

## Métis Finger Weaving

Karon Shmon developed the text below as a teacher's guide for a Métis fingerweaving video. It is advised that teachers or workshop facilitators consult this or another finger-weaving video before they attempt to finger weave, for as Karon wrote "Finger weaving can be very frustrating, because it is done entirely by hand, and is more difficult than it looks, requiring manual dexterity". However, she concludes "If students are given a simple introduction to the basics, followed by a project they can complete, they can then decide whether to go on to sash making before investing too much in supplies or time. Not everyone will want to try a sash".

### Materials needed to make a sash:

The initial project is a small finger weaving, which will turn out about 20-30 centimetres long. It will have only 12 strands in order to be manageable for the students. Sashes vary in width from about 32-44 strands and in some cases more, depending on the size of the person who will wear it, and their patience and determination. More strands require more weaving. The first weaving project will require between 90-120 minutes, which should allow for students to receive individual and small group help. It is helpful if the students who learn to weave help you teach the others, so they too can finish their projects.

For a class of thirty students, twelve skeins of yarn in three different colours are required (4 x 3 colours). Inexpensive synthetic yarn is suitable for beginners. Pure wool is expensive and should be used for sashes once the technique is perfected. It is important that the wool is thick enough to ensure the results are soon evident. Fine wool requires many more strands and will require hours of weaving to produce results. All of the wool used for any one weaving should be of the same thickness. You will also need masking tape and frozen-treat sticks (one per student).

The large demonstration weaving is easier for students to see and will give them some practice requiring less dexterity than is required with wool. To make one, use three distinct colours, four strands each, all of uniform size.

#### 1) Basic Métis finger weaving:

The rainbow pattern is the most simple to do and allows students to follow one another's work and notice discrepancies more readily. They can get creative in subsequent projects, varying the colours and design patterns as they wish. An overall even number of strands will work best, and each colour used should also have an even number of strands. (Otherwise, the pattern changes somewhat, as the rows alternate and the front becomes the back and then the front again.) Here are some points to remember:

I) First row: Start on the right side with the end strand. Over, under, over, under, until you have no more strands to go over or under. Then, put the weaving strand up.

II) Subsequent rows: Start with the end strand at the back (right side). Go over the front, under the back until finished, then put the weaving strand up, exchanging it for the one that was up there. It will become obvious whether to go over or under, as it is always the opposite of what was last done.

III) After each row: Separate front from back. Pull the one that was up there, and the one that is up there.

IV) To finish: Using the last two strands used for weaving, tie them closely together to the weaving. Tie each front and back strand together until all of the strands are tied. This will keep the weaving from unraveling.

V) Finishing the ends: Longer fringes look best and provide more options. Choices include braiding the ends, unraveling them, unraveling and braiding them, leaving them as they are, or evenly trimming them.

Basic patterns covered include:

RAINBOW (example set up: 8a 8b 8c)

FILMSTRIP (example set up: 8a 2b 2a 2a 2b 2a 2b 2a 2b 2a 2b 2a 2b)

SALT AND PEPPER (example set up: 8a b a b a b a b a b a b a b a b a)

8a, which will provide a one colour solid strip, is optional. For all salt and pepper, omit 8a, add ab x 8.

## 2) Advanced Métis Finger Weaving

Advanced patterns are more difficult to weave. The technique is similar to weaving two sashes at the same time, and having them join and exchange strands when they reach the sash's centre. Advanced patterns covered include: ARROWHEAD, DIAMOND ARROWHEAD, and DIAMOND.

The set up for each of these patterns is the same. You must decide ahead of time, which pattern you want. For the Arrowhead pattern, which will have continuous arrows all pointing in the same direction, tie the wool on the dowel with only enough wool left for the fringe. For the Diamond Arrowhead, tie the wool on the dowel with an equal amount on either side. In other words, half of the wool is on either side of the dowel. This will produce the diamond in the middle, and arrows continuing to each end in opposite directions, the same as each end of the centre diamond. For the Diamond pattern, which will have continuous diamonds, tie the wool on the dowel as you would for the Diamond

Arrowhead – remember that as each diamond is completed – you must follow the instructions in the video to create another diamond, rather than an arrowhead.

After you have decided which pattern you are making, set the wool up as follows: Arrange the predominate colour on the outsides of the stick (example set up: 8a 4b 8c 4b 8a). You can have fewer or more strands, as long as the numbers are even, and the set up is copied on either side of the centre colour, c. Once you are familiar with this pattern, you can vary the number of colours as well.

### Diamond Arrowhead

To make the diamond: Turn it over. Take out the stick. Loosen it. Pull out the stick. Pull the loops. Fasten the weaving. It will look the same. Continue on doing the same process until the pattern emerges.

### Diamond

Weave from the outsides inwards until the predominant colour gets to the outside again; making the wool set up look the same as when you started. Take the outside strand and wrap it around the strand beside it, so you could start weaving towards the centre with it. (This only has to be done once. Then the rest of the strands will be properly aligned until the diamond is finished.) When they meet in the middle, they will cross over and become a strand in the other side of the weaving. Continue on as before from the middle outward to make the lower half of diamond then repeat the above step (until you have as many diamonds as you want, or until it's time to make the fringe.)

**Adapted From:**

Préfontaine, Darren. "The Sash".

<http://www.metismuseum.ca/media/document.php/00741.pdf>