Clue 6

BLOCKING and FINISHING

Congratulations! The smocking is completed for The Mystery of the Five Diamonds. How are you going to finish and use your project? It has been advertised as a fold-over envelope-style bag, but that doesn’t mean that is what you have to make. It could be an insert for a pillow, a tote bag or anything else you might think of. I am going to describe below the process and materials I used to make my three fold-over bags. You may certainly choose to use your own favorite tried and true techniques.

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Blocking

Regardless of your choice, the insert must first be blocked. Leave the center basting thread and pleating threads for Rows 1 and 13 as aids for construction. Whether to remove the remaining pleating threads at this point is a matter of choice and/or circumstance. If your smocking design (not this one) features open non-smocked areas which are intended to “puff” out when completed, you must remove the pleating threads. If your stitches have pierced the pleating threads, then they need to be removed in order to evenly distribute the pleats across the fabric width. However, if you want to maintain the crispness of the pleats or are using a fabric where the pleats may want to flatten out, then keep the pleating threads in place, providing they won’t leave permanent holes in the fabric and are tied off no less than the exact finished width.
Back in Clue #2 I suggested you tie off your insert at 10-11½”, depending upon your fabric selection, stitch tension, number of repeats chosen at the sides of the design or desired look. As you can see in the photo on the previous page, I blocked each of my three samples at a different measurement: 10”, 11” and 11½”. Either at this point, or just after blocking, press to flatten out any remaining fabric at the sides. Do NOT cut away any fabric!

Use plenty of pins when blocking. I first pin along one of the short sides, using a ruler to make sure it is straight. Then I stretch out the pleated fabric to its predetermined finished measurement and pin. Use a ruler again for the long sides to keep them straight and to make sure that the center basting thread is at the center of the measurement. Steam well and allow to dry thoroughly. Unpin, but before removing from ironing/blocking board press seam allowances flat beyond holding Rows 1 and 13.

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Fabric Layout

I cut two pieces of fabric 25” x 12½” (your measurements may vary, depending on how you choose to finish); one piece is the main bag fabric, the other will serve as a lining which need not match. These guidelines are suggested measurements which will be trimmed to size later on as needed. Here is my layout. Do NOT CUT ANYTHING until instructed!

If using DIRECTIONAL FABRIC, the fold lines will become seams. The top of each piece is marked ► or ◄, above. Add ½” seam allowances to each. Then seam them together in the direction as indicated and treat as one main fabric piece.
Clue #6

1. **We will be using ½” seams.** If, for example, you have blocked your insert to a finished width of 11½”, then the 12½” fabric width as noted above is perfect. If you are using a different width, you will need to trim your fabric so that it measures 1” more than your finished width to allow for seams. My maize sample, shown here, will be 11” wide when finished, so I trimmed away ½” down the 25½” length on both the main fabric and lining pieces to make them 12” wide.

2. **Set aside lining fabric piece,** but first trim away ¼” from one long edge (see more about that below).

3. Use contrasting color sewing thread and thread trace down the center of the main fabric.

4. **Cut off a 3” (2” + ½” + ½” = 3”) strip of fabric from one end to serve as the lower front flap.**

5. From the same end, cut off a second strip of fabric 3½” wide (OR your measurement between Row 1 and Row 13, less 1” for seam allowances). Discard this piece. It will be replaced by the insert.

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**NEW TECHNIQUE: Insertion by Ribbon**

There are many methods for insertion of smocked fabric into flat fabric. You may certainly use whatever you have found works best for you, but I want to share with you a
Smocked inserts are bulky and can be difficult to add to flat fabric without ripples and distortion of the flat fabric. For this reason, the flat fabric is normally stabilized using interfacing and/or corded piping. Instead of corded piping, my technique uses ⅜" grosgrain or double-faced satin ribbon. You will see how it eliminates some of the bulk in the seam allowances.

1. Cut two pieces ribbon 1" wider than the flat fabric width. (I find the excess ribbon handy to hold onto while stitching.) **I am a BIG fan of disappearing basting tape!** It allows me to precisely position and align the flat fabric onto the smocked fabric, using the smocking stitches as a guideline.

2. Add tape along edge of one piece of ribbon. Even though the tape is not supposed to gum up sewing machine needles, I like to avoid putting it directly on the stitching line, especially if I will be removing the tape (see below). Remove paper backing strip.

3. Position ribbon with taped side down onto one edge of the 3" fabric strip cut earlier, with the taped ribbon edge ½" from the fabric edge.

4. Straight stitch down the opposite edge of the ribbon (away from the seam allowance). Hold taught with firm tension front and back to keep fabric feeding smoothly.

5. The tape does disappear with washing, but I generally remove it if (a) the finished project is not washable and/or (b) pressing will be involved. Remove the tape.

6. Press flat first from wrong side of fabric (a). Then turn seam allowance completely back exposing ribbon and press again (b). Repeat from #2, above, for the other main fabric piece. (Please refer to photo at top of page 5.)
7. **Cut a piece of ordinary gift wrap tissue paper** 15” x 12” as further stabilization for the insertion process. Center smocked insert on top of tissue and pin at the sides. Use a ruler to make sure that Rows 1 and 13 are perfectly straight and square with the short sides.

8. Apply **disappearing basting tape again** to ribbon wrong side of 3” fabric strip. Position tape away from ribbon edge, if possible, to keep it out of the seamline. Press down firmly with fingertips. Remove paper backing.

9. **Position onto smocked insert**, first matching center basting marks. Align ribbon so that it just covers cable stitches on Row 13. Use your eyes or a ruler to keep an even distance between the ribbon and first row of honeycomb stitches. At the ends, the smocking edge should be ½” from flat fabric edge (see ruler, below).

10. Once you are happy with the position, press down firmly on ribbon with fingertips. For extra security, pin through flat fabric and tissue, avoiding ribbon. Add two or
three pins at center of smocked insert, being careful not to distort smocking. **Stitch in place along remaining ribbon edge.** If you have beaded your honeycomb stitches, you may need to adjust needle position. You may remove the tape.

11. Repeat at top of insert with other piece of main fabric. Tear away tissue paper.

12. Use a ruler and trim away excess fabric at sides of insert.

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**Insertion by Fold**

Here is another method for insertion of smocking into flat fabric. Depending on the look we want for our finished project, the contrast provided by corded piping or ribbon like we used above may be distracting. Heavyweight fabrics may be stable enough on their own to support the smocked insert without added bulk. Both of these factors dictated the insertion method for my cinnamon sample. Because I had added German interfacing to the black linen, no other stabilization was needed.

First fold back and press under the ½” seam allowance. Apply disappearing basting tape to the seam allowance about ⅛” from the fold. Remove paper backing and “stick” the folded fabric onto the smocked insert the same way as shown above when using ribbon.

Carefully open fold to expose the wrong side of the main fabric. Since mine was black, I marked the crease with a white pencil for easier visibility. Then simply **stitch along the crease.** See how smoothly it turns out?
Stabilization for Construction

Some sort of stabilization/interfacing is called for unless your fabric is very sturdy. For all three of my samples, I used fusible fleece on the wrong side of the main fabric. The fleece allows the insert seam allowances to sink in and not leave unsightly ridges on the right side. Because they are fused, the layers won’t shift. I cut the fleece $\frac{1}{2}”$ smaller on all sides to keep its bulk out of the seamlines and then fused it lightly in place, taking care not to flatten the smocked insert.

If using non-fusible fleece, cut it the same size as above. It will need to be basted in place. Start basting, using large stitches, with a big ‘X’ from corner to corner to keep the layers from shifting. Then baste around the sides at least $\frac{3}{4}”$ from the edges.

Optional button loop: My beaded green dupioni sample is lighter weight than the cotton or linen samples. I was afraid it might not close smoothly, so added a small self-fabric button loop to the bottom flap edge.

Optional scissors holder: Since my maize sample is going to be a sewing project bag, I wanted to add a holder for a small pair of scissors. I used a loop of matching grosgrain ribbon and sewed it to the end opposite the insert, then added a small faux leather scissors sheath. (Remember, the scissors handles will need to be closest to the fabric edge and not to the fold.)
Lining

Stabilization/interfacing of the lining is your choice. Depending on the chosen weight, it can add body to the fabric. Since I was using the same cotton print for both main fabric and lining for my sewing bag, I knew that just the fusible fleece used above was not going to be enough to give my bag the body I had envisioned for the finished project. I wanted to use a medium to heavyweight fusible interfacing. At the mercy of the local fabric chain store, all I could find was ultra-firm 71F Peltex which yielded an extremely firm bag. (I do not recommend this product for this particular usage!)

The green dupioni for my evening bag project is very lightweight, so an interfaced lining was essential. I used pellon 809 Decor Bond for added body. I didn’t need extra firmness for the cotton lining of the black linen bag, but I added a layer of fusible fleece to help protect my iPad. For all three samples, I used the technique described below.

Cut lining interfacing $\frac{3}{4}$” smaller on all sides, again to keep even more bulk out of the seamline. Fuse (or baste) into place, but do not fuse the last 2” at each short side.*

Optional felt “needle park:” I like to have a place, other than the arm of my chair, to stick needles when working on small projects. For my sewing project bag, I cut a piece of coordinating wool felt 3½” x 2½” and attached it to one corner of the lining using a machine blanket stitch. You can see the result on page 9.

You may wish to round the corners. If so, use any convenient circle as a pattern. Don’t forget to trim interfacing out of the new seam allowance. Use the lining piece as a pattern to cut the same curved corners for the main fabric. Remember, these corners are at the end just below the smocked insert.

Fold one end of the lining (needle park end, if using) with right sides together 8½” from the end. (If you have used a directional fabric, there will be a seam here.) Crease sharply and press firmly. This becomes the top flap for the bag.

*Now you may fuse the interfacing at this end; trim out of seam allowance, if necessary.
Optional pocket: I added a small interior pocket on the inside of my beaded green dupioni bag. I thought it would be convenient for driver’s license, credit card, etc. I attached it at the center of the back lining portion. Just make sure that the pocket opening faces toward the upper flap! (See thread tacks, #6, on page 10.)

Construction and ‘Turn of the Cloth’

When two or more layers of just about anything are stacked and folded, the inner layers will protrude beyond the outer layers. If the layers are attached at the edges while still flat, the inner layers will ripple and not lie smoothly. We are going to have a bulky mess once our bag is put together and the flaps folded over! So, we are going to take some steps to tame this “turn of the cloth” and end up with a smoothly constructed bag.

1. First, temporarily pin the lining and main fabric with wrong sides together. Start with the curved corners of the front flap and pin across the bottom edge (lining will be slightly smaller). Next proceed on both sides up to the fold at 8½”. Use a safety pin and pin through both layers directly through the fold on both sides.

2. Fold the main fabric around the lining flap. Continue pinning both sides, but for only 2”.

3. Now fold up lower flap/the other end of the lining 8-8½” or your desired depth so that it is under top flap. It should not extend beyond the fold of the top flap, nor should the top flap extend beyond the bottom fold (remember there are ½” seam allowances). If necessary, trim interfacing. Sharply crease lining only at the fold.

4. With bag still folded, continue pinning the two layers together. Use safety pins again at the bottom fold. Do you see how the lining extends? Don’t cut it yet!
5. Fold in the seam allowances on both short straight edges until they meet. It may be necessary to trim interfacings to keep them out of the seamlines. If desired, trim fabric seam allowances if they exceed \( \frac{1}{2} \)”. Temporarily baste or pin each seam allowance.

6. Replace the safety pins on both pieces with thread tacks which will be used as construction guides. Unpin the two layers and lay them out flat. Do you see that the outer layer is longer than the lining? That is our “turn of the cloth” allowance.

7. Press the seam allowances on both short straight sides.

8. With the lining on top, pin the two layers with right sides together. Start with both short edges. Yes, the lining is supposed to be smaller! Next match the thread tacks at the folds and pin. In order to evenly distribute the fullness between the folds/thread tacks, use lots of pins.

9. Do not stitch the short straight edge. You need to leave it open for turning! Stitch around the remaining three edges with lining on top so that the machine feed dogs will help to ease the main fabric underneath.

10. Trim any remaining interfacing from seam allowances. This is important to keep the edges sharp. Clip curves and turn right sides out. Press edges.

11. Close the opening along the short straight edge either by hand or with machine topstitching.

Before joining the bottom flap to the back at the sides, you may wish to edgestitch as I did for my beaded green dupioni bag. I basted the edges before stitching. Note that I did not attempt to edgestitch along the sides of the smocked insert.

If you are also going to edgestitch the bottom flap at the sides, you may do this in one step. See next page.
At Long Last, It’s a Bag!

We are almost finished! The next step is to turn up and attach the lower flap!

Turn up and pin the lower flap in place and decide whether you want to stitch the sides by hand or by machine. This may depend on whether your machine has the capability to stitch through all layers! I knew that there was no way my machine could penetrate the Peltex I had used for the sewing project bag. Of my three samples, the beaded green dupioni was the only one I felt would cooperate, so I edgestitched the sides together at the same time as the front flap (see previous page). Note that I added a button to fit the previously applied loop.

If you have used a contrasting lining fabric, there is a good chance it will show if stitching by machine. The lining fabric for my cinnamon/black linen bag is the same cotton as the smocked insert, which I felt would detract from the overall look of the bag. I joined the sides using \( \frac{1}{8} \)" long ladder stitches, picking up only the main fabric from side to side. Start at the top edge of the flap and work down toward the fold. Make sure to start both sides from the top to keep everything square. The sewing project bag was done the same way, except that I left the first inch unstitched to give more accessibility to the interior.

SECRET TRICK: The Ladder Stitch

The key to stitching a smooth ladder stitch is to take several stitches, pulling up the thread of each stitch just until the edges come together. After a \( \frac{1}{2} \)" or so, stop and firmly pull on the thread. This will tighten the first stitches in the set, but leave the last couple of stitches still loose, which will be tightened with the next repetition. Stitch the next \( \frac{1}{2} \)" and repeat all the way down the side. (Do you see how the lining would have shown if I had machine stitched?)
Finally, you will need to strengthen the sides of the bag at the top where the lower flap joins to the back. Nothing could be more heartbreaking than to have your bag tear apart during use! All you need do is to add thread bar tacks.

For extra security you can overcast the bar tacks with closely-packed blanket stitches.

Don’t forget to remove any remaining basting threads!

It has been my pleasure to present The Mystery of the Five Diamonds Smock-Along! Thank you to everyone who has participated and taken this journey outside their comfort zone and learned something new or has had an opportunity to revisit some less-used stitches.

It has been so much fun seeing everyone’s progress. I can’t wait to see how you finish your project! Please post to our Smock-Along Facebook page. If you are coming to the SAGA Retreat at Valley Forge, October 8-11, 2015, please bring your project (it need NOT be finished!) or send it along for a special display.

SAGA Artisan Program Participation

SAGA Artisan enrollees: There are two ways to document and verify your participation in The Mystery of the Five Diamonds Smock-Along in order to earn 2 points to enter onto your Artisan card:
(1) I will sign Artisan cards at the Valley Forge Retreat, October 8-12, 2015. Please bring your card and your project with the smocking completed. (You will find me in Hospitality.)

(2) Post a picture of your project, with the smocking completed, BEFORE October 15* to the Smock-Along Facebook page. Make sure that I respond to it. At the end of October you will receive an acknowledgement email from SAGA which you may attach to your Artisan card as verification.

*Verification for this Smock-Along cannot be accepted after October 15.