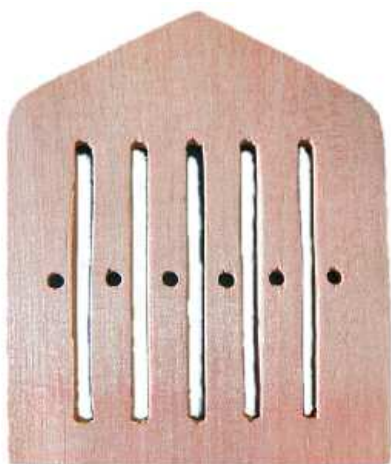


# Woven Critters

pets, wildlife, and more

OLGA PIKOUSOVÁ

Here's a great way to introduce weaving to children—though you are likely to find you love it, too. All you need is a small easy-to-make wooden "loom" (see Photo a). You can also use a warping paddle (the kind with slots and holes, Photo b) or a section of a rigid heddle (Photo c). A small supply of fuzzy, bumpy, smooth, shiny, and textured yarns in animal colors (or not!) and they (and/or you!) are off and running.



a. Wooden "loom," or heddle, shown at two-thirds its full size



c. Section of a rigid heddle



b. Warping paddle

This project works especially well for groups of about ten students ranging in age from seven- to thirteen-years-old. I like to encourage them to start by weaving their pets, so the first step is having them talk about their favorite pets to get them imagining. Next, they choose materials for their woven pet's fur. (You'll want to have a tableful of odds and ends of yarns, lots of naturals, but also lots of bright colors and some black for eyes.)

It's a good idea to use a smooth warp material that is available in many colors—8/4 carpet warp is ideal for this. Students work in pairs to warp their looms and then weave the animals following the basic instructions on page 3. Sometimes the planned animal accidentally turns into quite a different one—no problem!

## OLGA PIKOUSOVÁ

The secret to teaching children is to work *with* their imagination rather than against it. Children find weaving a way to relax—it provides balance for their busy, stressful days of learning from books and computers. There is something fascinating about weaving that attracts children of all ages, abilities, and personalities. When they've learned to weave animals, they can go on to belts, headbands, bracelets.

Girls (especially) learn that they can enrich their lives with things they do not have to buy.





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## STEPS FOR WEAVING THE CRITTERS

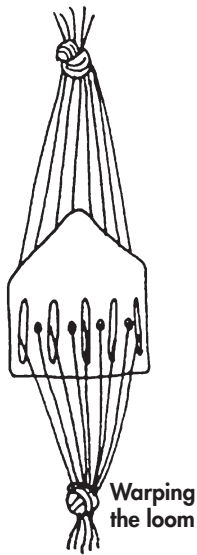
**Step 1** Have the students work in pairs to prepare the warp and thread the loom. These instructions are for making a fish.



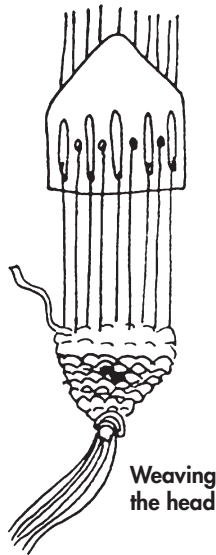
Cut 11 threads 12" long and tie into a knot at one end. Thread 1 end in each slot and 1 in each hole of the loom. Tie the loose ends in a second knot. Through each knot, insert a sturdy cord and tie one to a stationary object and the other around the weaver's waist.



**Step 2** Moving the heddle up and then down, place the weft alternately in the two sheds. Press in the weft with your fingers or the edge of a ruler. Make each row a little bit wider to shape the head. To weave the eye, weave a separate black thread several times with 2 warp threads in the middle of the warp, then continue the head. Change colors for the body and keep weaving. Pull the weft in for a bit, then back out, to shape the fish's tail.

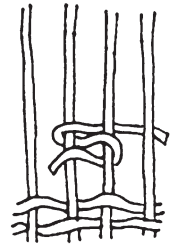
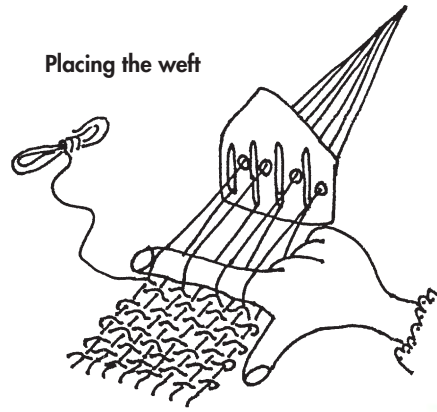


Warping the loom

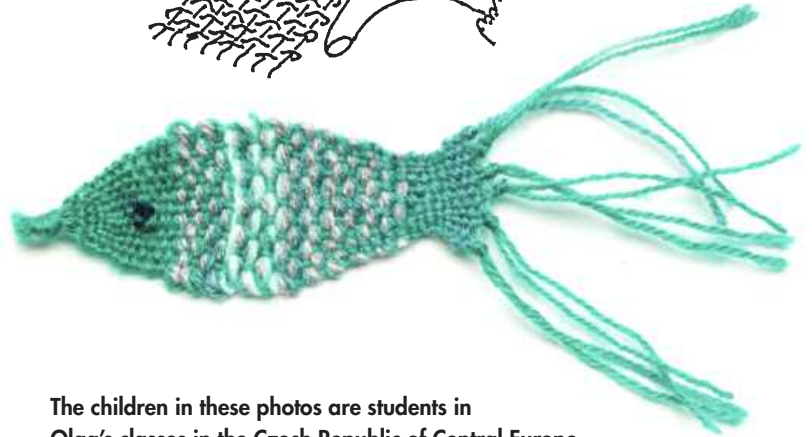


Weaving the head

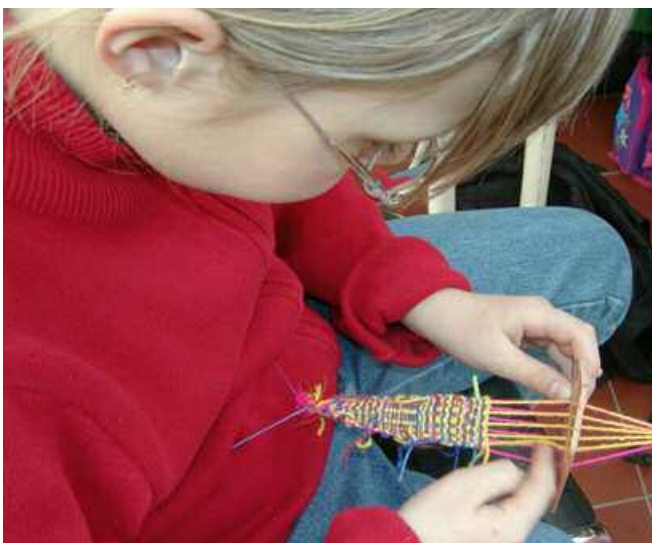
Placing the weft




Weaving an eye

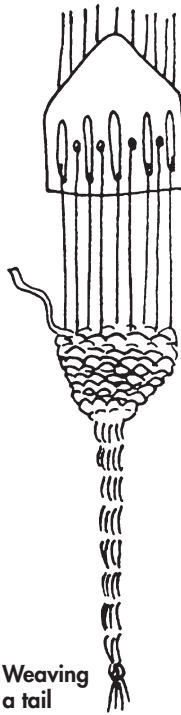


The children in these photos are students in Olga's classes in the Czech Republic of Central Europe.



**Step 3** When the fish is finished, cut the tail warp threads leaving enough length for overhand knots (2 threads/knot) to secure the end. Cut the nose threads close to the knot at the beginning.

**Step 4** Now try weaving other animals! To make long tails, pull the weft tightly. To make two ears, use two wefts, one for each ear. To make whiskers, tie a group of cut threads around a center warp thread and trim. To make legs (as for cats) weave the leg area of the body with wefts that extend about 10" on each side. When you are finished with the animal, remove the loom, knot the tail and ears. Thread one group of leg threads in the loom, knot the ends, secure the knot to stationary object. Knot the opposite leg threads and tie them to a cord around your waist. Weave the (threaded) leg as for a tail, remove the loom, and tie a knot at the end of the leg. Repeat for each leg. 



Weaving a tail

