

# History

**Boro - visible mending**

RecyCOOL Lessons

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# Boro – visible mending

## **Description of the lesson**

In this lesson we will explore Boro technique.

## **Objective**

Objective of this lesson is to explore the art of Boro mending and its possible use to amend and design our clothing.

## **After this lesson you will be able to**

- describe the basics of the Boro technique
- mend your clothing using the Boro technique

## **Tools and materials:**

thread, needle, damaged garment, piece of scrap fabric, pen and paper

## **BORO:**

Boro means worn out, ragged or tattered. It refers to mended Japanese textiles and garments, most likely from indigo cotton or hemp.

## **BORO MENDING:**

Derived from the Japanese boroboro, meaning something tattered or repaired, boro refers to the practice of reworking and repairing textiles (often clothes or bedding) through piecing, patching and stitching, in order to extend their use.

If you wore your fashion garment long enough, it could also be worn out where the most strain was placed on the fabric. This is a sign that we really used the garment to its full. Each of us already must have some damaged clothing, most likely torn – however, its potential is not lost and can be revived again.

Think of the worn out garments that you own – the pair of jeans, an old shirt, a t-shirt, or coat. For those of you who would like to try to improve the condition of the item, you can use the Boro technique to repair and revive it, during this lesson. If you decide to fix your clothing with visible mending, you will need that garment, needle and threads in colours of your choice.

Consider the visible mending and the design possibilities it offers. What if we try to implement it and make, or design, a statement piece?

## You can do this lesson in two ways:

1 If you are skilled and would like to learn a new skill of visible mending, you can try out the technique yourself with your garment in need of repair, and try to fix or revive it.

2 If you are not sure about trying to fix your own clothes just yet – you can make a drawing of the design instead, incorporating the new technique we will be talking about today.



Each culture has its own habits and traditions. These vary from location to location and are developed over time. And this also applies to mending our clothes.

Visible mending is a way of fixing our broken clothing, in a way that showcases it, instead of hiding or disguising it. Reinforcement stitches are there to celebrate the journey of the garment and they can be made in many aesthetic ways. One of the oldest methods is a Japanese mending technique called Boro – and we will explore its history in this lesson now.

Boro means worn out, ragged or tattered. It refers to mended Japanese textiles and garments, most likely from indigo cotton or hemp.

Boro technique is a visible mending technique using a simple running stitch (originally called a saschi stitch) to reinforce the damaged garment with scraps of fabrics.



Photo credit: [V&A](#)

Boro stitching was used by peasants in Japan during the Edo period (1600s–1800s), when recycling of anything was a normal part of life or rather a necessity.

The supplies were scarce and this made the whole society contribute to repurposing anything they needed. Traders or crafters back then included specific jobs such as:

- tinkers (repairers of metal products)
- ceramic repairer
- truss hoop repairer
- used paper buyers and collectors
- used clothes dealers
- used umbrella rib buyers
- ash buyers
- (... and so on)

So it is understandable, that even when it comes to clothing, all resources were smartly used and garments were repaired in highly skilled matters.

The concept of this mending was (and still is) that nothing should be wasted and that any imperfections should be accepted.

Repurposed kimonos and boro textiles were fixed multiple times and scraps of fabrics covering the damaged places were overlapping. They were stitched on by sashiko technique and for that was used sashiko thread, which is twisted and slightly different to the embroidery thread we commonly use.

**Sashiko technique is an embroidery technique using a little stitches in one running stitch and creating geometric patterns**



Photo credit: [Indigo Niche](#)

Originally the mending technique used only in Japan has recently become very popular on a global scale. It seems that its popularity was raised as a opposition to a “throw-away” culture – as a part of the movement which is trying to prolong life of things surrounding us, letting them carry their and our stories further.

Since Boro garments were always traditionally mended and passed on from generation to generation, the passing of time was also very evident in the garment – so it is very difficult to re-create a real, very original Boro. Still, we can at least try to mend our damaged clothing by this technique.

## How to Boro

So if you decide to fix your clothing by visible mending, follow the steps below.

All you need is the garment you are going to mend, a scrap of fabric, thread and needle. For the purpose of this lesson you can use a regular embroidery thread. Even though it won't be the same as a sashiko thread, we want to try this technique first before we invest in the special crafting supplies required for authentic boro!

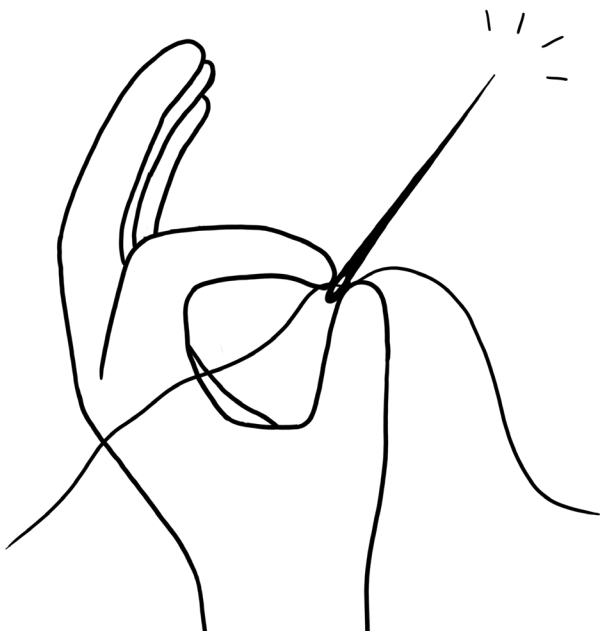
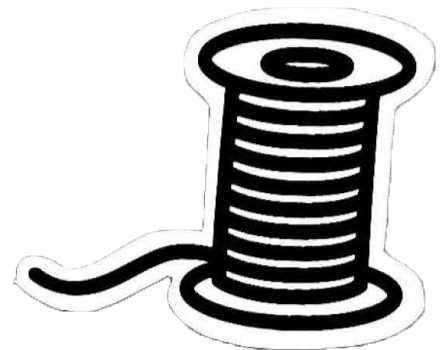






Photo credit: [Sew obsessed](#)



## The following steps were written by Matt Rho in his [article](#)

**1 Secure the patch before doing the repair.** Most of the time, I'm holding the patch in place with safety pins, then basting the patch in place (remove the safety pins once the basting is in place), and then doing the repair (remove the basting stitches once the repair is done).

This is really helpful in repairing jeans, because you're not working on a flat surface. You're going to be manipulating the fabric a lot, so it helps if you know the patch isn't going anywhere.

**2 Anchor the patch into solid fabric.** The edges of the patch need to be anchored into fabric that still has integrity. Usually this means cutting the patch much larger than the actual hole you're repairing, as the fabric immediately around the hole is probably pretty flimsy as well.

**3 Work from the inside out to the edges.** Repair the hole first. It might seem natural to sew the edges of the patch first. But I've found it works out best when you repair the hole first, then do the edges. If you're doing large panel sashiko lines, work from the middle of the patch out.

**4 If you're using a raw denim patch, wash and dry it first.** Hot wash and hot machine dry. You want to take all the shrinkage out of it before using it for the repair.

You can watch a full tutorial about boro [here](#)



Photo credit: [Indigo Niche](#)

If you prefer drawing and designing, try to make a sketch of a fashion garment with the implemented boro technique as a part of its design. The design itself can be simple with just Boro stitching, but as an example - it can also be combined with other more complex techniques such as embroidery, cross stitch or patchwork.

# Reflection

Now looking at your mended garment, how did it go and how do you feel about the outcome?

And – if you were sketching rather than mending – how did your ñdesign turn out? Was it difficult to implement boro into a fashion design, or not?

Photo credit: [V&A](#)

## Now question for everyone:

In your culture or in the community you live in, is there any traditional or popular mending technique used in the past or now – visible or invisible? Can you think of its evolution or anything you know about it? It could be worth exploring this more, as an option for repairing your clothes in the future.

If you fell in love with Boro style, you could try to make your own bag as in [this tutorial](#) by Victoria



And if you are not a fan of visible mending and prefer hidden mending, or if you would like to know more about invisible mending, you can search more for example about [Rafoogari](#), which is a high skill mending technique used in India.

# Resources

Japan for Sustainability. JAPAN'S SUSTAINABLE SOCIETY IN THE EDO PERIOD (1603–1867). 2003. Available at: [https://www.japanfs.org/en/news/archives/news\\_id027757.html](https://www.japanfs.org/en/news/archives/news_id027757.html)

Hawaii Herald. Fashion History – JAPANESE BORO. 2021. Available at: <https://www.thehawaiiherald.com/2021/05/21/fashion-history-japanese-boro/>

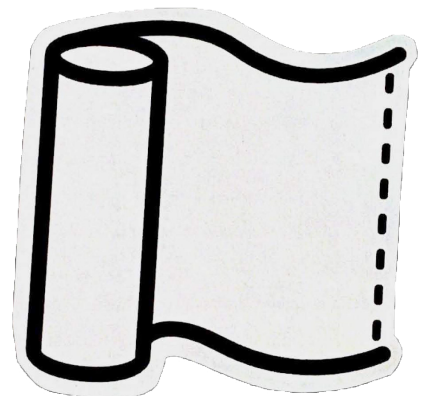
V&A. Make your own: Japanese 'Boro' bag. 2018. Available at: <https://www.vam.ac.uk/articles/make-your-own-japanese-boro-bag>

Sue Howie. Boro Textiles – An Introduction. 2018. Available at: <https://indigon-iche.com/2018/08/30/boro-stitching-introduction-history/#:~:text=Boro%20is%20essentially%20the%20practice,a%20distinctively%20gorgeous%20textile%20artform.>

## Further reading:

Inspiration on [visible mending](#):

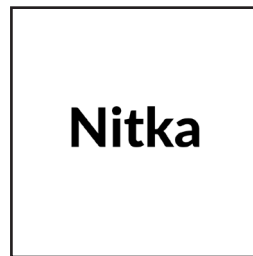
Read more about [longevity of our clothes](#)



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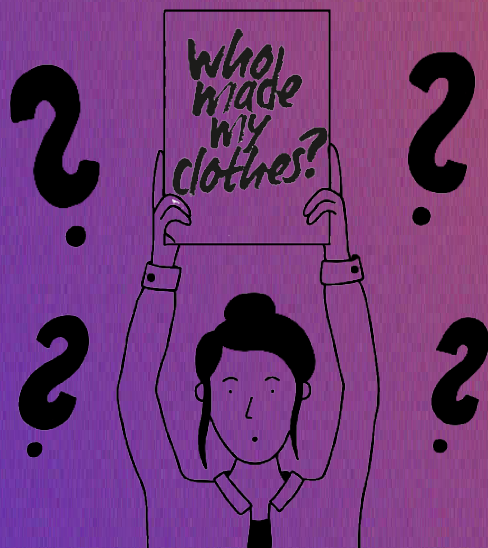
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