

# Secret Message Pillow Cover

Kristen C. Howard



*Sample 1: Morse Code Message*



*Sample 2: Illusion Knitting*

This two-sided pillow cover is inspired by wartime knitting efforts and knitting espionage conducted in the World Wars. Knitters (and non-knitters!) across the world were called to contribute to the effort to keep troops near and far from home warm by knitting hats, sweaters, and above all, socks.

## Details

### Size

Approx. 15.5 x 15.5" to fit a standard 16" pillow form

### Yarn

1, 2, or 3 colors of worsted weight yarn, approx. 450 yards total.

### Suggested Yarn

Patons Canadiana, 100% acrylic (100g/205 yards)

*One color:* 3 skeins

*Two colors:* 1 or 2 skeins of each color

*Three colors:* 1 skein of each color

*Colors used in Sample 1:*  
Medium Grey Mix (2 balls)

*Colors used in Sample 2:*

Red (1 ball)  
Black (2 balls)

### Suggested Needles

US 7 (4.5 mm)

### Notions

Two stitch markers, tapestry needle, scissors, waste yarn (optional), 5 small buttons (option)

### Gauge

18 st x 26 rows = 4", knit flat and blocked

### Abbreviations

K: Knit  
P: Purl  
PM: Place Marker

## Inspiration

This pattern is loosely based on Mary Thomas' Modern Knitted Cushion pattern in *The Queen's Book of the Red Cross*, 1939 (p. 250), which is available at McGill Library's Rare Books & Special Collections (and digitized for this project thanks to the efforts of Digitization Services). Thomas' cushion features an all-over moss stitch pattern, marling, and knitted fringe.

Our pillow cover is also inspired by another aspect of wartime knitting: espionage. Knitting espionage involved the use of knitting to hide secret messages or as a cover for spying. This pattern offers two methods to hide a secret message in your knitting, both of which rely on the use of simple and well-placed knit and purl stitches: Morse code and illusion knitting.

Knit one side of the cover in each method, choose just one, or cover the pillow in your preferred coded knitting!

For more on the inspiration behind this pattern, see page 6!

## Directions

Choose and knit two of the following options:

- Option 1: Morse Code Message
- Option 2: Illusion Knitting
- Option 3: Moss Stitch
- Option 4: Plain Stockinette

Then, seam the two pieces together so that right sides are facing out. See [Finishing](#) and [Seaming Options](#) on pages 4-5.

## Option 1: Morse Code Message

Encode your own message in your knitting using morse code! In international Morse code, short marks (dots) are comprised of one unit and long marks (dashes) are composed of three units. In knitting, this can be represented by using the following stitches against a plain stockinette background:

- P: Dot
- 3P: Dash
- K: Space within a letter
- 3K: Spaces between two letters
- 7K: Space between two words

Refer to the Morse Code Chart for more.

First select the message you would like to knit, then, referring to the Morse Code Chart, enter your message into the Morse Code Worksheet. Be sure to enter your message from left to right (as you read) and enter code only on Right Side rows (odd rows). The Morse Code Worksheet is 45 stitches wide, but you can accommodate a shorter message by compensating with plain stockinette.

### Directions

Cast on 65 stitches using preferred cast-on method.

*Note:* use a provisional cast-on method to seam this side with the three-needle bind-off (see *Seaming Options at end of pattern*).

**Row 1 (RS):** Knit

**Row 2 (WS):** K1, P until last stitch, K1.

Repeat rows 1-2 for 4" (10 cm), ending on a RS row.

**Next row (WS):** K1, P9, PM, P until 10 stitches remain, PM, P9, K1.

### Begin Morse Code Message

**RS:** Knit until marker, SM; then beginning at the bottom right corner of your Morse Code Worksheet, knit according to the encoded pattern you have created; SM, K10.

**WS:** K1, purl to final stitch (slipping markers as you come to them), K1.

Repeat Rows 1-2 until you have completed the Morse Code message. On the final WS row, remove markers.

Repeat rows 1-2 from above for 4" (10 cm) or until desired length is reached. Cast off loosely or place stitches on waste yarn to seam this side with three-needle bind-off (*see Seaming Options at end of pattern*).

### **Option 2: Red Cross Illusion**

Illusion knitting is a method of using two colors and knit and purl stitches to create an image or message that can only be seen at an angle. This simple pattern of a cross is inspired by the Red Cross emblem as an homage to the organization that created so many knitting patterns during the World Wars. Unlike other options, this option requires using two colors:

- **MC:** background color (in the sample, black)
- **CC:** symbol color (in the sample, red)

### Directions

With MC, cast on 65 stitches using preferred cast-on method.

#### *Main Pattern:*

**Rows 1-2:** With MC, knit all stitches. Now, attach the CC. Don't break MC.

**Row 3:** With CC, knit all stitches.

**Row 4:** With CC, K1, P until last stitch, K1.

Repeat Rows 1-4 for 4" (10cm), ending with the CC (Row 4). Then, begin the illusion pattern:

#### *Illusion Pattern*

**Row 1 (RS):** With MC, K19, PM, K27, PM, K19.

**Row 2 (WS):** With MC, K to marker, SM, K11, P5, K11, SM, K to end of row.

**Row 3 (RS):** With CC, knit all stitches slipping markers as you come to them.

**Row 4 (WS):** With CC, K1, P to marker, SM, P11, K5, P11, SM, P until last stitch, K1.

Repeat rows 1-4 five more times. (Substituting SM for PM in Row 1.)

**Row 25:** With MC, K all stitches, slipping markers as you come to them.

**Row 26:** With MC, K1, K until marker, SM, P until marker, SM, K to end.

**Row 27:** With CC, K all stitches, slipping markers as you come to them.

**Row 28:** With CC, K1, P to marker, SM, K to marker, SM, P until last stitch, K1.

Repeat Rows 25-28 two more times.

Then, repeat Rows 1-4 of the Illusion Pattern six times. Illusion pattern is now complete.

Knit Rows 1-4 of the Main Pattern for 4" (10cm) or until desired length, finishing with MC (Row 4).

Bind off loosely in MC (or follow directions to implement an alternate seaming strategy).

### Option 3: Moss Stitch

If you only want one side of your pillow to feature a coded message, knit the back side in moss stitch following Mary Thomas' WWII-era knitted cushion pattern.

#### Directions

Cast on 65 stitches using preferred cast-on method.

*Note:* use a provisional cast-on method to seam this side with the three-needle bind-off (see *Seaming Options at end of pattern*).

**Row 1:** \*K1, P1; repeat from \* to last stitch, K1.

**Row 2:** \*P1, K1; repeat from \* to last stitch, P1.

Repeat Rows 1-2 until length measures 15.5" (40 cm) (or desired length). Cast off loosely or place stitches on waste yarn to seam this side with three-needle bind-off (see *Seaming Options*). Note that moss stitch is completely reversible.

### Option 4: Plain Stockinette

If you want your coded knitting to shine or simply want a quicker option for the back, you can knit one side of the pillow entirely in stockinette.

#### Directions

Cast on 65 stitches using preferred cast-on method.

*Note:* use a provisional cast-on method to seam this side with the three-needle bind-off (see *Seaming Options at end of pattern*).

**Row 1 (RS):** Knit all stitches

**Row 2 (WS):** K1, P to last stitch, K1.

Repeat Rows 1-2 until length measures 15.5" (40 cm) (or desired length), ending

on a WS row. Cast off loosely or place stitches on waste yarn to seam this side with three-needle bind-off (see *Seaming Options at end of pattern*).

### Finishing

Seam together all four sides so that the right sides are facing out using mattress stitch or your choice of the following seaming options. Be sure to seam the fourth (final) side with the pillow form in place.

Sew in all ends and block pillow cover.

*Note:* If you have used an acrylic yarn (as suggested), steam block rather than wet block.

### Seaming Options

#### *Option 1: Mattress Stitch*

After completing both pieces, seam all four sides together with right sides facing out using the mattress stitch.

#### *Option 2: Three-Needle Bind-Off*

You may choose to use a three-needle bind-off on one or two sides of the pillow cover (top and/or bottom). There are two ways to accomplish this:

- 1) *At cast-on:* When casting on, use a provisional cast-on method. After both sides are complete, unpick the cast-ons and place the live stitches on spare needles, then seam together (with wrong sides facing each other) using the three-needle bind-off.
- 2) *At cast-off:* Before casting off, place stitches on waste yarn or a second set of needles. After both sides are complete, seam together (with wrong sides facing each other) using the three-needle bind-off.

Then, use mattress stitch to seam the remaining sides (being careful not to accidentally twist the sides).

*Note:* Be sure to seam the fourth (final) side with the pillow form in place.

### *Option 3: Button Closure*

If you would like to be able to easily remove your pillow form, you may choose to add a button closure on one side of the pillow cover. You can easily accomplish this at the top of the pillow by adding a button band before binding off. You can also add a button band to the side of the pillow; directions for this second method follow.

*Note:* This option will require 5 small buttons.

Choose which of your two squares you would like as the front of the pillow and which will serve as the back. You will knit a button band on the front and sew buttons to the back. The button band will wrap behind the pillow so that the buttons are not seen from the front side of the pillow.

### Directions:

*Set up row:* With the front square and the right side facing, pick up and knit 54 stitches on one side (the left or the right, your choice) with the approximate pick-up rate of 1 out of every 2 stitches.

**WS:** \*P2, K2\*, repeat until end of row.

**RS:** \*K2, P2\*, repeat until end of row.

Continue 2x2 ribbing by repeating the previous two rows for 1 inch, ending on a WS row. Then:

### **Next RS row (create 5 buttonholes):**

K2, \*K2tog, YO, work 10 stitches in pattern\*, repeat from \* to \* 4 times, K2.

Continue in 2x2 ribbing for 1 more inch, then bind off in pattern. Cut the yarn.

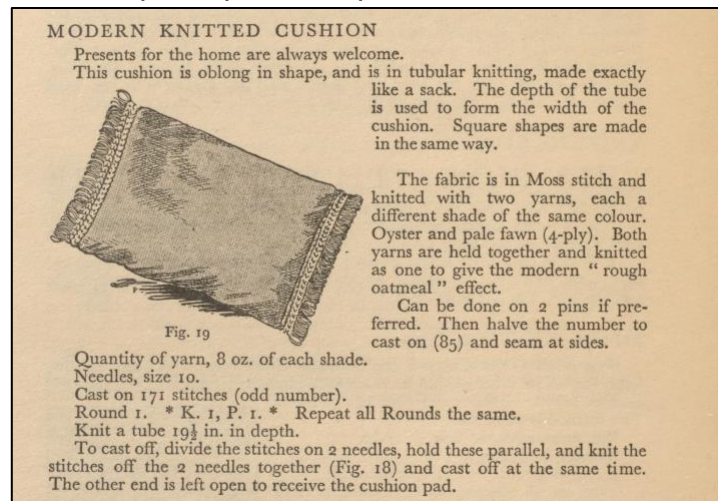
Seam together the other sides of the pillow cover (making sure wrong sides are facing in). Then attach the buttons to the RS of the back of the pillow so that the pillow cover can be buttoned shut.

# Secret Message Pillow Cover

## Inspiration

Women spies conducted *knitting espionage* in the American Revolutionary War, both World Wars, and likely most other wars in modern human history. In some cases, knitting provided a “cover” for spies, as soldiers and government officials easily overlooked women of any age with knitting notions. In other cases, knitting was used to disguise messages, such as by hiding knots in wool or silk that corresponded to a secret code; or to amplify messages, such as by knitting matching freedom caps during the French Revolution – perhaps an early form of what we call *craftivism* today.

This pattern draws on the rich history of knitting espionage as well as the other aspect of wartime knitting: relief knitting. Knitters (and non-knitters!) across the world were called to pick up double-pointed needles and contribute to the effort to keep troops near



and far from home warm by knitting hats, sweaters, and above all, socks. Some manuals also included patterns for more fanciful items, such as Mary Thomas’ *Modern Knitted Cushion* that appeared in *The Queen’s Book of the Red Cross* in 1939 (at left). This manuscript has been generously digitized for this project thanks to the efforts of McGill’s Digitization Services and can be viewed at the following URL:

<https://tinyurl.com/2p9c9j43>

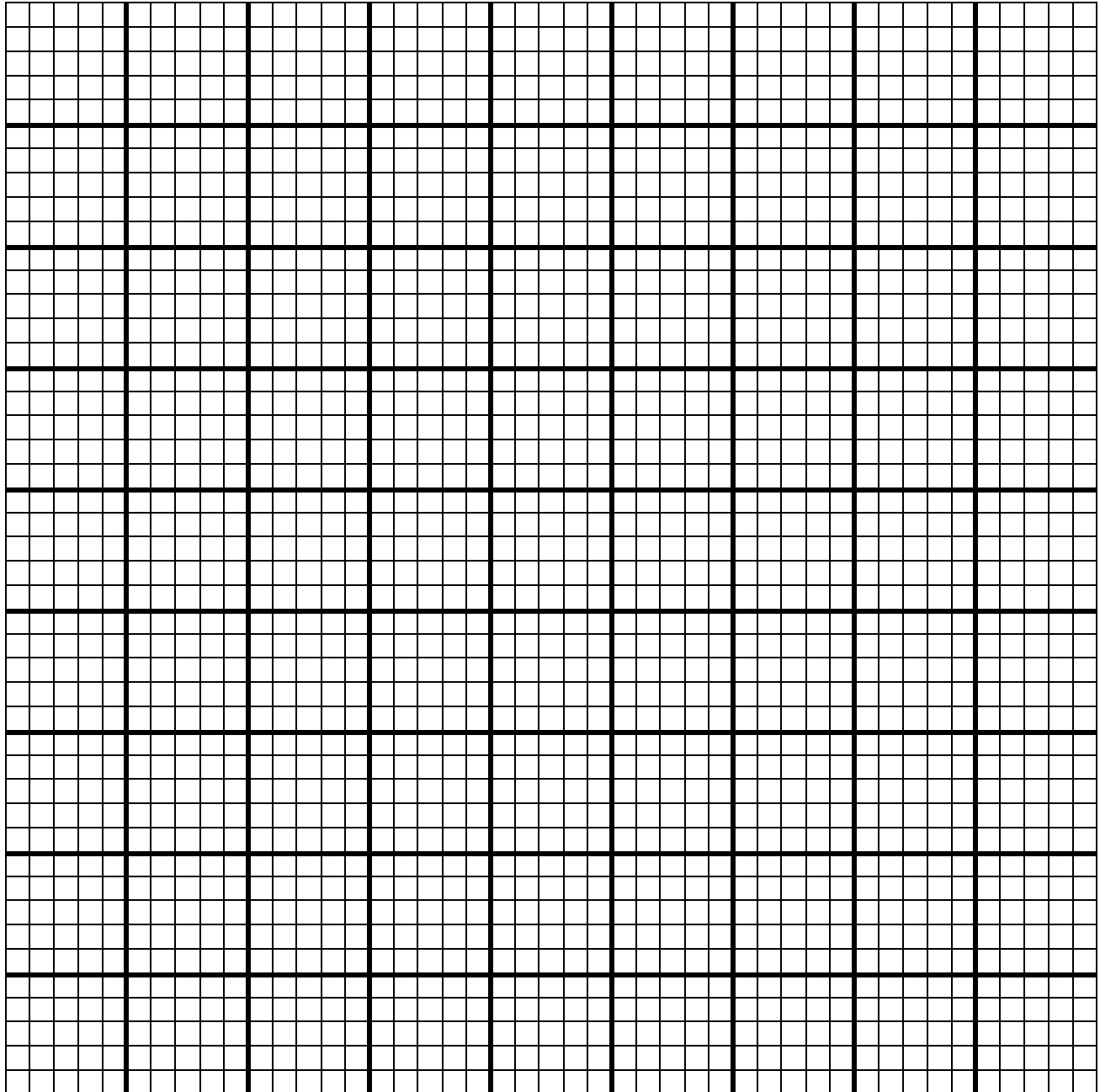
Secret Message Pillow Cover combines two methods of hiding codes in knitting, Morse code and illusion knitting, with aspects of Thomas’ cushion, such as the all-over moss stitch pattern. The sample Morse code chart provided (see p. 9) features the first stanza of Katherine Hale’s poem “Grey Knitting” published in December 1914 which reveals what life was like on the Canadian home front during WWI. Although “Grey Knitting” is not as famous as John McCrae’s “In Flanders Fields,” it was widely popular in both Canada and the United States during and after the war. Katherine Hales dedicated her book *Grey Knitting and Other Poems* to “The Women who Knit.”

In lieu of payment for this pattern, please consider making a gift to McGill Library’s Rare Books and Special Collections.

*With special thanks to Jacquelyn Sundberg, Outreach & Special Projects, McGill ROAAr (Rare & Special Collections, Osler, Art, and Archives).*

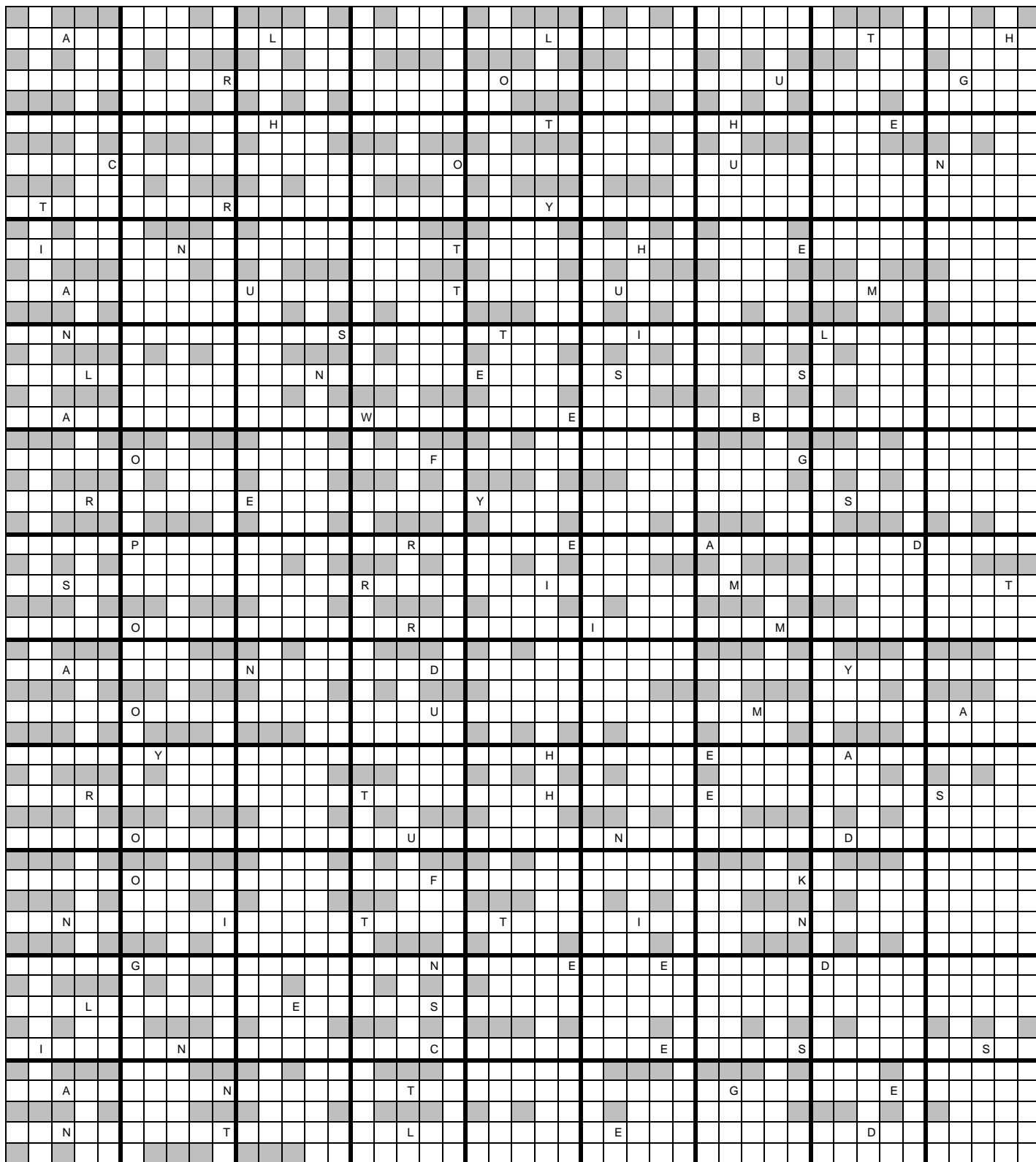


# Morse Code Worksheet





### Morse Code Example: Grey Knitting



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