

**TEACHING CHILDREN BOOKBINDING:  
A PATHFINDER FOR EDUCATORS**

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## Teaching Children Bookbinding: A Pathfinder for Educators Introduction

Bookbinding is an ancient art that began four thousand years ago in the Middle East.<sup>1</sup> There, native people placed clay tablets inside a clay envelope, thus making the first book prototype; that is, a creation meant to “receive writing for the purpose of communicating ideas.”<sup>2</sup> On our continent, indigenous people in Mexico used the fibrous roots of fig trees to make books protected by wooden covers,<sup>3</sup> while Native Americans in the north wrote on birch bark scrolls and used shells to commemorate agreements called wampum. The urge to record thoughts and deeds spans thousands of years and is common to many cultures around the world. Teaching children bookbinding is a way for them to become part of this long tradition of book arts in a fun and imaginative way.

I created this pathfinder specifically for the virtual library at Northwest Indian College (NWIC) so I searched exclusively for sources that are available for free on the Internet. Additionally, I confined my searches to sites that I thought would be relevant and useful to the K-8 pre-service teachers in the Oksale Native Teacher Preparation Program at NWIC. Since bookbinding is potentially an unwieldy subject, I narrowed the field by looking for sites that children as well as elementary school teachers would find appealing and I hunted for sites that discussed Native American contributions to the book arts. I also discovered that where children are concerned, teaching bookbinding or bookmaking is closely linked to the activities of papermaking and writing; therefore, I included sites that address how these three processes interweave and complement each other.

I began my quest with the Internet search engine Google <<http://www.google.com>>. When I performed several simple keyword searches which included the words and phrases “teaching children bookbinding,” “teaching children bookmaking,” “Native American’ and ‘book art,’”

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<sup>1</sup> Kilgour, Frederick G., *The Evolution of the Book*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 1998), 12-13.

<sup>2</sup> Avrin, Leila, *Scribes, Script, and Books*, (Chicago: ALA, 1991), 1.

<sup>3</sup> Diringer, David, *The Book Before Printing*, (New York: Dover, 1982), 429.

“American Indian art,” and “teaching Native American children,” Google identified thousands of web pages that contained these terms. As I scanned these lists, I looked for pages constructed or sponsored by schools, teachers, and non-profit or educational organization since these sites are generally very reliable and authoritative. I also investigated any website that used my search terms in a cluster; for example, if I searched on the terms “American Indian art” and a site had all three words together I viewed it even if it was from the “.com” domain. I found that many excellent sites by authors and illustrators come from the “.com” world, so on these commercial pages I looked for educational awards or recommendations from dependable, well-known organizations. Some of my most outstanding finds were sites that Google did not identify, but they were listed in online bibliographies on trustworthy sites such as the Book Arts Web and Kidbibs International.

A few of the questions that I imagine teachers would want to know about teaching bookbinding include: Will the students really learn anything valuable from this activity? How can I integrate bookbinding with my existing lesson plans? How expensive are the supplies and do I have some of them already? Are there any sources about Native Americans and bookbinding? I hope to answer these inquiries as well as any others that may arise with this pathfinder, which can be found at <<http://www.gslis.utexas.edu/~vlibrary/pathfinders/martin/pdf>>. So come, let’s walk down this path together and learn how creating books leads to stimulated young minds.

## Teaching Children Bookbinding: A Pathfinder for Educators Annotated Bibliography

Citation format: Harnack, Andrew, and Eugene Kleppinger, "Chicago Manual of Style," *Online! A Reference Guide to Using Internet Sources*, 2000, <<http://www.bedfordstmartins.com/online/cite7.html>> (28 February 2001).

1. Bades, Dean, "Five-Stitch Bookbinding," *Zum Gali Gali Rubber Stamps*, 28 January 2001, <[http://www.zumgaligali.com/projects/bookbinding/book\\_5st\\_1.html](http://www.zumgaligali.com/projects/bookbinding/book_5st_1.html)> (2 March 2001).

These five-stitch books are small, journal- or diary-type volumes that look very professional. This particular project would probably be best for older children (seventh and eighth grade), for it requires a heavy darning or embroidery needle and some sewing. The instructions are clear, the photos are good, and the author has a fun sense of humor.

2. Canyon View Elementary School, "Write On, Reader!," *Thinkquest Jr.*, 2000 <<http://library.thinkquest.org/J001156>> (2 March 2001).

*Thinkquest* is a non-profit organization whose goal is to advance education through the use of technology. They sponsor a classroom-based competition every year in which fourth and fifth graders create and write educational websites on a topic of their choice. This site is a 2000 Platinum Award winner, and the accolades are well-deserved. This fifth-grade class from San Diego, California not only has unusual book types that I did not find anywhere else--such as a Peek-A-Boo book, a Double-Hinge book that looks like a treasure chest, a Lift-Up book, and a great Pull-Tab book--but it also has tips on how kids can publish books, several story ideas, word games, and author interviews.

3. Drewes, Jeanne, "Concertina Book Instructions," *Home Page*, 11 October 2000, <<http://lib.msu.edu/drewes/cncrtina.htm>> (2 March 2001).

A glue stick and paper are the only supplies you will need to make this Asian-style book. Ms. Drewes is the head of preservation and conservation at Michigan State Universities, and her directions and accompanying diagrams are so clear that you could print them out and pass them on to students as a handout. The book is simple, yet still looks like a "real" book because it has a spine and firm covers. I think it would be best for fifth grade and up.

4. Frank, Ross, *Plains Indian Ledger Digital Publishing Project*, 7 October 2000, <<http://weber.ucsd.edu/Depts/Ethnic/fac/rfrank/Ledger.Home.html>> (2 March 2001).

Dr. Frank is a professor of ethnic studies at the University of California at San Diego, and he has done an exemplary job of using digital technology to make the moving and poetic Native American Ledger Art of the nineteenth century available to anybody with Internet access. The Plains nations used these accountants' books to create pictorial narrations of important events in their lives before and after they were forced onto reservations in the 1860s. The text Dr. Frank wrote about the ledger books is scholarly and directed at adults, but the photo gallery of the two ledgers makes a powerful impact that people of any age can appreciate.

5. Gaylord, Susan Kapuscinski, "Bookmaking Projects," *Making Books with Susan Kapuscinski Gaylord: for Teachers, Parents, and Children*, 2000, <<http://www.makingbooks.com/projects.html>> (2 March 2001).

This lively and engaging author and illustrator suggests three types of bookbinding projects on her website: a Hot Dog book, an Accordion book, and a Who Am I? book. She has designed these projects especially for the classroom using materials that teachers would already have. Additionally, there is a great photo collection based on her book *Multicultural Books to Make and Share* where students can view books fashioned from palm leaves, bamboo, and birch bark. These projects are aimed at second through fourth grade.

6. Giese, Paula, "Wampum," *Native American Indian: Art, Culture, Education, History, Science*, 17 December 1996, <<http://www.kstrom.net/isk/art/beads/wampum.html>> (2 March 2001).

Paula Giese was an Ojibwa from Minnesota who has passed away, but her family, friends, and interested site visitors maintain this wonderful and extensive website in her memory. She explains that eastern nations wove wampum belts of shells and fabric to record treaties and sacred agreements. The excellent photographs of wampum and paintings depicting wampum show how the colors and designs of the belts conveyed information such as how important a treaty was, who was involved in the agreement, and where it was ratified. Wampum are not "books" with a cover and pages, but they tell a story and communicate important ideas in a beautiful and culturally unique way.

7. Google Inc., *Google*, <<http://www.google.com>> (3 March 2001).

I have consistently found that Google is the best search engine on the Internet today. It uses a software program called PageRank™ that not only counts the number of times the words you searched on occur in web documents, but also evaluates the quality of the pages that your search identifies. I am listing it as a source in the bibliography because in the World Wide Web's state of flux, web sites come and go with great frequency; for example, one of the sources listed here changed their address in a matter of weeks. Therefore, I highly recommend performing searches at different times to discover new sites that address this pathfinder's topic.

8. Irvine, Joan, "How to Make a Pop-Up Book," *Home Page*, 2000, <<http://makersgallery.com/joanirvine/howto.html>> (2 March 2001).

Fun frogs, roaring lions, and leggy bugs are just some of the creatures kids can create with a pop-up book. Joan Irvine's pop-ups are simple, too, requiring only scissors, glue, and crayons. This teacher and artist from Ontario, Canada writes easy-to-follow instructions with terrific illustrations. The pop-up project would be perfect for kindergarten through second grade.

9. Koller, Jackie French, "Publish a Book," *Home Page*, 2000, <<http://www.geocities.com/~jackiekoller/publish.html>> (2 March 2001).

Middle school-age kids will enjoy author Ms. Koller's advice on creative ways to set up text and pictures on a page, while instructors will like her web links for teachers and her essay on the writing process: brainstorming, first draft, sharing, and so on. She posts photographs of the finished products inside and out and gives in-depth and encouraging descriptions. Best of all, at the end of the project, she makes a Greg Cajete-like suggestion to celebrate!

10. Lavadour, Roberta, *Mission Creek Press*, 2000, <<http://www.missioncreekpress.com>> (2 March 2001).

Ms. Lavadour is a book artist whose beautiful site shows her studio in the Blue Mountains of Oregon. She documents her handmade paper and book projects with stunning photographs, and she discusses her commitment to using only local and seasonal plants, flowers, and trees in her work. You can order her book *Handmade Paper in the Classroom: A Teacher's Guide to Making Paper with Kids* for \$6.00 since her own methods--which include a twelve-ton press--are impossible to duplicate. Teachers and students alike can look to her photos and her environmental sensitivity for bookmaking ideas galore.

11. Messier, Maryanne, "Make An Art Book," *KinderArt*, 2001, <<http://www.kinderart.com/artbook/index.html>> (2 March 2001).

A lesson plan in ten steps that has sample results for each step plus downloadable handouts that are both whimsical and educational. The book is an About Me type, and every step teaches about things like color mixing, texture, and patterns. It is recommended for kindergarten through sixth grade, though I think it is better suited for younger children. Ms. Messier is a teacher, so there is a very complete list of supplies. The website *KinderArt* is a super resource for teachers that lists over six hundred fifty lesson plans and features a free newsletter.

12. Michel, Laura, "A Journey to Publication Using Writer's Notebooks," *Currents In Literacy* 2, no. 1 (Spring 1999), <[http://www.lesley.edu/academic\\_centers/hood/currents/v2n1/michel.html](http://www.lesley.edu/academic_centers/hood/currents/v2n1/michel.html)> (2 March 2001).

This article by a second and fourth grade teacher is very inspirational. In it, she describes teaching Native American students about the writing and bookmaking process, which she compares to planting seeds and watching them slowly mature into lovely flowers. Instructors can discover how the writer's notebook exercise helps children learn about themselves as they articulate their ideas, and how it gives them a sense of accomplishment after following the project through to the end. The *Currents In Literacy* journal is full-text online and is an outstanding place to read about issues such as curriculum development, innovative literacy programs, and family literacy.

13. Oregon Book Arts Guild, "Projects You Can Make: the Four-Needle Book," *Green Heron Book Arts*, 1996, <<http://www.green-heron-kits.com/refs.html>> (2 March 2001).

Green Heron sells book arts kits but they offer this one for free on their website. The project is very precise, with all supplies and measurements scrupulously listed. An Exacto knife and darning needles are part of the requirements, so older kids can produce practically saleable books by following the clear instructions and diagrams. The authors have nice suggestions for using fancy materials like velvet scraps.

14. Oregon Public Education Network, "Featured Projects: Art of the Book Index," *Support for Teachers in Art*, 6 July 2000, <<http://www.open.k12.or.us/start/visual/featured/artbook/index.html>> (2 March 2001).

A superbly produced lesson plan that teachers can read and follow or adapt as they wish. There are recommended grade levels as well as an estimate of the time it will take to complete each activity. The site features a Stroke book, which is wordless but filled with the kids' illustration so that it can be folded in different ways. Each fold style creates a new story for the children to narrate as they share their book. The authors demonstrate how to mix tempera paint, how to make paste, and how to make a book cover.

15. Pages, Joyce Melton, "Growing Readers and Writers Through Bookmaking," *Kidbibs International*, 19 February 2001, <<http://www.kidbibs.com/learningtips/lt49.htm>> (2 March 2001).

Educator and mother Joyce Melton Pages discusses bookmaking as a process that fosters an appreciation for reading and writing in children. This appreciation then forms a base on which more love for writing and learning can develop--much like mulching soil to facilitate growing plants. The author suggests ideas for cross-curriculum bookmaking: books about math, science, health, social studies, and many more fascinating subjects. There is a large amount of marvelous links to Internet sites about teaching, bookbinding, art, and writing. This rich and stellar effort is a must-visit.

16. Prindle, Tara, "Uses for Birchbark," *Native American Technology and Art*, 2001, <<http://www.nativetech.org>> (2 March 2001).

In order to reach the "Uses for Birchbark" page, you must click on "Plants and Trees" on the main page, then click on the "Birchbark" link on the Plants and Trees page. Ms. Prindle, an anthropologist, has fashioned a gorgeous site brimming with information about the traditional practices of mostly eastern nations. The birch bark section describes how the Anishinabe culture removed bark from birch trees without damaging the living tree, how they stored and revived the delicate bark from the paper birch, and how they folded and stitched it. There are also illustrations showing the different sewing methods. Perhaps a local bark can serve as the base for an Anishinabe-style scroll. If you would like to know more about wampum after visiting Paula Giese's site, you can link to techniques by clicking "Beadwork" on the *Native Tech* main page.

17. Roland, Craig R., "Make An Artist Book," *The @rt Room*, 16 August 2000, <[http://www.arts.ufl.edu/art/rt\\_room/sparkers/artist\\_book/artist\\_bk.html](http://www.arts.ufl.edu/art/rt_room/sparkers/artist_book/artist_bk.html)> (2 March 2001).

The University of Florida's great *@rt Room* provides instructions on how to make a book out of a paper bag and other common, simple materials: scissors, ink stamps, old postage stamps, colored markers, and magazine pictures. The directions are admirably straightforward and have good diagrams for teachers to follow, plus a list of all the supplies you will need to complete the activity.

18. Syracuse University, *Book\_Arts-L Listserv*, 1 November 2000, <<http://www.philobiblon.com>> or <<http://palimpsest.stanford.edu>> (2 March 2001).

Managed by Peter Verheyen (who is also responsible for the amazing *Book Arts Web* that I will describe in the next entry), this listserv is screened to ensure appropriate, on-topic postings. I would encourage joining this great idea exchange, but even if you choose not to you can still search their archive for subjects that interest you. For example, I searched using the phrase "teaching children bookbinding" and I got about seventy-five postings dealing with that topic. A really nice feature of the search is that you can click on the "Next by thread" link at the bottom of the message you are reading so that you can follow replies to your topic exclusively. The members are primarily professionals, but there are plenty of teachers and educators to assist you with projects and questions.

19. Verheyen, Peter D., *The Book Arts Web*, 26 February 2001, <<http://www.philobiblon.com>> (2 March 2001).

This incredibly comprehensive and impeccably maintained website is the place to start any Internet search for book arts resources. The "Book Arts Links" is the most complete list that I encountered, and from here you can access the superior "Book and Paper Arts for Children" bibliography for print and electronic resources. Additionally, there are links for bookbinding tutorials, materials suppliers, the *Book\_Arts-L Listserv*, institutions that teach bookbinding, and anything else you could want to know about the book arts world.

**Teaching Children Bookbinding: A Pathfinder for Educators**  
**Pathfinder: <<http://www.gslis.utexas.edu/~vlibrary/pathfinders/martin.pdf>>**

This pathfinder covers sites that are relevant and useful to K-8 pre-service teachers in the Oksale Native Teacher Preparation Program at Northwest Indian College. These sites have appeal for both children and elementary school teachers and several of the sites discuss Native American contributions to the book arts.

**Before I begin investing time in researching how to teach bookbinding, I want to know if my students will really learn something valuable from making books.**

- A teacher describes how a writing and bookbinding project with her Native American students helped them learn about themselves as they articulated their ideas and how they felt a proud sense of accomplishment after their book was done. Read about it at <[http://www.lesley.edu/academic\\_centers/hood/currents/v2n1/michel.html](http://www.lesley.edu/academic_centers/hood/currents/v2n1/michel.html)>.
- Learn what Joyce Melton Pages means when she states that “learning and celebrating are one when young readers and writers make books” in her article at <<http://www.kidbibs.com/learningtips/lt49.htm>>. You will come away convinced by her experiences and excited by her ideas.

**Are there any sites where I can find general information about the book arts?**

- The *Book Arts Web* <<http://www.philobiblon.com>> has a tremendous amount of information about everything connected to the book arts. I recommend their “Book and Paper Arts for Children” bibliography if you need a good place to start learning about the world of bookbinding.

**How can I integrate teaching bookbinding into my existing curriculum?**

- For great tips on how to fit bookbinding into any subject (even math!), visit <<http://www.kidbibs.com/learningtips/lt49.htm>>.
- Laura Michel discusses how bookmaking figured in a writer’s notebook exercise in an article at <[http://www.lesley.edu/academic\\_centers/hood/currents/v2n1/michel.html](http://www.lesley.edu/academic_centers/hood/currents/v2n1/michel.html)>.
- If you need some structure, lesson plans for kindergarten through fourth grade that include supply lists are at <<http://www.kinderart.com/artbook/index.html>> and <<http://www.open.k12.or.us/start/visual/featured/artbook/index.html>>. The former site has downloadable handouts and the latter contains estimates of the time it will take to complete each activity.

**Are the supplies for teaching bookbinding expensive? Can I use some of my regular art materials for these projects?**

- Go to <[http://www.arts.ufl.edu/art/rt\\_room/sparkers/artist\\_book/artist\\_bk.html](http://www.arts.ufl.edu/art/rt_room/sparkers/artist_book/artist_bk.html)> to discover that grocery bags, old magazines, and colored markers or crayons are all you need. These sites all require only construction paper, scissors, and similar supplies: <<http://www.makingbooks.com/projects.html>>, <<http://library.thinkquest.org/J001156>>, <<http://www.makersgallery.com/joanirvine>>, <<http://lib.msu.edu/drewes/cncrtina.htm>>.
- Oregon Public Education Network’s project located at <<http://www.open.k12.or.us/start/visual/featured/artbook/index.html>> has recipes for making paste and mixing paint that you probably already have.



- Free supplies from Mother Nature (such as local plants, flowers, and trees for papermaking are featured on Roberta Lavadour's site <<http://www.missioncreekpress.com>> or Tara Prindle's *Native American Technology and Art* site <<http://www.nativetech.org>>. If using shells from a nearby beach interests you, Ms. Prindle and Paula Giese <<http://www.kstrom.net/isk/art/beads/wampum.html>> talk about and show how to make wampum belts.
- The most exotic and expensive items are the heavy needles (darning or embroidery) and Exacto knife called for in the following projects: <[http://www.zumgaligali.com/projects/bookbinding/book\\_5st\\_1.html](http://www.zumgaligali.com/projects/bookbinding/book_5st_1.html)> and <<http://www.greenheron-kits.com/refs.html>>.

**Since I will be teaching Native Americans, I would like to know if there are any sources about Native Americans and bookmaking.**

- Tara Prindle describes Anishinabe birch bark traditions at <<http://www.nativetech.org>>. In order to reach the birch bark section, you must click on "Plants and Trees" on the main page, then click on the "Birchbark" link on the Plants and Trees page. She also discusses eastern nations' use of wampum in the "Beadwork" section linked from her main page.
- Do not miss Dr. Ross Frank's *Plains Indian Ledger Project*! This site (located at <<http://weber.ucsd.edu/Depts/Ethnic/fac/rfrank/Ledger.Home.html>>) consists of digitally scanned images from nineteenth-century ledgers in which Native Americans created pictorial narratives of their lives both before and after they were forced onto reservations. The plain covers of the ledger books belie the power and poetry of the art inside. Students of any age will benefit from viewing this outstanding and culturally sensitive site.
- Paula Giese, an Ojibwa from Minnesota, has an informative page on wampum <<http://www.kstrom.net/isk/art/beads/wampum.html>>, which were fabric-and-shell records of treaties and sacred agreements. Though wampum are not books with pages, they tell important stories and communicate deeds and ideas in a beautiful and unique way.

**Now that I have all these great ideas, is there somewhere that I can discuss my experiences teaching and exchange plans with other educators?**

- The *Book\_Arts-L Listserv* <<http://www.philobiblon.com>> or <<http://palimpsest.stanford.edu>> is a terrific place to post comments or simply to read about the experiences of others. Joining would be the most interactive use of the listserv, but even if you do not sign on you can search their archive using keywords for topics that interest you. For example, I searched on "teaching children bookbinding" and I got about seventy-five postings dealing with that subject. A really nice time-saving feature of the search is that you can click on the "Next by thread" link at the bottom of the message you are reading so that you can follow the replies on that message exclusively.

**I hope that this pathfinder has helped you make bookbinding a part of your curriculum. I wish you well on any other paths that you may travel in pursuit of learning and showing children their great potential. If you find that any of these websites are no longer in existence or have any that you would like to add, please email me, Piper Martin, at [pipermartin74@hotmail.com](mailto:pipermartin74@hotmail.com)**

