

Crafty Cats: Sew Your Own Felt Friend!

Materials Needed:

- Felt squares (various colors like gray, white, black, pink, etc.)
- Embroidery floss or sturdy thread (various colors)
- Hand sewing needles (embroidery or sharps)
- Scissors (fabric scissors work best, but any sharp scissors will do)
- Stuffing (polyester fiberfill, cotton balls, or fabric scraps)
- Optional: Catnip (dried, ensure it's safe for cats if the toy will be used by one)
- Paper and pencil for sketching/pattern making
- Pins (optional, for holding pieces together)

Lesson Steps:

1. Introduction: Thinking About Toys (5-10 mins)

Let's talk about cats! What kinds of toys do cats like? (Balls, mice, stringy things, things that crinkle...). What makes a good cat toy? We're going to design and make our very own toy today using felt and sewing. It could be a mouse, a fish, or even just a fun shape!

2. Design Time! (10-15 mins)

Grab your paper and pencil. Let's sketch a simple shape for our toy. Think about a mouse, a fish, or maybe a simple geometric shape like a star or heart. Keep it fairly simple for your first sewing project! Remember, you'll need two identical pieces (a front and a back). Once you have a design you like, cut it out carefully. This is your pattern!

3. Sewing Basics: Tools and Stitches (15-20 mins)

Safety First! Needles and scissors are sharp. Always be careful where you point them, and put them away safely when not in use. Cut away from yourself.

Threading the Needle: Cut a length of thread (about arm's length). Carefully poke one end through the eye of the needle. Pull it through so you have a 'tail'. Tie a knot at the **other** end of the thread (the long end). Ask for help if needed!

Learning Stitches: Let's practice on a scrap piece of felt.

Running Stitch: Simple up-and-down stitch, like dashed lines. Push the needle down through the felt, then up a short distance away. Repeat.

Backstitch: Stronger stitch. Go up through the felt, then take a small stitch **backwards**, then bring the needle up a stitch length **forward**. Repeat. This stitch looks more solid.

4. Cutting the Felt (10 mins)

Choose your felt color(s). Place your paper pattern onto the felt. You can pin it in place if it helps. Carefully cut out TWO identical shapes from the felt using your scissors.

5. Let's Sew! Assembling Your Toy (30-45 mins)

Place your two felt pieces exactly on top of each other. If you want to add features like eyes or whiskers with thread, it's easiest to embroider them onto the **top** piece **before** sewing the two pieces together.

Now, thread your needle (choose a contrasting or matching thread color!). Start sewing the two pieces together using either the running stitch or the backstitch. Sew close to the edge (about 1/4 inch).

Important: Leave a small opening (about an inch or two wide) – don't sew all the way around yet!

6. Stuffing Time! (5-10 mins)

Take small amounts of stuffing and gently push it inside the toy through the opening you left. Use a pencil eraser or your finger to get it into all the corners. Make it as full or as soft as you like. If using catnip, mix a small pinch in with the stuffing.

7. Finishing Up (5-10 mins)

Carefully sew the opening closed using the same stitch you used before. Try to make the stitches neat. When you reach the end, make a few small stitches in the same place and tie a secure knot. Trim any excess thread.

8. Show and Tell! (5 mins)

Congratulations! You've made your own felt creation! How did it turn out? What was the hardest part? What did you enjoy the most? If you have a cat, you can (carefully) introduce them to their new toy (if using catnip, supervise playtime).

Optional Extensions:

- Add more details: buttons for eyes (supervise if for a real cat), ribbon tails, embroidered patterns.
- Make different shapes or sizes.
- Try different fabric types (with adult help if using a sewing machine).