

Proposal for Emoji: SEWING NEEDLE

Submitted by: Amanda Hickman, Amberley Romo, Mari Gray

Date: February 2019

Emoji Name: SEWING NEEDLE

Sort Order: either in the TOOL category of OBJECTS, after MAGNET or, alternatively in the ARTS & CRAFTS category, after SPOOL and before YARN

Reference Emoji: Wrench

Keywords: SEWING | MENDING | QUILTING | TAILORING | STITCHES | SUTURES | EMBROIDERY | NEEDLE | NEEDLE AND THREAD | BODKIN | CREWEL | TATTING



72x72

18x18

Credit: Aphelandra Messer (Free for use in context of this proposal)

Abstract

We are requesting the addition of a NEEDLE to the emoji character set. Though the making, mending and wearing of textiles is a defining distinction of human society the current emoji character set includes no NEEDLE emoji. The NEEDLE fills a notable gap in the tools category.

Introduction

Clothing, virtually all of which incorporates sewing in its construction, is a defining characteristic of human civilization, and yet we have no emoji for the act of SEWING. The recently approved SPOOL OF THREAD , introduced in 2018, begins to address this omission, but the spool is, by its very nature, static. The physical act of sewing, of drawing a needle and thread through fabric until the pants are hemmed, the button attached, the patch secured -- this is far better represented by the NEEDLE itself. Moreover, as described below, there are countless needle crafts that don't use spooled thread at all.

Humans are the only animal species that constructs and wears clothing. Not only did clothing allow our pleistocene ancestors¹ to migrate to north into colder climates, but by the time we began to organize ourselves into societies, distinctions between clothing were integral to our community identities, from Scottish clan tartans to Native American beadwork.

Though the emoji character set includes glyphs for a number of tools:   and , there are insufficient glyphs for the making, mending, or maintenance of textiles. Notably, the available tool glyphs are all strongly associated with trades traditionally dominated by men (carpentry, construction, maintenance of machines). Though cobblers and tailors and sail makers make heavy use of the needle and thread, in many cultures sewing remains strongly associated with women.

Alongside the recently approved YARN , SAFETY PIN  and SPOOL OF THREAD  proposals, this proposal fills a notable gap in the character set.

¹https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/History_of_clothing_and_textiles#Prehistoric_development

History

The [oldest known sewing needle](#)² is 50,000 years old and predates homo sapiens. Ancient Egyptians made ceramic needles, Romans made bronze and iron needles. The ancient Indian Vedas describe the care and use of steel needles³ for medical purposes. Humans now produce needles in a wide range of sizes, but the basic design of the needle pulling thread has not changed.

A threaded needle is used to stitch leather shoes, canvas sails, delicate silks, cotton shirts. It is used for decorative embroidery work, quilting, tatting lace, darning stockings, applique, cross-stitch, beadwork, and making tapestries. The Japanese tradition of sashiko (or 刺し子) uses a needle and thread, as does Korean bojagi (보자기). Many First Nations and Native American tribes decorate day-to-day and ceremonial clothing with carefully sewn beadwork. While these artists do employ thread in their beadwork, the needle is far better able to represent the painstaking work of beading.



The beadwork on these Kiowa beaded moccasins, was done by hand with a sewing needle.

Photo: ca. 1920, OHS Photo Uyvsdi - Own work, Public Domain, <https://commons.wikimedia.org/w/index.php?curid=7928947>

The tradition of communities coming together to work together on hand quilting a single quilt by attaching the quilt top, batting, and backing together with careful stitches is an important cultural

2

<http://siberiantimes.com/science/casestudy/news/n0711-worlds-oldest-needle-found-in-siberian-cave-that-stitches-together-human-history/>

³ <http://fashion-history.lovetoknow.com/fashion-history-eras/history-needles-sewing>

tradition in a variety of communities around the world. Only the NEEDLE can adequately capture the active nature of this vital craft.



Women gather to hand quilt with sewing needles in Gees Bend.

Photo Andre Natta - Flickr, CC BY 2.0,

<https://commons.wikimedia.org/w/index.php?curid=3434048>



Huichol bead artist uses a sewing needle to embellish a cuff.

Photo by Kaixodude (assumed) CC BY 2.5

<https://commons.wikimedia.org/w/index.php?curid=1952649>



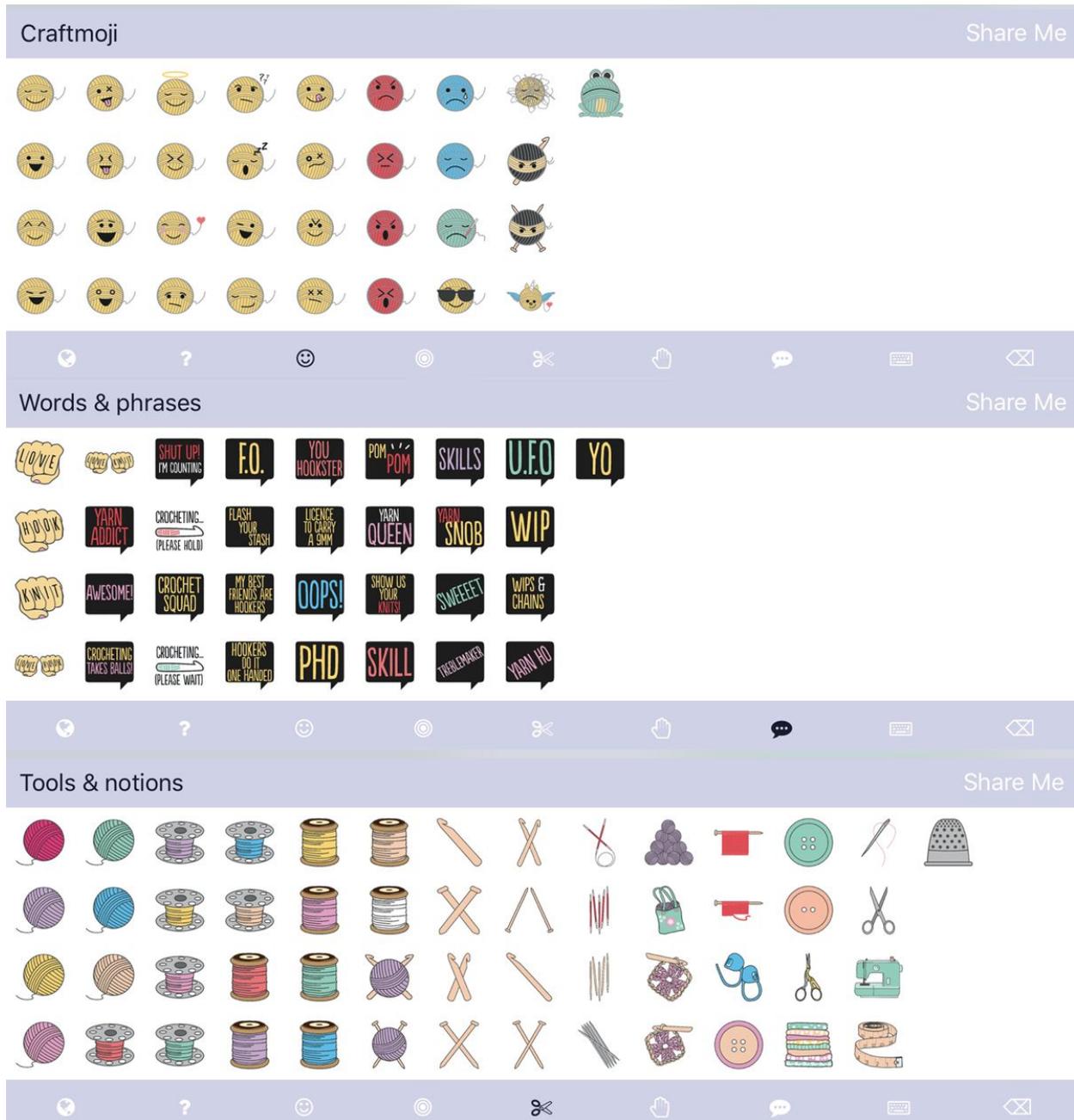
Women embroider traditional textiles in Aldea Las Flores, Sumpango Guatemala

Photo by Mari Grey, Kakaw Designs Used with permission.

Selection Factors -- Inclusion

Compatibility

The Craftmoji⁴ iOS icon set includes a SEWING NEEDLE.



⁴ <http://www.theyarnloop.com/article/craftmoji-are-now-live-%E2%80%93-use-our-apple-crafters-emoji>

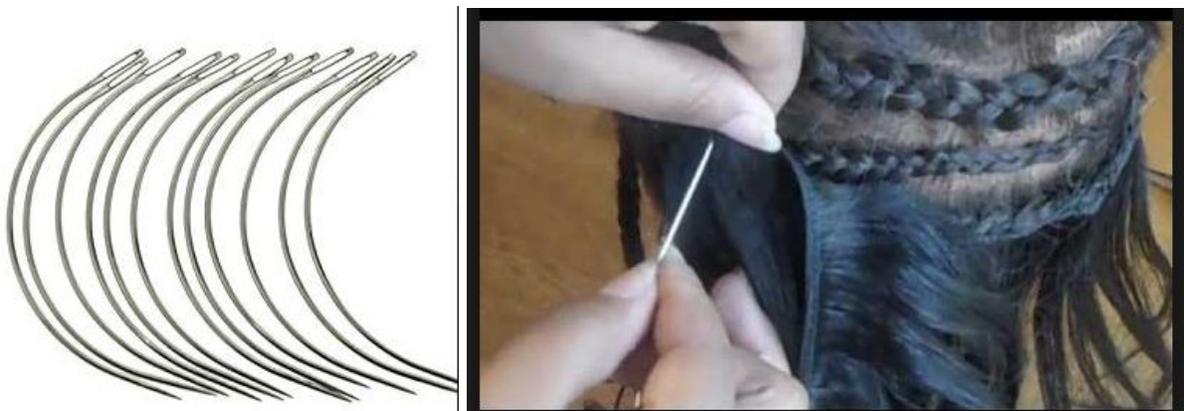
Expected Usage Level

There is nowhere in the world where people don't make and mend clothing, bedding, luggage, and decoration by sewing. Mass production happens on sewing machines, but everywhere high end couture sewing and tailoring happens with a simple needle and thread, as does mending and tailoring. As of October 2018 More than 7.8 million Instagram posts use the #sewing hashtag and another 7.9 million are tagged #embroidery. Over a million are tagged #quilting. These are just a few of the many, many crafts and pursuits that require a sewing needle.

#embroidery 7,957,166 posts
#quilting 1,273,559 posts
#handsewn 562,935 posts
#handsewing 206,000 posts
#sewist 145,000 posts
#sewersofinstagram 261,000 posts
#needlework 745,125 posts

#sewing 7,881,547 posts
#quilt 1,251,611 posts
#needleandthread 91,644 posts

A curved weaving needle is used for sewing in hair extensions and wigs, usually called a "sew in" weave. The [#sewin](#) hashtag has 3,298,892 posts.



Rivea Weaving Needles sold for weaving in hair extensions, and a still of a video of the sew in process. Video by YouTube user [kandidbeauty](#).

There are 809,000 YouTube videos on the subject of "How to thread a needle." The smallness of the needle's eye is what makes the technique worthy of hundreds of thousands of instructional videos.

Sewing needles appear regularly on signage indicating that tailoring or alterations are available, often (though not always) alongside a spool of thread.



Sewing needles are also featured in movies, popular TV shows and music videos. Project Runway with Heidi Klum and Rupaul's Drag Race feature lots of sewing and alterations.

On The Tonight Show, magician David Blaine sewed his mouth shut on stage. He used thread from a spool, but piercing his face with the NEEDLE was the more dramatic element of the stunt.



David Blaine on the Tonight Show https://www.youtube.com/watch?time_continue=2&v=82QbMrq2Hol

Jane Campions 'Bright Star' begins with an extreme close up of a needle being threaded as the main character stitches an elaborate collar. In Disney's Tangled, Rapunzel sews a dress for Pascal, her pet chameleon.





Cinderella got to the ball with help of a few birds and mice sewing a lovely gown for her with a sewing needle and thread.



Marge Simpson uses a sewing needle on The Simpsons.

It is clear that the internet was hungry for the THREAD 🧵 emoji -- a search of Twitter shows that it is already in wide to tee off comment threads: <https://twitter.com/search?q=%F0%9F%A7%B5>

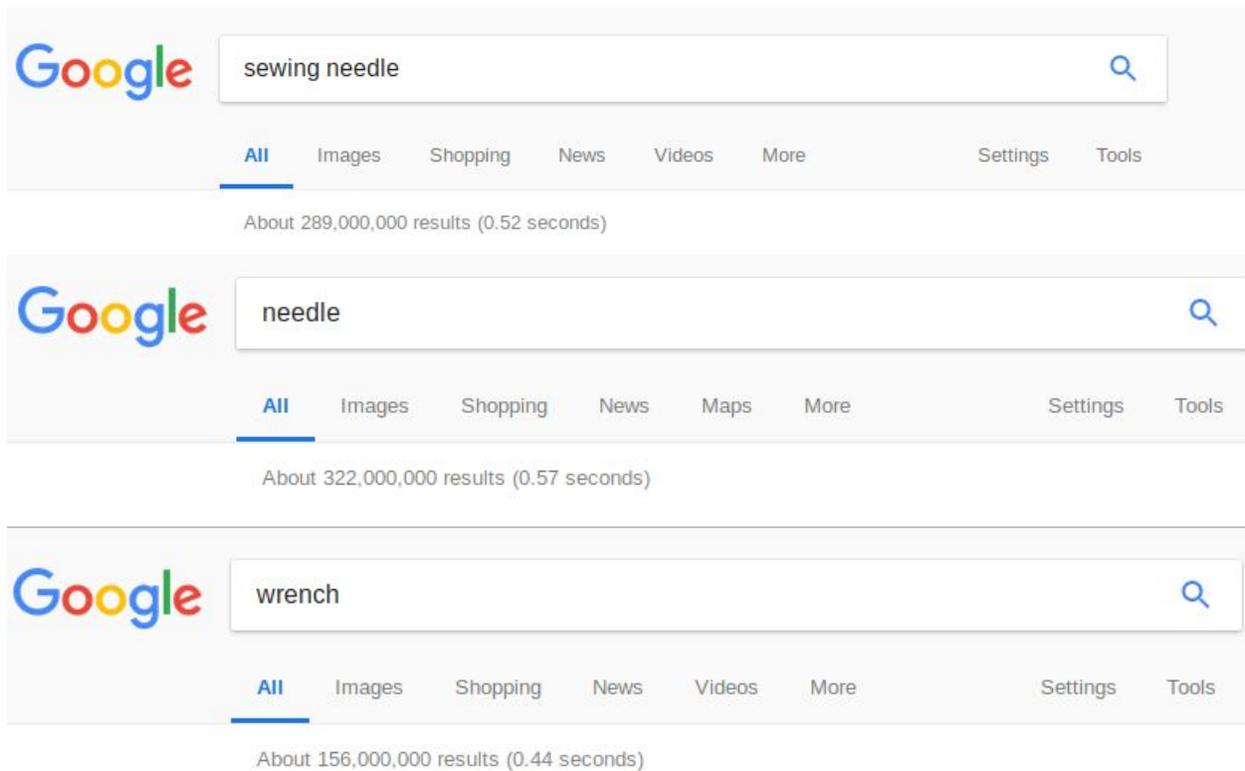
YARN 🧶 is also seeing wide usage, though it has only been on keyboards for a few months <https://twitter.com/search?q=%F0%9F%A7%B6>

We firmly believe that the evidence shows NEEDLE will be similarly well received.

Frequency Evidence

The following search results provide the data requested in the “Evidence of Frequency” section for submitting emoji proposals and all searches were completed in a private browser window. We have compared the terms ‘needle’ for the proposed emoji and ‘wrench’ 🗡️ for the comparison existing emoji. We chose 🗡️ because it functions as both a noun and a verb, much as “needle” does.

Google Search:



The image displays three screenshots of Google search results, each showing the search term, the number of results, and the search time.

- Search 1:** The search term is "sewing needle". The results show "About 289,000,000 results (0.52 seconds)".
- Search 2:** The search term is "needle". The results show "About 322,000,000 results (0.57 seconds)".
- Search 3:** The search term is "wrench". The results show "About 156,000,000 results (0.44 seconds)".

Bing Search:



[All](#) [Shopping](#) [Images](#) [Videos](#) [Maps](#) [News](#) | [My saves](#)

7-20 Of 16,800,000 Results [Any time](#) ▾

[All](#) [News](#) [Images](#) [Videos](#) [Maps](#) [Shopping](#) | [My saves](#)

30,900,000 Results [Any time](#) ▾

[All](#) [Shopping](#) [Images](#) [Videos](#) [Maps](#) [News](#) | [My saves](#)

25,800,000 Results [Any time](#) ▾

YouTube:

[All](#) [Images](#) [Shopping](#) [News](#) [Videos](#) [More](#) [Settings](#) [Tools](#)

About 286,000 results (0.63 seconds)

[All](#) [Images](#) [Shopping](#) [News](#) [Maps](#) [More](#) [Settings](#) [Tools](#)

About 16,200,000 results (0.41 seconds)



wrench site:youtube.com



All

Images

Shopping

News

Videos

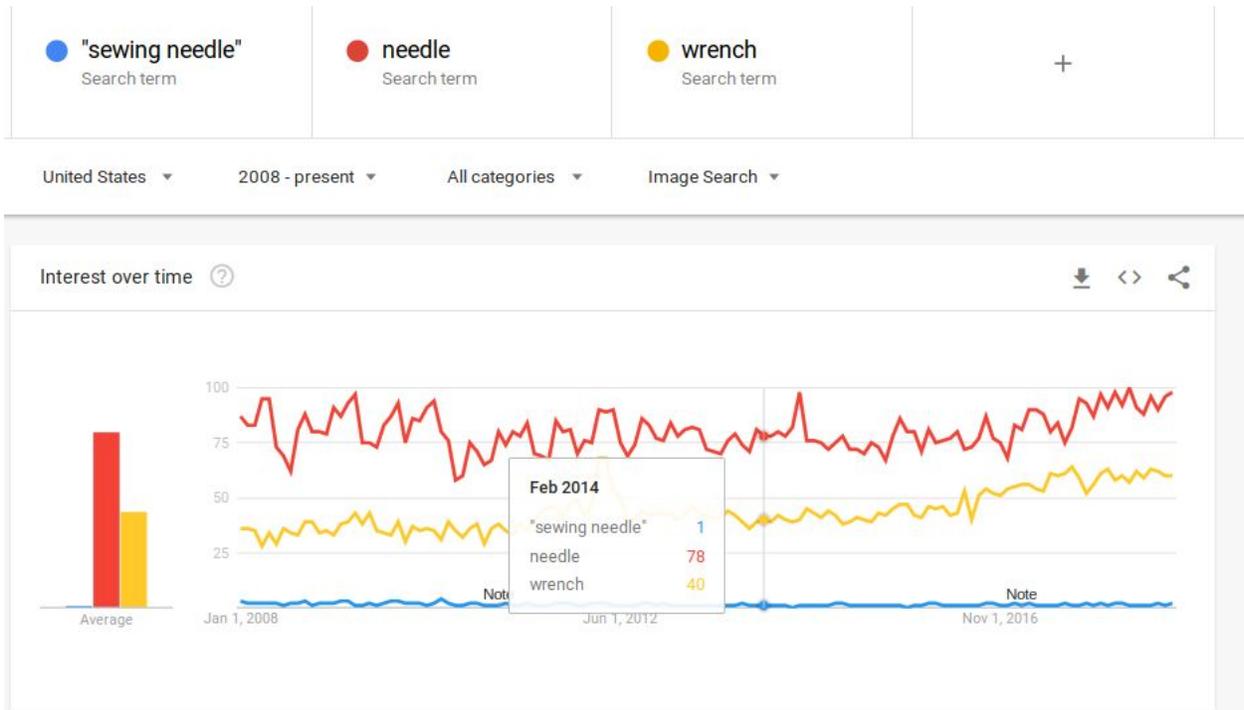
More

Settings

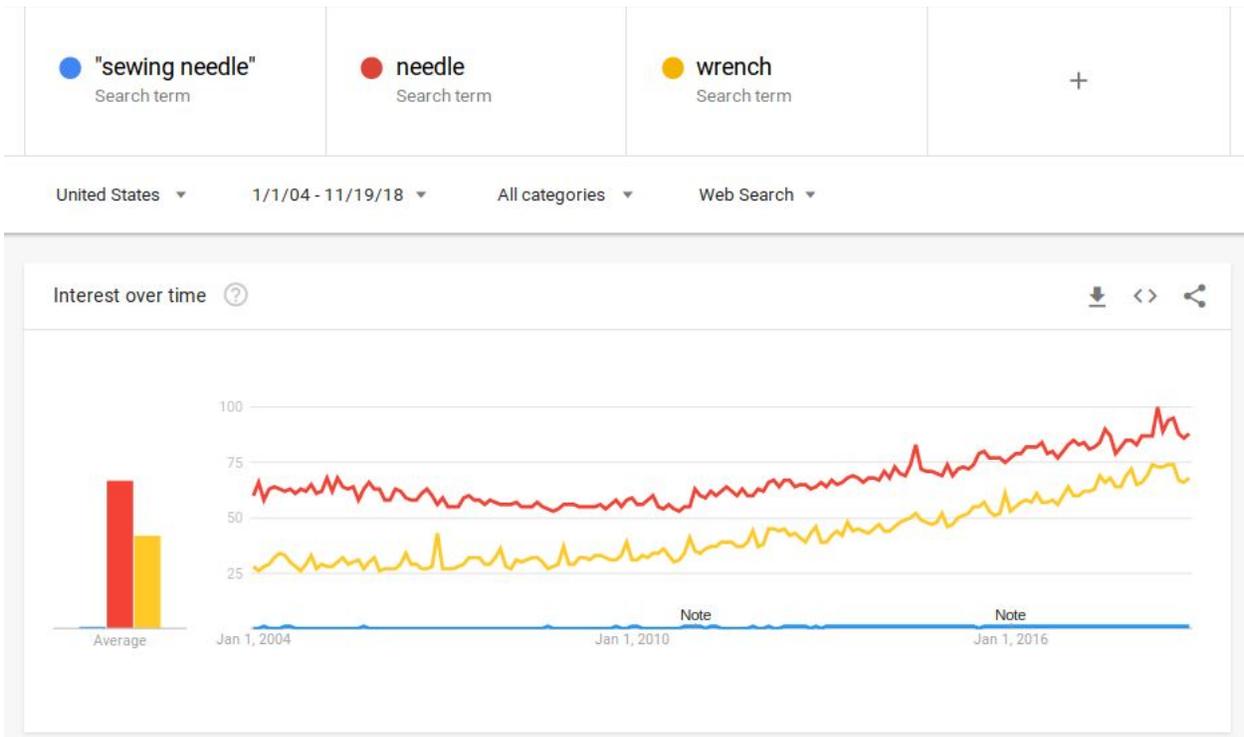
Tools

About 13,400,000 results (0.48 seconds)

Google Trends Image Search:



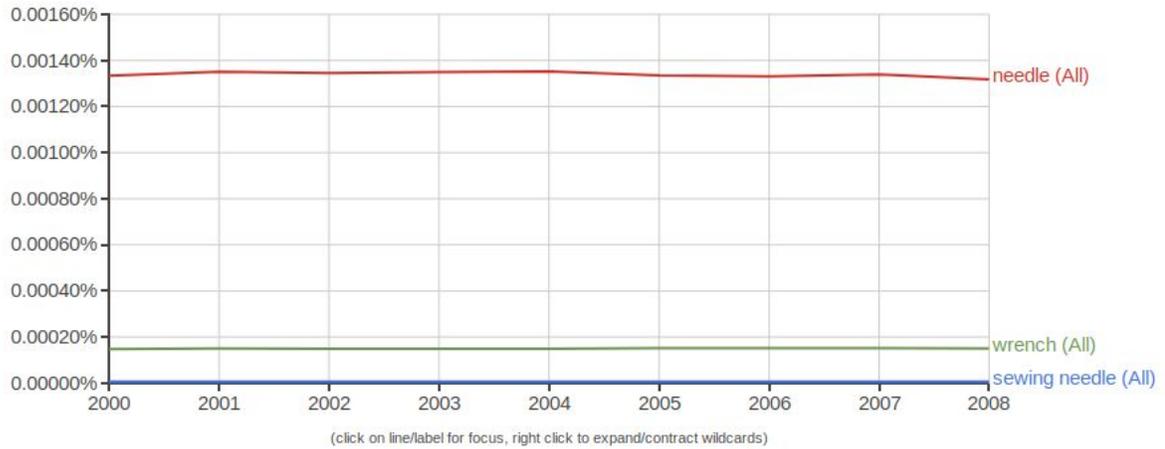
Google Trends Web Search:



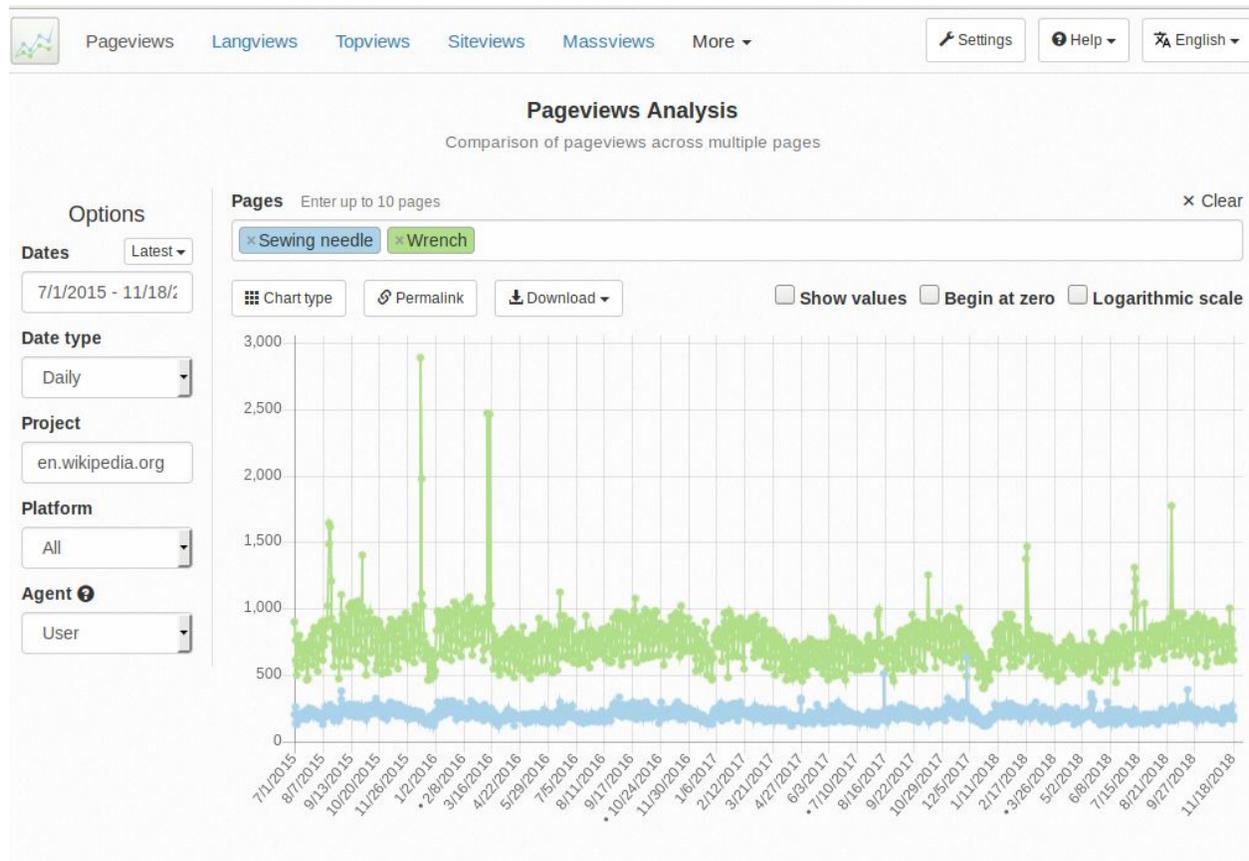
Ngram Viewer:

Google Books Ngram Viewer

Graph these comma-separated phrases: case-insensitive
between and from the corpus with smoothing of [Search lots of books](#)



Wikipedia Pageview:



Multiple Usages

Sewing, quilting and embroidery are by no means the only use for the NEEDLE.

A surgeon uses a NEEDLE to suture a wound. The needle and thread is essential to taxidermy, upholstery, and book binding. Sail makers use a needle and thread to bind canvas. Hikers use a needle and thread to lance blisters. The process of felting, or creating felt from wool, uses a needle that is not visually distinct from a smaller sewing needle.

The finest couture ball gown is hand sewn, as is a patch that keeps a worn pair of jeans in service a little longer.

Symbolically, a needle and thread can represent finery (couture, embroidery, fine tailoring) as easily as it represents resourcefulness and conservation (mending and repairing clothing and other textiles, rather than discarding and replacing them). This use of resourcefulness can also be applied to non-literal activities such as patching up a social relationship and living more sustainably.

The needle is so valued in Japanese culture that there is a specific day dedicated to honoring broken needles and their service. On the Festival of Broken Needles, people bring their broken needles to the temple to thank and remember the tools' service.⁵

Basket making and rug making often employ a bodkin, or thick blunt needle, to work with pliable fibers, twines and yarns. In these cases the fiber is rarely stored on a spool, but it is indeed sewn with a needle (or a hair clip fashioned into a needle). This is a case where the NEEDLE is a helpful glyph, though the SPOOL is not.



Photos: [Etsy](#) and [Ceci Bean](#)

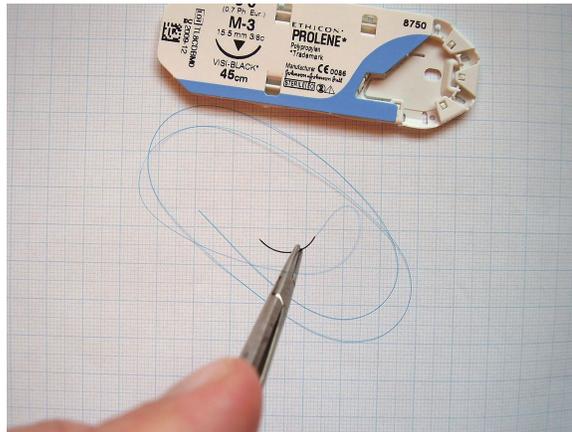
Tatting (a form of lace making) and embroidery use embroidery floss and threads that are generally sold and stored in a skein, hank or ball rather than coiled around a spool or bobbin. This represents another case where the NEEDLE is a helpful glyph, though the SPOOL is not.



The NEEDLE is used, without thread, to make tattoos. Though a sewing needle isn't explicitly used, it would be a suitable stand in and would capture the repeated pricks far better than the SYRINGE.

⁵ <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hari-Kuy%C5%8D>

Surgical sutures, which have been documented dating back to Egypt, 3000 BCE, employed catgut in their earliest iterations. Today, surgical sutures are made of synthetic material, distributed in sterile packaging. The NEEDLE is the best emoji to capture the anxiety that comes with getting stitches or sutures.



Though the latigo and rawhide used in leatherwork is sold as often on spools as it is in hanks or coils, the act of using a NEEDLE to pull twine or rawhide through leather in bag and shoe making is constant.



Photos, l-r: Martha Stewart, Amazon, Amazon

Aphorisms and Idioms

The NEEDLE is a versatile linguistic tool. Countless aphorisms and idioms reference the NEEDLE:

The idiom "*looking for a needle in a haystack*" first appeared in English writing in 1532, when Thomas Moore wrote of the futility of searching for a needle in a meadow, but the idiom is

common in many languages, including Spanish ("buscar una aguja en un pajar"), Arabic⁶ (إبرة في كومة قش), German and Italian.

Many faiths use the notion of passing large objects (camels and elephants, most often) through the eye of a needle. In Judaism, it is often said "They do not show a man a palm tree of gold, nor an elephant going through the *eye of a needle*." Christian imagery and texts often reference a passage from Matthew, that it is "easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter the kingdom of God." In Islamic traditions it is said that "until the camel can pass through the eye of the needle" non-believers will not have access to the gates of heaven.

The idiom *thread the needle*,⁷ a reference to perform a tricky or difficult task correctly and successfully, appears frequently in sports reporting, politics, and other writing.

Pins and needles is used to describe both anxious suspense ("we're all on pins and needles waiting for the verdict") and the tingling sensation that comes as numbness passes.

Use in sequences

The sequences we foresee are relatively predictable:

- With ☐ drop of blood: getting sutures
- With 😞, 😡, or 😠 to convey frustration with sewing
- With 😍 to convey joy
- With an article of clothing or stuffed animal to indicate exactly what the writer is sewing.
- In repetition or with loops 🧵🧵🧵 to indicate a lot of sewing or a repetitive sewing project.

Image Distinctiveness

A threaded or unthreaded needle is unmistakably that. Though a simple glyph might represent a wide range of thread and needle sizes, it is unlikely to be confused with any other emoji. It has been suggested that the needle is not visually distinct from the *Probing Cane*, which was approved as part of Unicode 12.0 in 2019. We feel that the addition of a bit of thread, and an exaggeration of the needle's eye can ensure that the two images are distinguishable, even at very small resolutions.



⁶ https://simple.wikiquote.org/wiki/Arabic_proverbs --إبرة في كومة قش

⁷ <https://english.stackexchange.com/a/372754/6647>

Completeness

The NEEDLE fills a notable gap in the available emoji to represent tools, making, crafts and art. It is both versatile and vital. Though the SPOOL OF THREAD was incorporated into Unicode 11, the SPOOL is a static object, representing materials used in sewing (and wiring and cabling) while a needle better represents the active action of sewing or mending textiles or suturing a wound.

NEEDLE PULLING THREAD is the only emoji missing from the chorus of Do Re Me:



Frequently Requested

Sewing was consistently among the top emoji requests on Emojipedia in 2016⁸ 2017⁹ and even in 2018¹⁰ after THREAD was approved and announced.



⁸ <http://blog.emojipedia.org/top-emoji-requests-2016/>

⁹ <http://blog.emojipedia.org/top-emoji-requests-2017/>

¹⁰ <https://blog.emojipedia.org/top-emoji-requests-2018/>

corinthia @xocorinthia · 4 Nov 2017
I need there to be a **needle and thread emoji** like I need air

goodie @goodiehey · 31 Aug 2017
Replying to @bspicybsalty
there really isn't a **needle and thread emoji** ugh

Fuente Cocodrilo @TchCrayon · 27 Apr 2017
I used 🧵 to represent a **thread** earlier, does that make sense? is there a **needle and thread emoji** I'm not seeing? Am I hip with the kids?

CAIT || STREAM BUTTERFLY #LOONA_BUTTERFLY @... · 21 Feb 2017
@fuzzy_llamas @lalalisa I started the thing! 🧵🧶🧶 (in other news, there needs to be a **needle and thread emoji** and a disco ball emoji)



Shelby Dalton @Shelbyddalton · 27 Dec 2016
Why can't I just get a **needle and thread emoji**?!?!?

kate nyx 🧵🧶🧶 @IAmKateNyx · 28 Nov 2016
Why isn't there a little **needle and thread emoji**?! I would use it all the time.

Georgia Pope @Littlegirlgrey · 24 May 2017
Stitched by hand 🧵 (why is there no **needle and thread emoji**) #leathercraft #sewing #studio #blue... [instagram.com/p/BUgGbesjnhd/](https://www.instagram.com/p/BUgGbesjnhd/)

Anne Denham @annodenimii · 28 Apr 2017
Textile related **emoji**? Not even a **needle and thread**? Yet 99% will be wearing **and/or** sitting on textiles right now. Am I missing something?

Sara Hudson @sara_hudson_ · 17 Mar 2017
Also @Apple I'd really enjoy a **needle and thread emoji**. Anything sewing related really. **And** more art emojis please #underappreciated

imaris @imaris · 14 Mar 2017
Sitting in my car behind the venue, charging my phone, **and** working on my cross stitch. I've missed this.
*insert **needle & thread emoji***

Yvonne Cox @Dulcie115 · 7 Jan 2017
Replying to @confusionrains @orla_ocean
Fantastic inspiration for a future patchwork!(no **emoji** thingy for a **needle and thread**)

Bellalicious 💎 @BeGlam_ · 21 Dec 2016
Replying to @malbolgiaSJ
🧵🧶 We need a **needle and thread emoji** 😊😊 @malbolgiaSJ 😊

MF 🧵 @mostflogged · 3 May 2016
every day I wish there was a spool of **thread and needle emoji** @unicode

peepie-soaked heckhole @rrroooiirrr · 25 Jun 2018
Replying to @ruthbrarian
omg i've been aching for even just a **needle and thread emoji** u know??

tozafoot @tozafoot · 29 May 2018
I'm pretty sure that making all my own shoes, with lasts, **and** welts **and** all, should count... it's a bit beyond basic sewing 🧵🧶🧶🧶🧶🧶 (can't find a **needle and thread emoji**: just imagine 2 of them, 'cos all my seams are double-stitched)

Ruthie Rayne 🧵 @imloti
Help me out Twitter. How many of you can do even some basic sewing (sewing on a button, mending a hem), and are under 50, please like, retweet, something to show your numbers! Thanks!
Show this thread

Brooke Watland @BrookeWatland · 10 Jan 2014
It's kinda sad that there's no **sewing emoji** but there a smoking one. Like wtf.

Rach @ofmiceandrachh · 18 Dec 2013
Replying to @softpowder_
@andyszetho handy andy 🧵🧶 (there no **sewing emoji** so this is my attempt at using emojis close enough)

Selection Factors Exclusion

Overly Specific

A sewing needle has broad application, and the design of a needle is universal, worldwide. A large needle can pull leather cording through a canvas sail, a tiny needle can pull fine thread through finer silk. But they all share the same basic form, and a single glyph can capture both

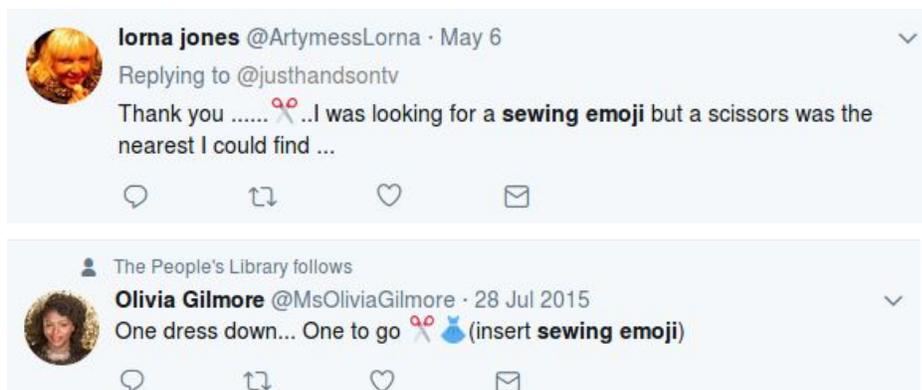
large and small. Throughout the world for tens of thousands of years humans and our precursors have used a threaded needle to make and mend.

Open Ended

We do not believe that the addition of this core textile tool opens up a new category of emoji.

Already Representable

The consortium approved the SPOOL in 2017, but the spool is distinct in usage and representation from the NEEDLE. SCISSORS are used in sewing but appear as often as a gripe about the inadequacy of the current emoji character set. Notably, the most oft cited alternative is SCISSORS ✂️, which represent the action of cutting, clearly indicating that there is need for the active tool that is the NEEDLE:



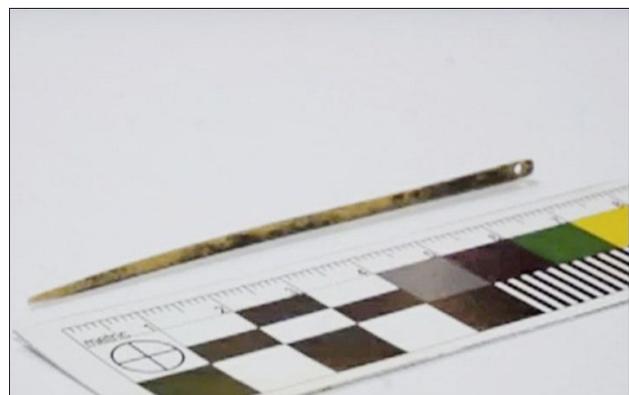
Logos, brands, UI icons, signage, specific people, deities

The design of the needle is tens of thousands of years old. It is not copyrightable.

The image we are submitting does not have any significance that would make it unsuitable for encoding as a character. There are no copyright, religious, or issues that reference anyone historic or living.

Transient

The 50,000 year old siberian bone needle bears a striking resemblance to a modern sewing or tapestry needle. Humankind shows no sign of abandoning sewing by needle.



Faulty Comparison

There is no existing needle emoji.

Exact Images

Any image that is recognizable as a sewing needle is fine.

Other Character Properties

The other character properties are suggested to be defined as follows.

General Category:

Canonical Combining Class:

Bidirectional Class:

Decomposition Type:

Decomposition Mapping:

Numeric Type:

Numeric Value:

Bidirectional Mirrored:

Name:

ISO Comment:

Simple Uppercase Mapping:

Simple Lowercase Mapping:

Simple Titlecase Mapping:

Author Bios (optional)

Amanda Hickman (amanda@velociraptor.info) works at the intersection of technology and journalism. She has been sewing since she was six years old, and cherishes the independence afforded by mending, altering and making her own clothes. She is currently hand finishing a coat and making her first pair of jeans.

Mari Gray (mari@kakawdesigns.com) grew up watching, and sometimes napping next to, her mother weave. Though she thought she would never follow her parents' footsteps and work in anything artsy, she found herself happiest when working with rural textile artisans in Guatemala. She is currently working on her master's in Sustainable Development in Europe, and is passionate about reducing consumption and waste in textiles through mending practices.