

Sunshine Bags for folks in Memory Care

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One of my book club members brings his mother, Sol, to our meetings. He brings some things for her to play with as we talk. Sol has dementia. Watching her reminded me of the way my pre-school and kindergarten students related to things, and I set out to make something for her. It had to be portable, appealing, and quiet. In her honor, I created what I've dubbed a *Sunshine Bag*, inspired by the Annie's book of Twiddle Cuffs and game mats, wonderful things made by our members, and a bit from hands-on math games from my Kindergarten teacher days. At Lois Moore's urging, I headed up a wonderful brainstorming/sharing session with Lois Payne, Nancy Stallard, Lois Moore and Tricia Ennis. The group of us realized we had questions that could only be answered by visiting a Memory Care unit. Lois was able to arrange with Renee Mann and Katie Donathan to visit Brookdale Westend and Ginter Hall to meet the residents and staff. What we learned from these wonderful folks inspired some modifications in my original bag.



My first Sunshine bag is crocheted, about 12 inches square, the front made from 16 2-row Granny squares joined with the join as you go method. A contrast row was worked around that and a back worked in a solid color to the same size. I joined the front to the back with half double crochet on 3 sides, then worked a row of double crochet around the open top. I threaded a 1-inch ribbon through the double crochets as a drawstring and knotted the end.



Inside are circles in 3 sizes and as many colors as I could find in my basket. My idea was for an open-ended activity, with options to sort the circles by size or color, or to arrange them in a pleasing way just for fun, or maybe use the checkerboard front of the bag as a game board or sorting surface.

When I suggested to the staff at the units that the bags could be smaller, they felt that 10-12 inches was a good size.

The FTH Board, Nancy and Lois P, and the staff at the 2 facilities we visited came up with a lot of ideas for the bags and their contents:

* an empty bag as a purse - the Memory care patients apparently LOVE purses and will carry one (or more) around all day! These could be smaller than 10 inches. Shoulder bags are especially popular.

* no reason to stick with crochet - sewn or knitted bags would be fun!

* a matching game, with the loose squares inside matching those on the bag. I did one with loose squares so the player could just match them one-to-one on the checkerboard patterned bag surface, with a few spare odd ones just for a challenge. It would be fun to make a lot of squares in various colors to match, perhaps patterned Granny squares (?) Or small knitted Garter stitch squares. Such a bag need not have 16 squares - maybe just 9 3-row Grannies or 4 4 or 5-row Grannies. The squares could be sewn or crocheted together - the ridge of the seam would make yet another tactile aspect.

* Place items for sensory play e.g. pompoms, circles made of assorted textured yarn, small stuffed toys, inside the bags

* the front of the bag could be one granny square with 4 or 5 rows in green (for a “yard”), one row in gray or tan (a “sidewalk”) and 2 rows in black (a “road”) with a few toy houses and a crocheted car or 2 (I found a cute pattern for one) inside the bag. Perhaps something similar for an airplane landing strip and toy airplanes (I found a pattern for that, too) or something to suggest a railroad line and toy train (I know I’ve seen toy crochet and knit train patterns) I actually made one with cars, but it got snapped up at Ginter Hall, so don’t have a photo.

* a 9-square tic-tac-toe board, game pieces could be granny or garter stitch squares with X or O embroidered

* several finger or hand puppets would be a fun addition to a bag - perhaps the bag itself could suggest the setting for a story.

* Lots of flowers in various sizes could be arranged in a “garden” or “window box”

* Colorful stripes, or designs, would make lovely bags. Or one big granny in a self-striping yarn. Yarns with texture, for just a row or 2, would be fun. Nancy Scrimizzi brought in a Catherine Wheel blanket, and we talked her into making a bag with that pattern. It got snapped up at Brookdale! Corner to corner squares would make a pretty bag as well. Or if you have 4 or 9 granny squares, or knitted pattern squares languishing in your stash, sew them together to make a bag!



The circles I put into my bag are pretty basic. For a small circle: chain 3, double crochet between 9 and 12 stitches into the 3rd chain from the hook. (the number depends on how many stitches it takes to complete the circle... depends on the thickness of the yarn and my hook size, and my mood). Fasten off securely.

For a medium, I added a second round - 2 single crochets in each stitch of the first round and fasten off.

For a large, the second round was 2 double crochets in each stitch of the first round and fasten off.

Sets to match in textured yarn are fun to work up.

Small Granny squares were worked at a fairly tight gauge if I meant them to be playing pieces rather than begins sewn together so they'd hold their shape. I have not yet tried sets with triangles, but those might be fun

Cautions

Any items in or on the bags should be very firmly attached

No buttons

all materials should be washable, or at least spot-cleanable

gauge should be firm; items will be handled a *lot* and a firm gauge tends to survive washing better

So - indulge your imagination! What can you make?