

## **Found Art Handmade Books**

by Taylor Johnson

**Education level:** Junior high, high school

**Genre:** Poetry, Fiction, Hybrid

**Time frame:** 60 min and/or self-paced

**Objective:** To create a handmade art book including poetry, stories, and/or visual art

**Prior knowledge and skills:** This might be a good culminating class project for students who enjoy making art and have already written stories or poems that could be included in the handmade book.

**Required materials:** Cardboard, used paper grocery bags, scissors, various sizes of paper, liquid glue, string or yarn, magazines, old postcards, photographs, stickers, watercolor, brushes, markers, colored pencils, crayons, sharpies, oil and/or soft pastels, charcoal, found objects from nature (dried flowers, leaves, roots, seeds, insect wings, pods, tiny bits of gravel, etc), tissue paper, cut up strips of words from self-created or found poetry or other writing. (Suggested, use what you have on hand.) Please note: I do not recommend glitter, as this is a microplastic and is harmful to the environment.

**Literary model:** None

### **Sequence of activities:**

1. Assemble materials that will be used to make the books. Any art supplies that you already have on hand are great—the fun of this project is in using what you have on hand rather than going out and buying brand new materials. In fact, recycling and repurposing existing materials adds an ecological focus to the project and is encouraged.
2. Select a thicker type of paper such as cardboard or brown paper bags to use for the cover. Select a few sheets of notebook paper, printer paper, construction paper, or really any type of paper you have to be the pages of the book. Experiment with different sized pages and styles of paper within one book to create a random, textured effect.
3. Create your book's centerfold by stacking the inner pages on top of the cover and then folding the stack in half to create a crease down the middle.
4. Create a simple binding: With the book pages still folded in half, take a pair of scissors and carefully cut two tiny triangles directly into the fold, each spaced approximately one inch (or more) from the top and bottom margins of the book, making sure to cut through the cover and all the inner pages. Remove the cutout pieces of the small holes and then poke your string or twine through each of the holes that were created so that the string ends pop through to the center of the book. Tie a tight knot in the centerfold to bind the pages together and cut off the excess length to your liking. (It may help to have a friend hold down the tie before you make a final knot to keep the string and pages taut if you have trouble doing this by yourself.)

5. If you have colored pencils, markers, pastels, or paint to play with, you may want to add color to your blank pages first. However, it may make more sense to add color after you glue down other images, so if you need to switch the order of steps 5 and 6, please do so.
6. Now you have the freedom to decorate your pages with found materials, including magazine cutouts of images and words, stickers, old photographs, postcards, plant material - whatever you have on hand that you have permission to cut up. Using scissors and glue to cut out and affix your pieces, arrange your found objects on the pages of your book. This process should be fun, intuitive, and meditative, and it can be completed at varying paces, depending on the person's style or preference.
7. Adding writing to the book: if you have previously written poetry or stories that you want to add into this book, either copy your writing by hand into the book using a dark colored pen, or if your work is typed, print it out and paste it into the book. Alternatively, if you have a piece of writing that you want to repurpose, a fun thing to do is to cut up existing works (either your own and/or other people's) into single lines or short phrases, and then collage these words, phrases, and lines into an entirely new piece of writing.
8. This project can start in the classroom, and then students take unfinished books and materials home with them to finish at their own pace. Or it can be a multi-day project that students work on throughout multiple class periods. If students do take the work home, it may be helpful to give them a small envelope to transport any small paper elements (words and images) that didn't get a chance to be glued down during the class period.
9. When the books are complete, give students an opportunity to share them with others, or to read their writing aloud from the pages. Perhaps students will want to create a classroom library or participate in a museum gallery walk. In advance, stipulate norms about how to handle other people's works with respect and care, and/or give varying options for participation.
10. It can also be fun to take photographs of each page of the book and further manipulate the images digitally using a range of features available in Google Photos, including options for making a collage in the utilities section of the app.