



A Closer Look: Samplers



Sarah Fuller (born Gloucester 1787), *Sacred to the Memory of the immortal George Washington*, 1800. Silk on linen. Gift of E. Hyde Cox. [#1998.36]

Look closely at the textile. Respond to the questions below.

What do you see?

What do you think is happening in this sampler?

What do you wonder about?

Writing prompt: This sampler was made to honor a hero. My hero is...

Teacher Notes

Samplers, primarily a utilitarian endeavor brought over from England, were one of the earliest mediums for artistic expression in colonial life. A sampler is a piece of embroidery worked in various stitches to demonstrate skill, typically containing the alphabet or adages. Sewing was an essential skill for family life as all clothing and linens were handmade. Seventeenth-century girls were taught to sew samplers at home or by a woman in the community, but by the eighteenth century, some, particularly those from upper-class families, learned in school. Five- and six-year-olds would start with a marking sampler employing letters, numbers and a quote, simultaneously learning literacy, arithmetic and sewing skills. Upon completion the samplers were often framed and displayed at home as decoration and even status symbols. This mourning piece was created in 1800 to commemorate the death of George Washington. This type of sampler was meant to convey affection for the deceased and respect for the solemnity of death. Samplers are more than treasured decorative arts from the eighteenth and nineteenth century. They are documentary evidence of a way of life. Upon further examination they speak to the viewer about social and cultural values of early America.

For more information, visit <http://www.capeannmuseum.org>.

Extensions

PreK–5 (Social Studies)

Girls across America made mourning samplers to commemorate George Washington. These samplers were often full of symbolism. What symbols do you see? Why do you think they were chosen? What symbols might you choose if you made a sampler?

6–8 (ELA)

Samplers contained symbolism that was often used to express a mood. Write a poem that elaborates on the mood you think the sampler is conveying. Incorporate the text of the sampler into your poem.

9–12 (Visual Arts)

Samplers give us a glimpse into America’s past and a certain way of doing something. Using various materials, create a sampler that serves the same purpose today that it would have served back then.



Standards

Elementary School (Massachusetts History and Social Science Curriculum Framework)

1.3 Identify and explain the meaning of American national symbols: B. the bald eagle.

1.5 Give reasons for celebrating the events or people commemorated in national and Massachusetts holidays.

5.18 Describe the life and achievements of important leaders during the Revolution and the early years of the United States. G. George Washington.

Middle School (Massachusetts Curriculum Framework for English Language Arts and Literacy)

Write short narratives, poems, scripts, or personal reflections that demonstrate understanding of the literary concepts of mood, tone, point of view, personification, or symbolism.

High School (Massachusetts Arts Curriculum Framework)

Arts in U.S. History: The American Revolution, Creating a New Nation (1750–1815)

Decorative arts such as needlework

Connections 6.6 Describe and analyze examples of art forms that integrate practical functions with aesthetic concerns.



(LEFT and ABOVE) Sarah Fuller (born Gloucester 1787), *Sacred to the Memory of the immortal George Washington* [details], 1800. Silk on linen. Gift of E. Hyde Cox. [#1998.36]



A Closer Look: Alfred Wiggin



Alfred J. Wiggin (1823-1883), *Eliza Dennison Wiggin and Child*, 1856. Oil on canvas. Gift of the estate of Thelma Dennison, 1995. [# 1995.68]



Alfred J. Wiggin (1823-1883), *Eliza Dennison Wiggin and Child*, c. 1856. Daguerreotype

Look closely at the portrait and daguerreotype. Respond to the questions below.

What do you see?

What do you think is happening in these images?

What do you wonder about?

Writing prompt: A woman and child pose for a portrait. Last time I got my picture taken, I...

Teacher Notes

Notable folk artist, Alfred James (A.J.) Wiggin (1823–1883) arrived on Cape Ann in the 1840s. Wiggin lived first in Rockport and then moved to the Dennison Homestead in Annisquam around 1852. Four years later, he married Eliza Ann Dennison. He remained in the area until 1868, when he and his family moved to South Boston. Although he spent the rest of his life in Boston, he continued to visit Cape Ann for business and pleasure.

By 1846 the world began changing for painters like Wiggin. Daguerreotypes became the first generally available photographs and threatened the livelihood of itinerant portraitists, whose merchandise could be replaced with less expensive documentary images. Wiggin was not alone in deciding to work with photographs and learn from them. He himself became a photographer and based a painting of his wife and an unknown child on his own daguerreotype. This was not, of course, a commissioned work, and it may have been a practice piece for painting from photographs.

In the arena of formal portraiture, photography took a backseat to painting. There was no color photography, no way to add expression or invent settings other than with a studio backdrop. The idea that photography could be used to create rather than document did not occur to artists until many years into the future.

For more information, visit <http://www.capeannmuseum.org>.

Extensions

PreK–5 (Social Studies)

These two images give a snapshot of life in 1856. What do they tell about the clothing that women and children wore at the time? How are the clothes that we wear today different? Do students dress differently for school portraits?

6–8 (Art)

The invention of photography changed the work of artists. How did Wiggin use this technology to benefit his work as an artist? How did photography impact the person posing for the painting? How do artists use technology today?

9–12 (ELA)

The relationship between the woman and child pictured is unknown. Write a fictional narrative of their story us-

ing these portraits as the beginning or the end of the story.

Standards

Elementary School (Massachusetts History and Social Science Curriculum Framework)

Grade 3 Content and Skills

2. Observe visual sources such as historic paintings, photographs, or illustrations that accompany historical narratives, and describe details such as clothing, setting, or action.

Middle School (Massachusetts Arts Curriculum Framework)

Visual Arts Standard 9: Inventions, technologies and the arts

9.2 Identify and describe examples of how the discovery of new inventions and technologies, or the availability of new materials brought about changes in the arts in various time periods and cultures.

9.3 Identify and describe examples of how artists make innovative use of technologies and inventions.

High School (Massachusetts Curriculum Framework for English Language Arts and Literacy)

Writing Standards Grade 11–12.

3. Write narratives to develop real or imagined experiences or events using effective technique, well-chosen details, and well-structured event sequences.



Alfred J. Wiggin (1823-1883), *Eliza Dennison Wiggin and Child*[detail], 1856. Oil on canvas.

Gift of the estate of Thelma Dennison, 1995. [# 1995.68]

References

Baigell, Matthew, *A History of American Art* (New York: Praeger Publishers, Inc., 1971)

Bishop, Robert, *Folk Painters of America* (Greenwich House, 1979)

Bryant, T. 2011. "Stitches in Time Go Online." *University of Delaware Research 3*, number 1.

Huber, Carol (March, 2007). *Simple samplers to elegant embroidery in New England's Girlhood Needlework*. New England Antiques Journal. Palmer, MA.

Lepionka, Mary Ellen, *Native Americans on Cape Ann*. Paper, December 10, 2014.

Lipman, Jean, *American Primitive Painting*, (Dover Publications, NY 1969)

O'Gorman, James, "Toward an oral history of Cape Ann : O'Gorman, James," *Sawyer Free Library*, Gloucester, Mass., accessed April 17, 2018, <https://digitalheritage.noblenet.org/gloucester/items/show/1311>.

Paine, Susanna, *Roses and Thorns, or Recollections of an Artist: A Tale of Truth, for the Grave and Gay*, 1854.

Pohl, Frances K., *Framing America: A Social History of American Art* (New York, NY: Thames & Hudson, inc., 2002).

Pringle, James Robert. "History of the Town and City of Gloucester, Cape Ann, Massachusetts." Gloucester, Ma.: City of Gloucester Archives Committee; Ten Pound Island Book Co., 1997. First published in 1892.

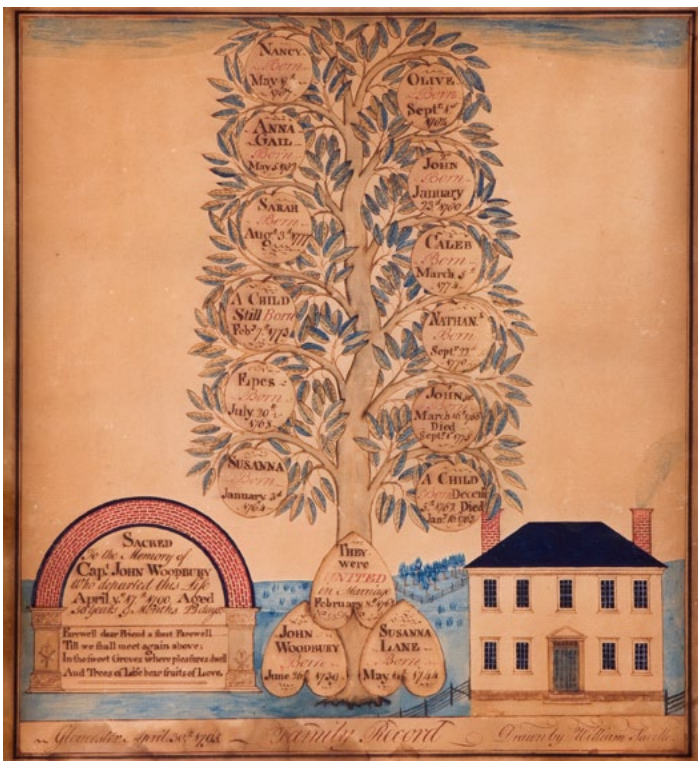
Barratt, Carrie Rebor. "John Singleton Copley (1738–1815)." In Heilbrunn Timeline of Art History. New York: The Metropolitan Museum of Art, 2000–. http://www.metmuseum.org/toah/hd/copl/hd_copl.htm (October 2003)

Barratt, Carrie Rebor. "Gilbert Stuart (1755–1828)." In Heilbrunn Timeline of Art History. New York: The Metropolitan Museum of Art, 2000–. http://www.metmuseum.org/toah/hd/stua/hd_stua.htm (October 2003)

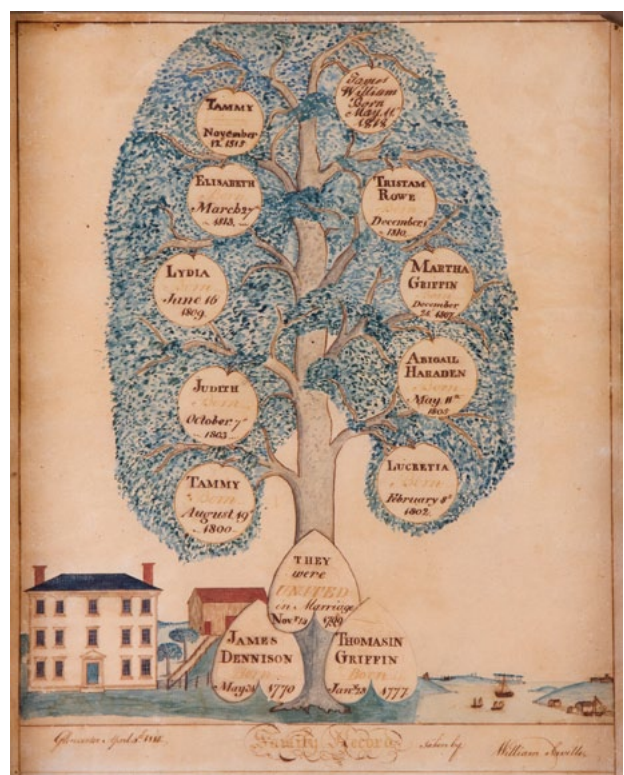
Peck, Amelia. "American Needlework in the Eighteenth Century." In Heilbrunn Timeline of Art History. New York: The Metropolitan Museum of Art, 2000–. http://www.metmuseum.org/toah/hd/need/hd_need.htm (October 2003)

Unless otherwise noted, all works of art and images are from the collection of the Cape Ann Museum.

Sources also include the artist files in the Cape Ann Museum Archives.



William Saville (1771–1853), Woodbury/Lane Family Tree, Gloucester, 1795. Watercolor and pen on paper.



William Saville (1771–1853), Dennison/Griffin Family Tree, Gloucester, 1815. Watercolor and pen on paper.