

Maya Textile Art

Did you know, when you text someone, you are really weaving words together? The word *text* and *textile* stem from the Latin word *texere* meaning *to weave*.

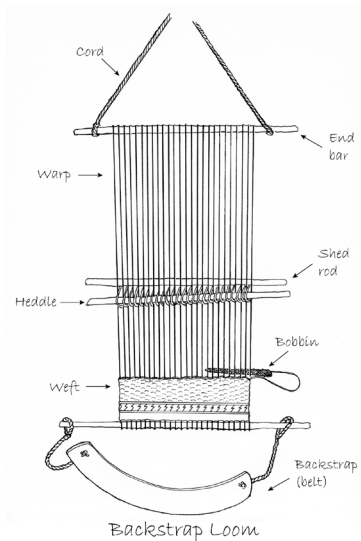
History

Weaving and the wearing of traditional clothing is a custom that has been practiced by Maya people continually for over a thousand years. Depictions on ancient stone monuments, painted pottery, and sculpted figurines show what the weaving tradition has been like throughout time. For centuries, Maya women have woven and embroidered textiles that express their social and aesthetic values and embody their roles as mothers and daughters.



Weaver with Back-Strap Loom and Birds
[Yale University Art Gallery](#)

Explore this [online exhibit](#) from Emory University about ancient Maya textiles and the modern tradition.



Technique

Basic weaving alternates horizontal weft threads over and under vertical warp threads on a loom. Varying color and texture among the grid formed can make intricate patterns. These patterns can tell the story of the weaver's time and place in the universe.

Complete the word puzzle below to learn weaving terms and the parts of a backstrap loom.

Patterns

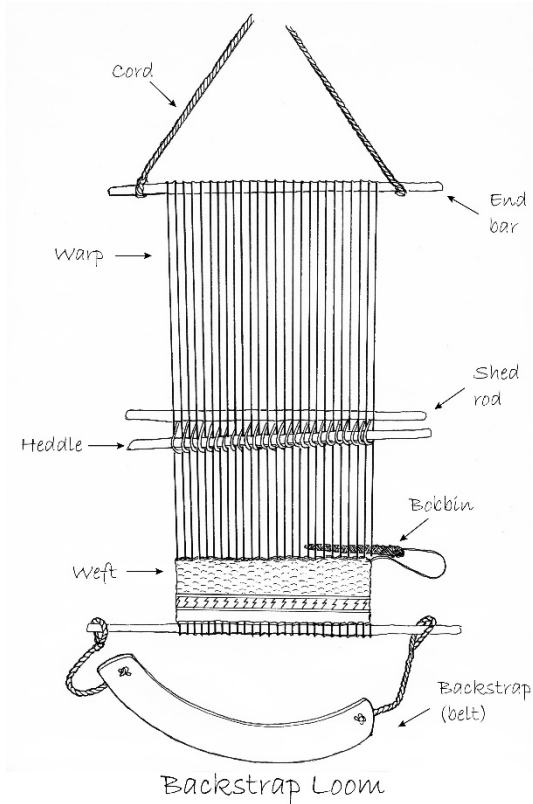
Today, like in the past, weavers get inspiration for designs from nature, objects from everyday life, beliefs, their families and communities, as well as the world at large. Commercialization and globalization have influenced innovations in creativity in recent times. Designs are specific to each community and it is possible to identify which community the wearer comes from based upon clothing design.

See below for instructions to make a friendship bracelet and design some beautiful patterns of your own. Many thanks to Sophie Laborwit, Maxwell Museum Education Assistant, for this activity.



Huipil (blouse) detail,
Chiapas, Mexico. Ca 2009
Maxwell Museum 2010.84.1

BACKSTRAP LOOM WEAVING



BACKSTRAP	Y	A	S	S	T	I	T	C	H	D
BATTEN										
BELT	R	F	B	O	B	B	I	N	G	W
BOBBIN	E	B	A	C	K	S	T	R	A	P
BROCADE										
CORD	D	H	T	J	O	K	S	R	H	L
EMBROIDERY	I	Q	T	W	E	R	P	R	E	T
END BARS	O	Y	E	U	A	M	D	I	D	W
HEDDLE										
LOOM	R	O	N	B	R	O	C	A	D	E
SHED	B	P	D	Z	E	O	X	C	L	F
STITCH	M	N	V	B	N	L	M	A	E	T
WARP										
WEFT	E	J	S	H	E	D	T	Q	L	V

Cord: ties the loom to a tree or post.

End bars: hold the warp to the upper and lower ends of the loom.

Shed rod: maintains the crossing of the warp's threads.

Heddle: lifts alternate threads of the warp.

Batten: separates alternate threads of the warp for the bobbin to pass through.

Bobbin: contains the thread of the weft, passes from side to side between the warp.

Belt: worn around the weaver's back and connects her to the loom.

(Illustration by Mary Sundstrom for Maxwell Museum)

Maya Textile Art

The Maya are one of the largest and most influential indigenous cultures in the Americas. Notably, they are very well-known for their textile arts. Their weaving and embroidery stands out because of its unique bright dyes and complex patterns. The tradition of textile art dates back to ancient times to make clothing and tapestries. Many of these textiles are in museums and collections but the tradition of Maya weaving and embroidery is still very much alive in Central America.



[Maya blouse \(huipil\) from Chuarancho. Holzapfel Collection](#)

Here are some examples of how these patterns can be laid out and designed:

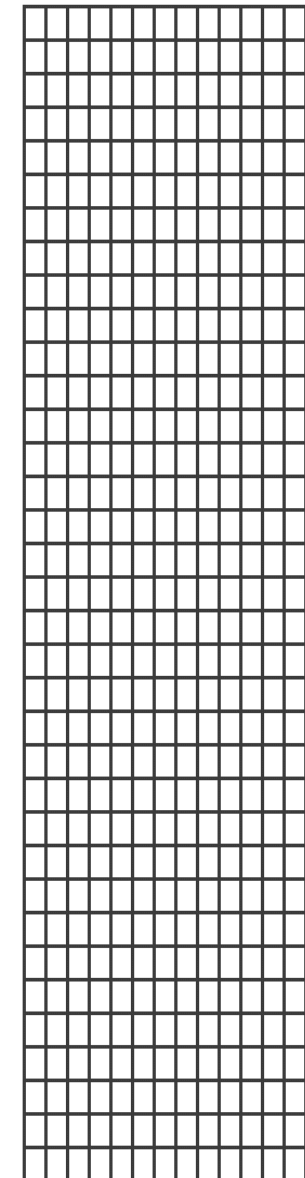
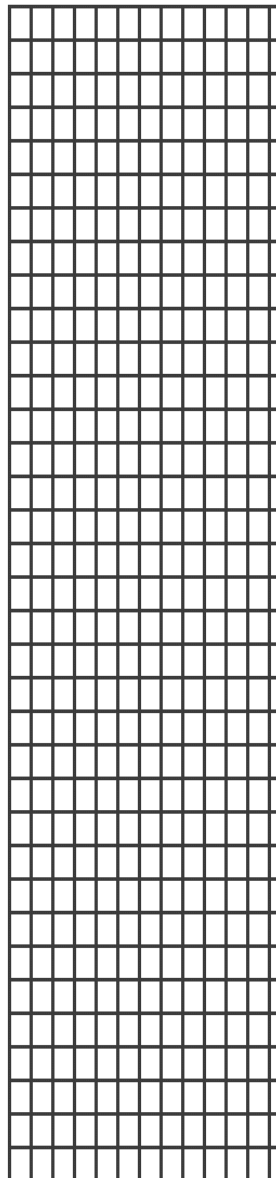
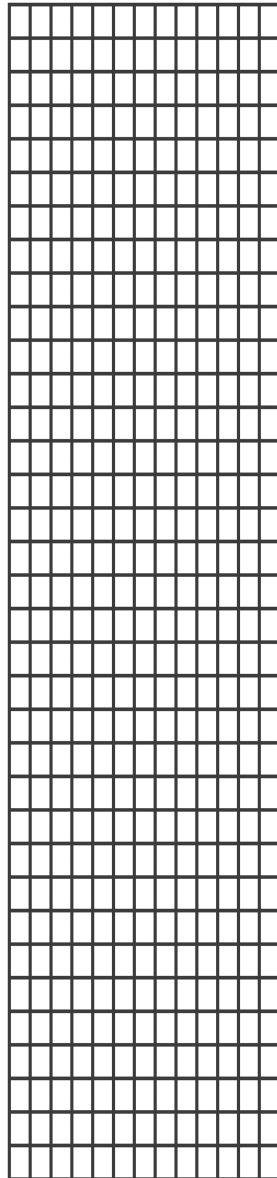
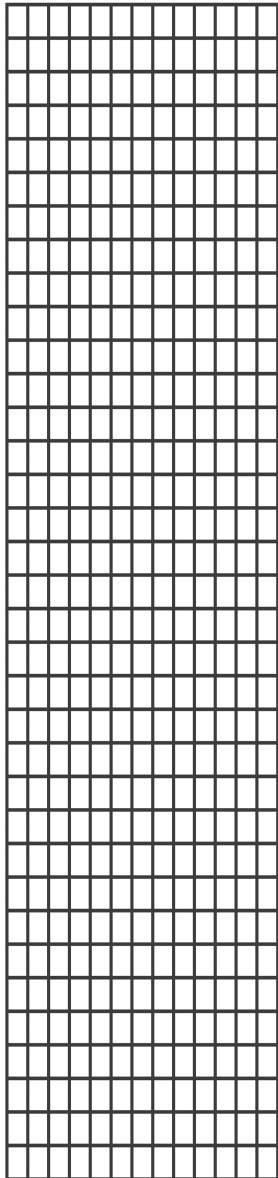
Popular designs include geometric shapes and are inspired by animals and nature



Try your hand at designing patterns inspired by Maya Textile Art!

Below are some blank grids for you to design your masterpiece!

The Maya use a lot of bright colors in their textiles, so don't be afraid to BE COLORFUL



Make Your Own Patterned Friendship Bracelets!

Friendship bracelets are a really fun way to spend the time and make gifts for the people you care about! Often times, friendship bracelets use bright colors and geometric patterns just like the Maya use in their weaving.

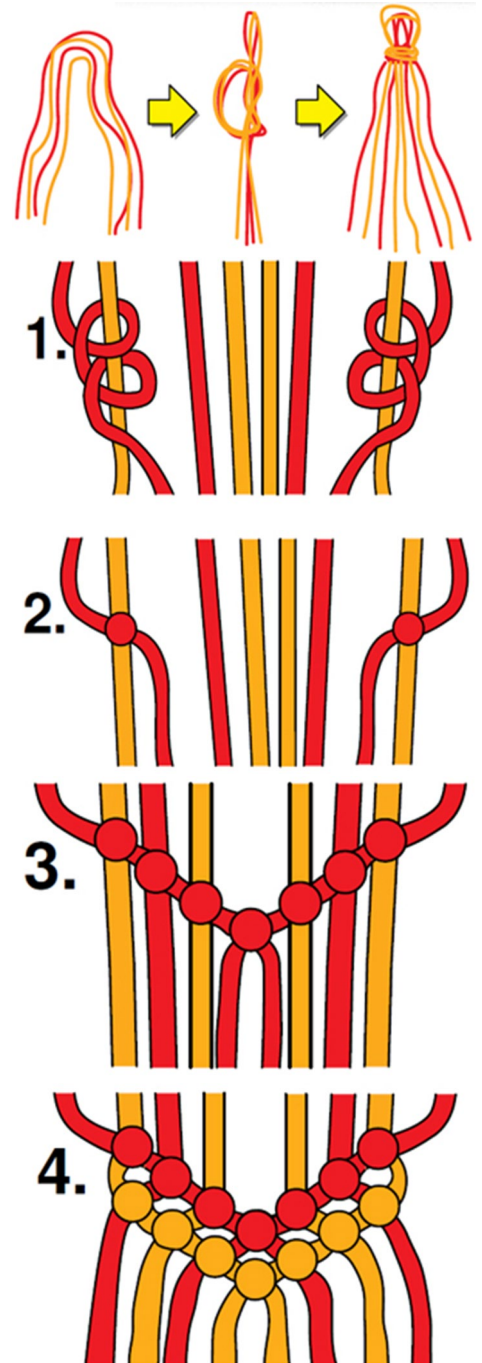
You will need:

- Some bright colored embroidery floss/thread
- Tape

To begin, we'll make a two-color chevron pattern.

Start by gathering four of each color string (20") into a bundle and tying it at the top. Use your tape to secure it down onto a stable surface you can work from.

1. Once you have a base, spread out your string with the colors in a pattern of - A B A B B A B A - and work from both sides, tying knots toward the center.
2. When you tighten the knots, it should look like the picture.
3. Use those same strings all the way to the center.
4. Continue this process, using the leftmost to make forward knots, and on the rightmost, make backward knots so the tail goes toward the center.
5. Repeat steps 1-4 until you reach a length you like, then tie it off at the end!



For more help on this activity, check out some of these links to some useful video tutorials:

DIY Chevron Friendship Bracelet (3:52) <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nNOioNDsg2s>

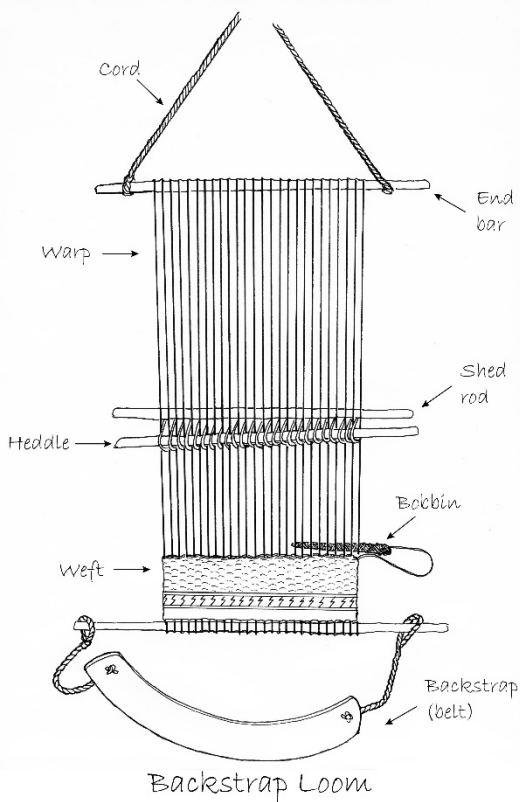
Chevron Tutorial- Friendship Bracelets (16:36) <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KCBGya6L7oQ>

For more information and images of Maya Textile art, here are some additional resources:

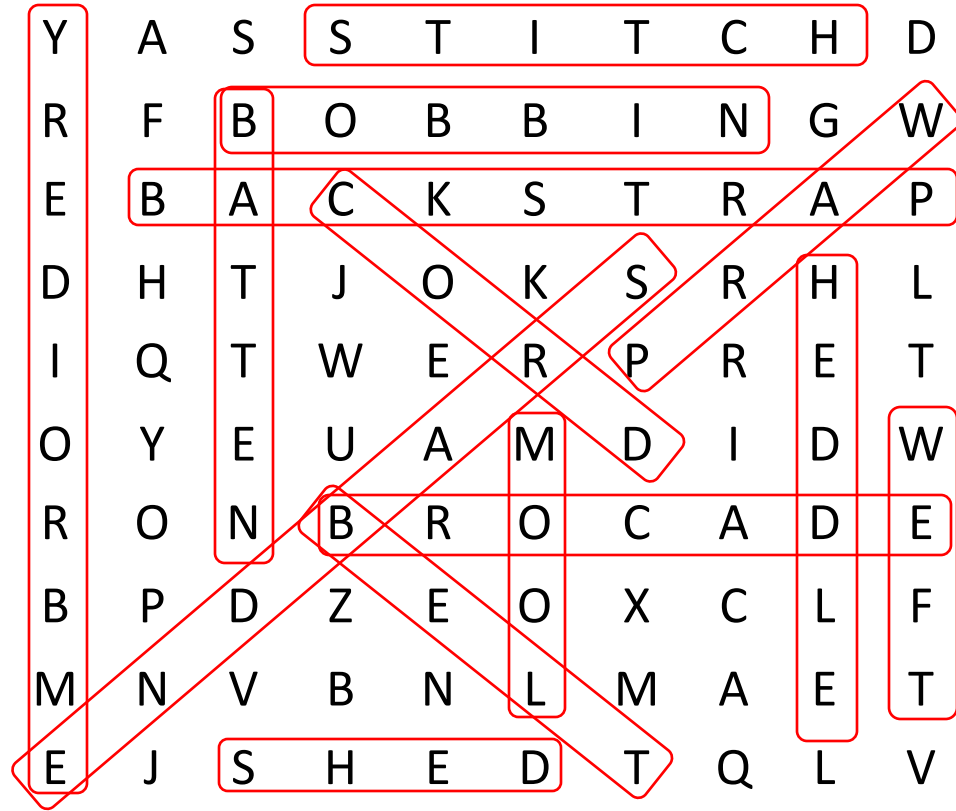
<https://www.spurlock.illinois.edu/collections/notable-collections/profiles/guatemala-textiles.html>

<http://threads-of-time.carlos.emory.edu/exhibits/show/essays/tiesbind>

BACKSTRAP LOOM WEAVING



- BACKSTRAP
- BATTEN
- BELT
- BOBBIN
- BROCADE
- CORD
- EMBROIDERY
- END BARS
- HEDDLE
- LOOM
- SHED
- STITCH
- WARP
- WEFT



- Cord:** ties the loom to a tree or post.
 - End bars:** hold the warp to the upper and lower ends of the loom.
 - Shed rod:** maintains the crossing of the warp's threads.
 - Heddle:** lifts alternate threads of the warp.
 - Batten:** separates alternate threads of the warp for the bobbin to pass through.
 - Bobbin:** contains the thread of the weft, passes from side to side between the warp.
 - Belt:** worn around the weaver's back and connects her to the loom.
- (Illustration by Mary Sundstrom for Maxwell Museum)



Lulu with her friendship collar and excited about her [new friends at the zoo!](#) Welcome to the pack!