



Photo by Justin Lui

Rattan seats were common in early subway cars before plastic became the preferred material. Rattan is a vine-like plant similar to bamboo. It can be woven like a basket and placed over cushions and springs to make furniture, including early subway seats.

Let's compare and contrast rattan subway seats with a different kind of seat.



Photos by [Black Paw Photo](#)

LOOK

Take a moment to look closely at all of the details in these pictures. What do you notice?

THINK and SHARE

- List all of the differences you notice between these two seats.
- What are some pros and cons of using rattan for subway seats?
- What are some pros and cons of using harder plastic or fiberglass for subway seats?
- If you could design your own subway seats, what would they look like? What materials would you like to use?

DISCOVER

Rattan is a reusable resource because it is made from plants, but the seats needed to be replaced more often and were also difficult to clean. Plastic and fiberglass can be cleaned easily and last longer than rattan.

ACTIVITY

Now that we've learned all about how rattan used to be woven into seat covering on trains, let's make our own woven art using recycled paper we have at home.

Materials: old magazine or newspaper, colorful construction paper, scissors

Step 1: Take a piece of paper from an old magazine or newspaper and cut it into long, 1-inch wide strips.

Step 2: Fold a piece of construction paper in half. Cut a slit from the folded edge towards the opposite edge, stopping 1 inch from the end of the paper, and repeat, cutting slits one inch apart all the way across the folded edge. Unfold your construction paper.

Step 3: Take one paper strip and weave it through the slits, going over, then under, then over, alternating until it's woven through.

Step 4: Weave a second strip of paper next to the first one, this time starting under and then going over the slits, and alternating until the paper is woven through.

Step 5: Repeat steps 3 and 4 until you have filled up all available space on your construction paper. Admire your woven art. You might even try placing it on a chair in your home and testing it out as a seat covering!

Share photos of your woven art using #nytransitmuseum

