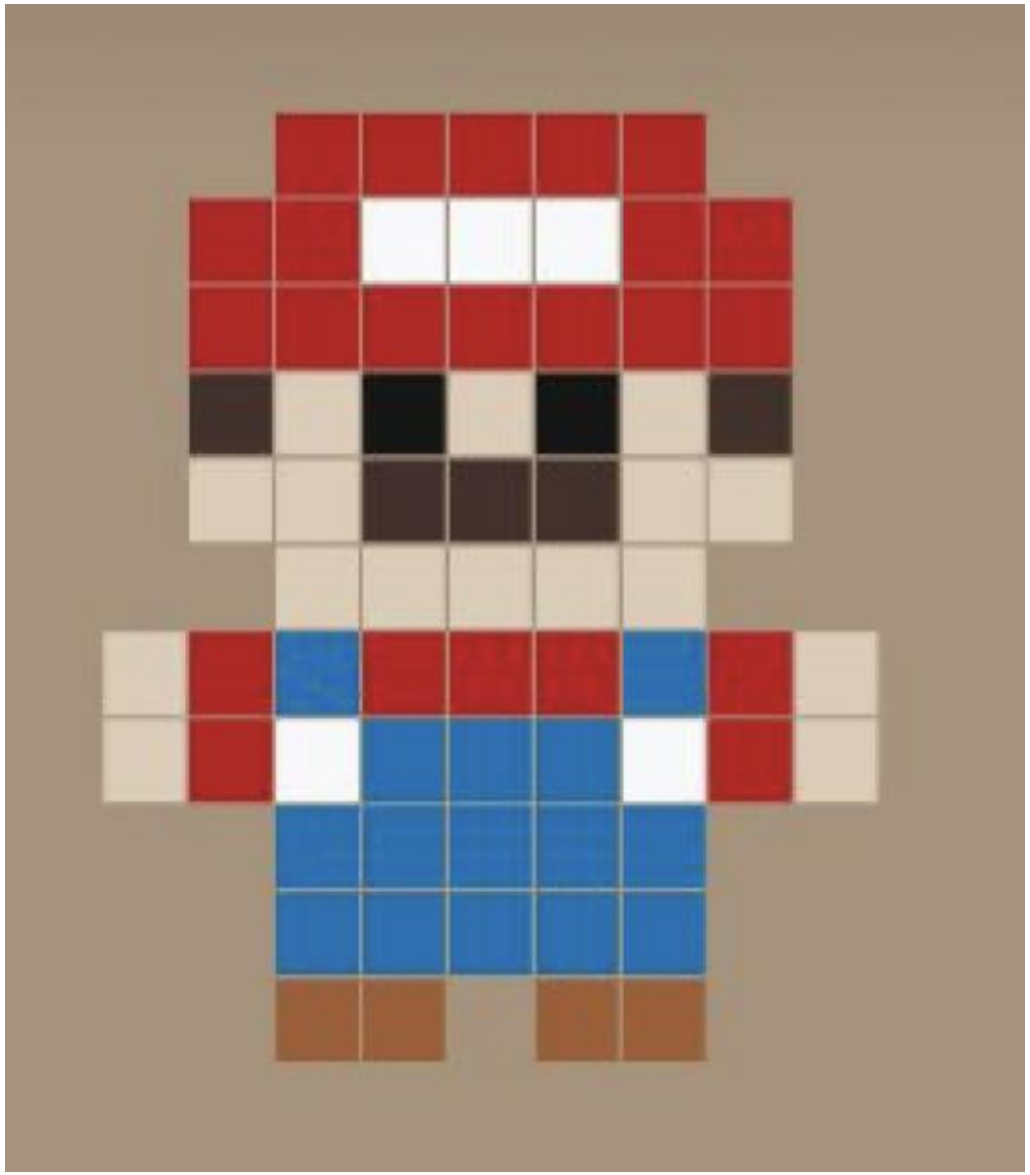
Materials:

- Embroidery floss (different colors)
- Needle
- Aida cloth
- Pattern (optional)

Instructions:

Here's a YouTube video demonstrating both the English & Danish methods of cross-stitch.

Both will give you the same result, so the choice is yours!

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jAySTDXTwSc

Here are some sample
patterns to try!