

Recycled  
**MATERIALS**  
for Making Books

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[makingbooks.com](http://makingbooks.com)

## *Tools*

I store my sets of tools in clear plastic shoe boxes which I place in a large Rubbermaid box when I travel to schools. To be more environmentally friendly, you can collect cardboard shoe boxes and have the children make labels.

\* Scissors: It's important to have decent scissors. The Fiskars brand kids scissors work well. I have the pointed ones, which are still not too pointy and use them for kindergarten and up. I also have a lot of big scissors that I bought when I started and thought I would be mostly teaching teachers and parents. I've had students as young as first grade use them without a problem, and with the additional thrill of using grown-up scissors.

\* Hole Punches

\* Glue Sticks: For me, glue sticks are the only way to go. They are neater than white glue and because there is no moisture in the glue, the paper will dry flat. I prefer colored glue sticks. They go on a color so you can see where the glue is but dry clear. My favorite is UHU brand. Some teachers feel that they dry too quickly. I like them because you can reposition the pieces if you need to. I usually buy them by mail from Quill Corporation, 1-800-789-1331. Quill carries all kinds of office supplies and has free shipping on orders over \$45.00. Ask the school office. They may have a catalog or order from them. I find them excellent to deal with.

\* Sewing Kits: There are lots of small bits and pieces when you sew books together. I was losing lots of needles and nails until I decided to make sewing kits. I used to use resealable sandwich bags labeled with a printed list of the contents. They would often tear. With my new environmental approach, I now use Altoid boxes with labels. All my problems are not solved. I still have to check each one between sessions as the items often get jumbled.

\* 1 size 16 tapestry needle (These have a very large eye. They're bigger than one would usually use for bookbinding but they're easier to thread. I purchase them at JoAnn Fabrics in packs of 5.)

\* 1 small pencil (for marking the holes)

\* 1 nail (to make holes for Japanese bindings)

\* 1 push pin (to make holes for pamphlet binding)

\* 1 small piece of cardboard about 2" x 3" (to protect the table when making holes for a pamphlet binding)

\* Blocks of Wood: about 3" x 8" x 1" each, used in sets of two. They are used with the nail to make holes for Japanese binding: one goes underneath the book to protect the table, the other is used as a hammer.

\* Scrap Paper: for gluing. I use old catalog pages (watch out for underwear), or used 8 1/2" x 11" paper.

## *Materials*

I have been using recycled, or more accurately repurposed, materials in my workshops for the past year. The students bring in brown paper grocery bags and cereal boxes and teachers collect used paper that has writing on only one side. I made the change to be more respectful of the environment and reduce consumption but the benefits go way beyond that.

On the selfish side, it has been a relief not to keep track of, store, and carry paper for the workshops. When teachers make books with their classes, they too are relieved of the burden of preparing the paper.

The best part is what it does for the kids. We live in an instant culture filled with manufactured objects. It is not their fault that they expect their paper perfect and think nothing of asking for a new piece when theirs has a wrinkle. Bringing in grocery bags and cereal boxes, or using paper that they have already done an assignment or a worksheet on, makes them aware of the paper they consume.

And there are other positive effects as well. When they start by cutting a paper bag, the paper is already uneven so it takes all the burden of precision away. I find it lightens the spirit of the whole process. There is a different energy in the room as they transform boxes and bags into books. In addition to consuming less paper, they learn to look creatively at the things they discard.

Making books with repurposed materials has a different aesthetic. Because we don't start with plain paper, there are often traces of its former life showing. I feel this brings life and vitality to the finished book. I bring examples from my collection of objects made from different materials which includes a bag made from juice pouches from Afghanistan, earrings made from soda cans from Africa, a toy car from Africa made from soda cans, and trivet made from rolled newspapers.

\*Paper: Ask the students to bring in grocery bags and cereal boxes. This gives them an investment in the project right from the start. The grocery bags are cut to make paper for the books. I cut the bag into five pieces: front and back panels, two side panels, and a bottom (used less frequently but sometimes). The cereal boxes are used for covers and for any project that requires stiff paper or cover stock. They can be flattened for storage. I have found that some children want to use their particular cereal boxes. If you want to honor that, it is better to have them keep flattened boxes in their desks rather than collect them all.

I also use copy paper with writing on one side only from the recycle bin. In the Hot Dog Booklet, all the writing is on one side of the paper so this works well for them. For accordions, I fold the paper in half the long way with the writing on the inside and use the folded paper to make the pages of the book. The one purchased paper I like to use is 3 x 5 index cards but I also cut recycled paper to that size.

\* Yarn: best for books that use knots to hold them together. Ribbon tends to be too slippery to hold. There are a lot of interesting variegated yarns available. I save scraps of yarn and string.

\* Ribbon: I use it for ties on accordion books. I buy it at craft stores as well as save ribbon from packages.

\* Thread for sewing: Crochet cotton, Dental floss, Carpet thread. In bookbinding, thread is waxed with beeswax before sewing by pulling it through a piece of beeswax. It strengthens the thread and makes it less likely to tangle. I usually don't bother when I'm making books with kids.

\* Cutting Yarn, Ribbon, and Thread: To save time cutting, I have pieces of heavy corrugated cardboard cut to specific lengths. The two sizes I use are 12" and 18". I wrap the yarn or ribbon around the cardboard. For yarn the length of the cardboard, I cut it at both ends; for ribbon twice the length of the cardboard, I cut it at one end only.

\* Pony Beads: for palm leaf books and wish scrolls and to have fun tying them onto any book. I buy them at Michael's, or A.C. Moore, or anywhere I come across them. They are more economical in larger packs. I store them in cream cheese or other plastic containers and pour them into applesauce or other small containers for use in the workshop.

\* Other Beads, Buttons, and Shells: I always look at necklaces and bracelets at yard sales and rummage sales and buy ones with interesting beads. I've also purchased plant holders made from shells. I take them apart when I get home. They can be stored in resealable plastic bags, jars, or plastic containers.

\* Plastic bread closures: can be used instead of beads

\* Elastics (I save them from vegetables and the newspaper delivery)

\* Film Containers: I use empty film containers for the wish scrolls from Ethiopia. Places that print photos on the premises usually have lots that they recycle. They should be willing to give you quantities for free.

## *For Illustrations*

- \* Collage Papers: I cut and/or tear any interesting colored paper- wrapping paper, paper bags, origami paper, art papers, etc.--into squares of about 3" and keep them in a box. I find that the smaller size wastes less paper and stimulates creativity in a way that large pieces of paper don't.
- \* Leftover adhesive back designs--from postage stamp sheets and round office stickers
- \* Fruit stickers--I put mine on the side of the refrigerator and then transfer them to wax paper when I get too many or when I'm working on a book
- \* Rubber Stamps: Rubber stamps are fun sources of imagery. They can be used for pictures or for pattern in borders. They provide an alternative for those lacking in artistic confidence. They are expensive, but I think worth the investment. However, kids can make a mess of them quickly as the ink from the stamp pads gets on their fingers and then onto everything else. I cover the top of my stamps with clear contact paper before I let anyone use them. I sort my stamps by theme--Flowers and Leaves, Animals, In the Sky, Dinosaurs, Patterns, etc.--and keep them on plastic plates. On each plate, I put a label with the Theme and cover it with clear contact paper. I store and transport the plates in resealable plastic bags. I ask students to wipe the stamps on a piece of scrap paper after each use, but I don't do any additional cleaning.
- \* Stamp Pads: I use micropore stamp pads from office supply places. The pigment stamp pads that are sold at stamp stores have better colors, but they are kind of goopy and can really make a mess. They require more vigilant cleaning.
- \* Stencils: Dover Little Activity Books has a series of inexpensive Fun with Stencils books with 6 pre-cut stencils in each. There are ones on Dinosaurs, Flowers, Northwest Indian, Pirates, Egypt, and many more. I've seen them in bookstores, card shops, and toy stores. I order mine directly from Dover Publications, Inc., for the largest selection. I also buy letter stencils and other plastic stencils. I have made stencils by tracing cookie cutters onto poster board, cutting the image with an exacto knife, and protecting them with clear contact paper. I also made a series of sea life stencils by tracing pictures from books and transferring them to poster board.
- \* Markers: I like markers for writing and for the vibrancy of color in drawing. However, they can bleed through so I test the marker first on an extra piece of paper if I am going to be writing on both sides of the paper. For the writing, it may be helpful to write the text lightly in pencil, proof-read it, and then go over it in marker. Whiteout should be used cautiously; it can make a mess. Test it first with the marker on scrap paper.
- \* Colored pencils: Colored pencils are a good choice. While they won't bleed through, some care should be taken to not press too hard when writing on both sides of the paper. Drawings can be made in colored pencil or with a dark marker and colored in. I also like to color in rubber stamp images with colored pencils.

# CUTTING BOARDS FOR YARN

cardboard or foam core about 3" wide

- 18" -

Wrap yarn around, cut at both ends for 18"  
Cut at one end for 36"

- 12" -

Wrap yarn around. Cut at both ends for 12"  
Cut at one end for 24"

open cartridge with  
small Phillips head screwdriver



← CROCHET COTTON

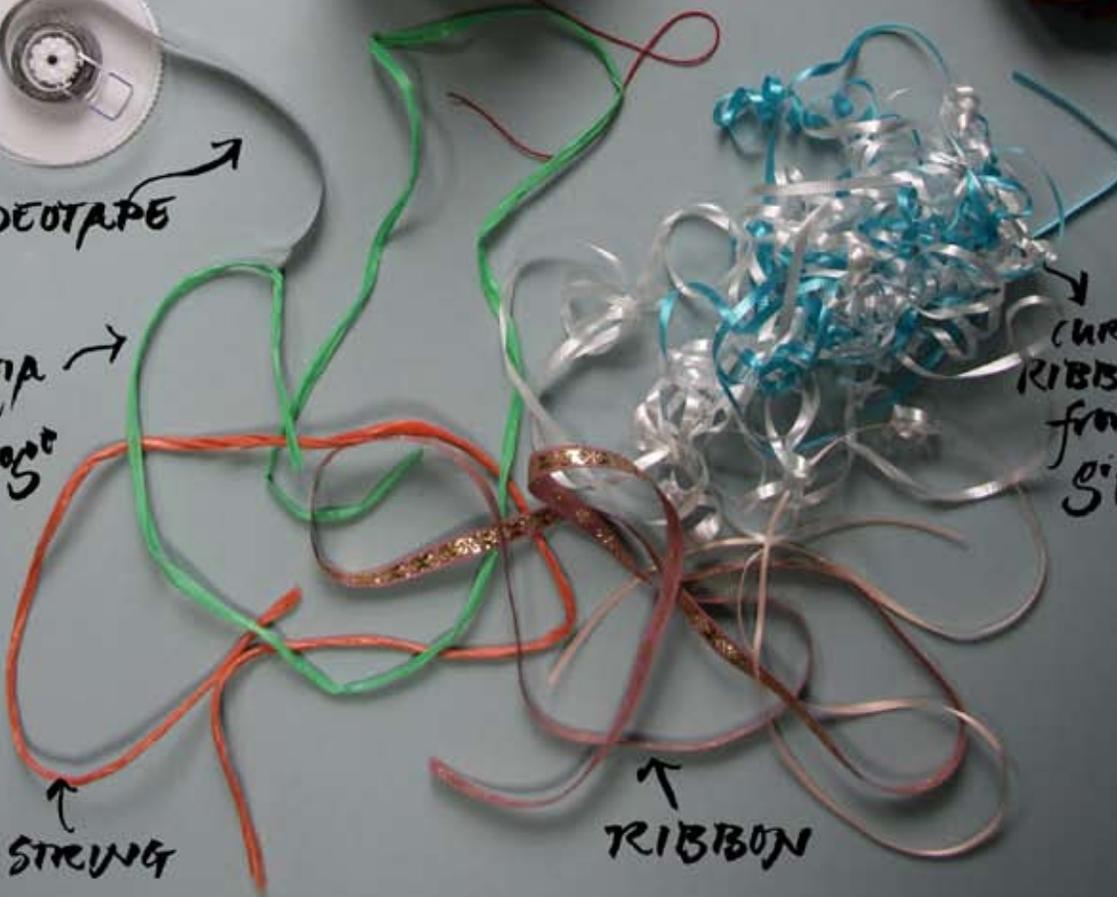


variegated YARN



VIDEOTAPE

RAFFIA from package



↑ STRING

↑ RIBBON

↑ CURLING RIBBON from gift



← BUTTONS



→ PONY BEADS  
available  
at  
craft shops



← PLASTIC  
BREAD  
CLOSURES



← SHELLS  
from hanging planters  
from yard sales

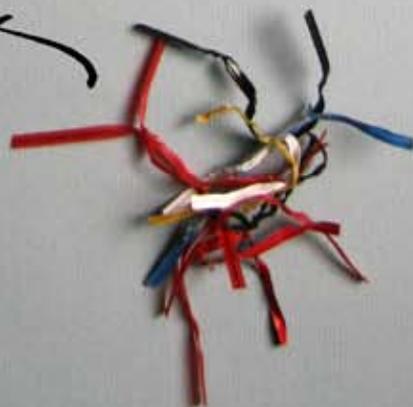


← VELCRO DISKS

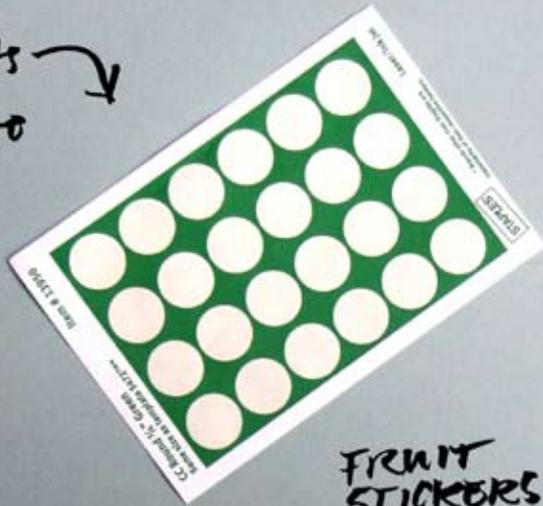


← ELASTICS  
from newspapers  
and vegetables

TWIST  
TIES

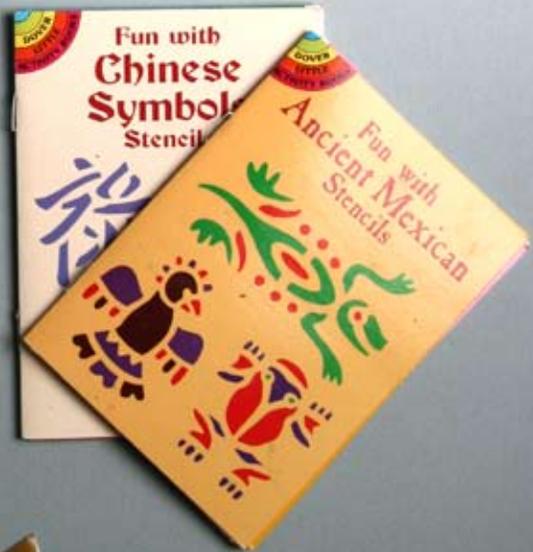


Leftover sheets  
from adhesive  
labels



COLLAGE  
PAPER  
stored in box

FRUIT  
STICKERS  
stored  
on  
max paper



STENCILS  
from  
doverpublications.  
com

from  
ADHESIVE-  
BACKED  
POSTAGE  
STAMPS



SEWING KIT  
CONTAINER  
Altoid or other tin or  
ziploc plastic  
bag



2  
CLOTHESPINS

PUSH  
PIN

PENCIL

NAIL

CORRUGATED  
CARDBOARD

NEEDLE  
SIZE 18  
Tapestry

BLOCKS of WOOD  
2x4s cut to 8" lengths

# Recycled Materials for Making Books

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Cover background: Paper made from repurposed plastic bags in India,  
purchased at New York Central Art Supply in New York City

The text can also be found in the For Teachers and For Families sections  
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