



Little Stitching Bear

A hand embroidery tutorial



January brings some of the coldest weather of the year when, after a brisk and chilly walk with the Newfies (who simply adore these winter days), it's lovely to snuggle down in front of the log burner and enjoy a mug of cocoa and some relaxing hand stitching. This tutorial came about as I was practising a stitch my grandma taught me that I hadn't used for a very long time. She called it basket weave stitch, though it is probably more accurately referred to as surface darning.

Being me, of course I couldn't just work a few squares of this stitch, I simply had to incorporate it into a new design, in this case a little bear wearing a warm woven jumper. And as I stitched I thought I'm using stitches that all begin with B ... Back stitch, Basket weave stitch, Blanket (or buttonhole) stitch and Bullion stitch. Feeling quite excited by this I decided to add the names of the stitches and a big letter "B" to my design, which is why you'll see that the bear begins all alone, but about halfway through the extras appear! I'm not going into details of how to stitch back stitch and blanket stitch, though I will give you a few of my tips on how to make your back stitch as nice as it can be.

Materials

- 6" embroidery hoop
- 9" square background fabric. I used a nice slubby white linen fabric, but any non-stretchy, firmly woven fabric will be absolutely fine
- Stranded cotton floss in black and five other colours of your choice. This is a good project to use up any ends of skeins left over from other projects.



Method

Before beginning to stitch

- I don't like flappy corners very much when I'm stitching, so if I know I'm simply going to display my work in a hoop when it's finished rather than incorporate it into a larger project, I like to trim away the corners to give me a circle around 2-3" greater in diameter than the hoop I'm using.
- It's always a good idea to finish the edge of your fabric before beginning to stitch, especially if (a) you know you're going to be working on the project for a while, picking it up and putting it down again and/or (b) the fabric is likely to fray. Fraying fabric is really annoying as threads can easily be caught up at the back of your work, and you may have to trim away quite a lot of border if it frays too much.
- Simply run around the edge of your fabric with your serger if you have one, or a zig-zag stitch on your sewing machine. Failing this you can even bind the edges with tape, though this isn't such a reliable solution!
- Transfer your design before hooping up your fabric. I am a huge fan of Sulky Sticky Fabri Solvy as this gives me the most accurate possible lines to stitch and also acts as a stabiliser if my fabric is quite loosely woven. I trim it fairly closely to the shape of the design (1) so there is less to dissolve away when my work is finished.
- When hooping up your fabric should be taut but not tightly stretched or you may distort it which will spoil your stitching. To hoop up loosen the screw at the top of the hoop. Place your fabric on the bottom ring, then push the top hoop down over the top, pulling the fabric gently until it's taut. Then tighten the screw. If your fabric slips in the hoop you may find it helpful to bind the bottom ring with

tape to give the hoop a better grip on the fabric.

- It's good practice to remove your work from the hoop between sessions, but I must admit I don't do this unless I know there's going to be a break of a few days or so until I'm able to return to my work.
- The template for the design is full size. Transfer the design, and be sure to mark in the squares for his jumper shown as pink lines (1)

Basket Weave Stitch

- With two strands of floss begin on one of the end squares and first work your vertical stitches. They should not be placed too closely together as this will make it (a) difficult to weave your needle in and out and (b) won't leave much space for your horizontal stitches to show and you'll lose the nice chequered effect of working with two colours.
- There's no need to carry your thread across the back of your work to come up again on the same side as you do with satin stitch - just make a very tiny stitch on the back of your work. This makes basket weave a very economical stitch to work floss-wise. (Which was probably very important to my grandma who would have been stitching during the Make Do and Mend war years).
- Keep your stitches nice and vertical - do watch out for any tendency for them to start to lean to one side as this will also spoil the effect you're seeking.
- When finished fasten off your thread and change to your second colour. Come up in one corner and start to weave your needle through the vertical threads (2). I find it easiest to reverse my needle and pass the eye through first (3). This means I am much less likely to pierce the existing stitches and/or fabric as I go. It may not work for you but it's definitely worth a try!



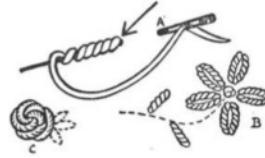
- When you get to the end of your row, pull the thread through fairly firmly (but don't yank too hard) and then with the blunt end of your needle push the thread into position so that the horizontal rows lie against each other. Don't push too hard though, simply touching is sufficient.
- Then take your needle back down through the fabric, make a tiny stitch, approximately the width of your floss and then come up again and go back the other way.
- When you've finished the last row you can comfortably fit in you may want to adjust the way the horizontal stitches lie so that the background fabric is evenly covered. Again you can gently move them with the blunt end of your needle.
- Continue in this way for the remaining squares.

Back Stitch

- This is one of the easiest stitches to work but does need a little care to produce the best possible results.
- When you're stitching with black thread on a white or pale background do try not to carry floss across the back of your work or leave long tails as these are likely to show through.
- The bear is stitched in two strands of floss. Be super-careful to make sure that you take your needle back down in exactly the same place you brought it up through the fabric.
- Where two lines meet, it gives the nicest finish if you can make all the stitches meet at a down point. So for the bear's mouth I worked two horizontal stitches, then brought the line of his nose down into the hole between them (5).
- The text is stitched in a single strand of black floss. Take your time over this. You can make longer stitches for the straight parts of the letters, but will need to make very tiny stitches for the small loops and curves. A good rule of thumb is if you think you can *probably* get

away with one stitch, then you really should be making two! (6)

Bullion Stitch



- I placed bullion stitches worked in 2 strands of light blue floss along the top of the bear's jumper. These do need a little practice to work successfully - the key is to keep tension in the thread you're wrapping round both as you wrap and as you pull the needle through the loops. The steps are as follows:
- Bring your needle up through the fabric at the point marked with the arrow above and then take it back down at the required length of your stitch and up again at exactly the same point as before (7).
- Don't pull your needle right through, but leave it lying on your fabric and twist the thread around it (8). Six or seven twists are about right.
- Place your left thumb upon the twists and pull your needle and thread through your fabric and also the twists as carefully as possible. Now pull your needle and thread away in the opposite direction. This movement will force your little coil of thread to lie flat in the right place. Tighten it up by pulling your working thread, then reinsert your needle at A. This should also be the end of your bullion knot if you've chosen the correct number of twists to fill the space. (9 and 10)
- Continue until the trim is finished.
- And that's it! One final tip - as my linen is quite loosely woven, when mounting for display I backed it with a circle of white felt. This meant I still had the lovely texture, but a much more uniform colour as no light could penetrate through the holes.

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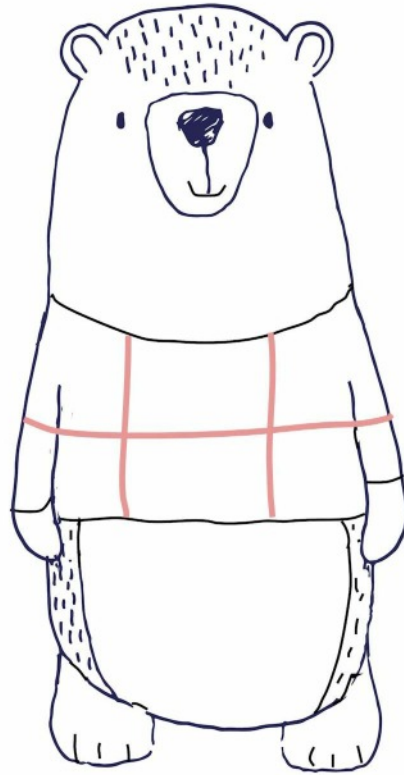
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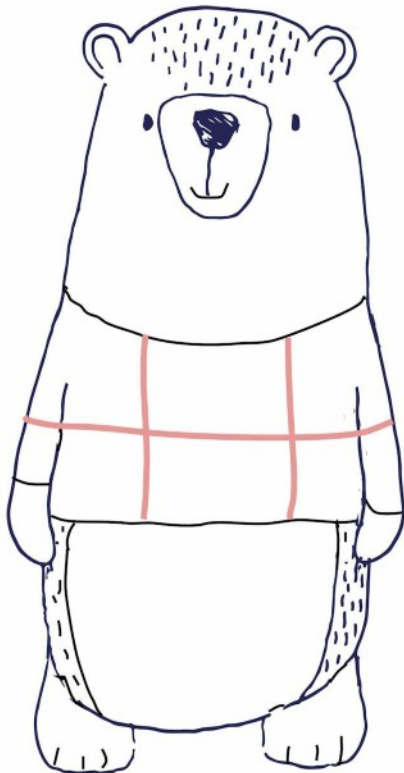
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B



Back
Basketweave
Blanket
Bullion



B

Back
Basketweave
Blanket
Bullion



BUSTLE & SEW
LOVE TO SEW AND SEW WITH LOVE

Why do we love to stitch? After all you can purchase mass-produced textile items at many high streets stores for very little cost. These days handmade means something special - a unique item created with love, a gift from the heart, not one that can be bought.

Hand stitching is also a great way to personalise an item, or perhaps to breathe new life into an old favourite that has seen better days.

[Bustle & Sew](#) offers my own unique patterns, designed to appeal to all skill levels and bring out all your natural creativity. And you can keep up to date with all the latest news from Somerset where I live as well as the newest patterns and much more over on the [Bustle & Sew Blog](#).



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Helen xx



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