



Creative Curriculum

Jane Austen's Patchwork Bedcover



Curriculum planning can be inspired by using a single object as a starting point

These notes are designed to help you use an object from the collection at Jane Austen's House Museum in order to inspire cross curricular teaching and learning in the classroom. A trip to Jane Austen's House Museum to see the object is the ideal 'learning outside the classroom' experience.

To Begin

Try using the following questions to encourage creative thinking about the bedcover and to help your pupils build on their speaking and listening skills:

- What do you think this bedcover is made from?
- Who do you think might have made this object? What skills would they need?
- How do you think this object was used?
- Describe the patterns and shapes used to make this object.
- Can you see any repeating patterns?
- Can you see any symmetry? If so, where?
- What sort of person do you think would own an object like this?
- This patchwork cover was used by a famous writer called Jane Austen. What can you find out about her?





Jane Austen's patchwork cover, details.

Background information about the bedcover

This patchwork cover dates from the early 19th century. It was made by a group of women who lived in a large cottage on an estate in the village of Chawton, Hampshire. The women were Mrs Austen and her daughters Cassandra and Jane, and a family friend called Martha Lloyd. Jane Austen helped to make this patchwork cover, although she is famous now for the books she wrote. The house where the women lived and where they made this cover is now open to the public as Jane Austen's House Museum.

The cover is made from many different pieces of fabric which have all been cut to size and stitched together by hand in a specially designed pattern. There is a large diamond shaped piece in the centre surrounded by a pattern of 249 smaller diamonds joined by spotted sashing. The outer edge is made up of over 2500 smaller diamonds; each side is 3cm long.

The bedcover has been very carefully planned and designed; it shows fourfold symmetry, with even the diamonds around the outer edge placed symmetrically, top and bottom and left to right. There are at least 64 different fabric designs used in the cover.

Patchwork is a traditional crafting method whereby pieces of fabric are stitched together to create a new design. Often, the fabric used was made up of old scraps of material that would otherwise have gone to waste; patchwork is an early form of recycling.

Women like Jane Austen learnt needlework skills from a young age and were expected to sew as part of their domestic duties. In one letter, Austen refers to this cover when she asks her sister if she has remembered to collect pieces for the patchwork. Jane Austen was also expected to make shirts for her brothers.

Candlelight was used for sewing in the evening as electricity had not been invented.

The bedcover has been on display at the museum since 1950; before this it was handed down through the Austen family. Great care has to be taken of the bedcover as fabric deteriorates when exposed to sunlight.



The Owner

Jane Austen was born in Hampshire in 1775. She was the daughter of a clergyman and had six brothers and one sister. She did not receive much formal schooling and was not allowed to go to university. However, she would have received lessons in needlework from an early age as this was a life skill that all women were expected to have. Although Austen was a skilled needlewoman, she preferred writing. She started writing stories from an early age, primarily to entertain family and friends. At the age of about 20, she started writing full length novels although it wasn't until she was 35 that her first book was published.



Above: Jane Austen's writing table.

Right: Early edition of *Pride and Prejudice*

After her father died, Jane Austen and her mother and sister went to live in the Hampshire village of Chawton and it was here that Jane Austen wrote her greatest works. Her novels were innovative in style and subject matter; her stories focused on character rather than plot.

Although she had good reviews for the four novels published in her lifetime, she was not a famous writer (she published her books anonymously) and it was not until the 20th century that her works gained in popularity.

They are now published in over 40 languages and have all been adapted for film and television. She recently became the first woman ever to be featured on the £10 bank note.



Ideas for creative planning across the curriculum

You can use this object as the starting point for developing pupils' critical and creative thinking as well as their learning across the curriculum. Build on links between curriculum areas by following a particular topic or theme that interests you and your class. Here are a few suggestions of possible topics that you and your class could focus on:

- Jane Austen
- Materials and design
- Homes in the past
- India

Ideas for creative planning across the KS1 and KS2 curriculum using 'Materials and Design' as a theme

Here are a few ideas of how you can develop a range of learning opportunities to engage pupils with this topic. Each activity can link with the others to build on pupils' learning across the chosen theme.

- Design and make your own patchwork object
- Investigate textile designs, including those from other countries, and design one of your own. Print your design using the block printing method.
- Investigate other methods of recycling materials used in the Georgian/Victorian period. Compare to today – who is more environmentally friendly? Run a class debate.
- Research where cotton was produced 200 years ago. Find out who worked in the textile industries and what life was like for them.
- Some of the designs used in the bedcover are based on an Indian pattern called chintz. Find out about India, including fabrics and patterns that are popular there.
- Learn about symmetry and shape in maths.
- Design your own patchwork quilt using a computer program.
- Rags of fabric were used to make paper 200 years ago. Investigate how this was done.
- Write stories or poems about this quilt and the people who made it.
- Think about the women who made this quilt. How were they feeling when they made it? Would they rather have been doing something else, or did they enjoy their work? Act out scenes in the classroom and turn into scripts.
- This patchwork quilt was made as a bedcover. It may have been used by family relations who visited the cottage at Chawton. Imagine you are visiting the cottage and write a letter home to describe your stay.
- Investigate daily life at Jane Austen's house 200 years ago, including materials used. What did they eat? How did they keep themselves warm? What did they do to entertain themselves? What materials were household objects made from?
- Investigate different materials in science.



Tips for introducing objects to a class

- Display an image of the object in the classroom for a number of days with a 'graffiti wall' for children to add comments or questions about the object. Once the pupils' comments and questions have been gathered a class discussion can follow on.
- Cover the object and allow the children to feel it. Can they work out what it is without seeing it?
- Show the object to the class for a minute or two. Remove the object and see what they can remember.
- Introduce the object to the whole class in a question and answer session designed to develop the pupils' speaking and listening skills as outlined on page one.
- Work in pairs sitting back to back. One child describes the object and the other draws.
- Collect as many pictures or examples of similar objects from different time periods and explore the similarities and differences.



Jane Austen's House Museum

