

Paper Leather Journal

With the look and feel of aged leather, this tab-bound book is the perfect home for artistic thoughts and sketches

(art + social studies)

Leather has a long history in Western bookbinding. As early as the 4th century, leather straps were used to hinge wood panels together, and soon expanded to cover entire books. Animal skin was a practical material to cover a book because of its abundance, flexibility, durability, and resistance to temperature changes and humidity. The oldest coptic-bound book to survive with its original cover is a 7th century St. Cuthbert Gospel with an embossed leather cover.

Another benefit to covering a book with leather is that it accommodates many decorative techniques and binding structures. The beauty of a book's cover can greatly increase its value. Leather can be tooled, embossed, gilded, dyed, heat-etched, and treated with acids to create unique patterns and textures.

With the arrival of the printing press, the industrial revolution, and now the digital age, most books are now published rather than crafted. However, books created and bound by hand are still in demand and considered a highly skilled art form because of their aesthetic qualities.

The cost and ethics of working with animal products might hinder a young artist or beginning bookbinder from working with natural leather. The materials and technique introduced here offer a means of designing a book that has the look and feel of old leather but is created entirely from paper.

Paper leather is made to simulate the look and feel of real leather. It's extremely durable and can be embossed, distressed, sewn, and combined with leather scraps and lacing to make a unique journal with the look and feel of an antique book.

GRADES 5-12 Note: Instructions and materials are based upon a class size of 24 students. Adjust as needed.

Preparation

1. Cut Paper Leather in half vertically into 5-1/2" x 8" pieces. This process will make a small 4-1/4" x 5-1/2" journal. For larger journals, do not cut the sheet.
2. Cut parchment paper for inside pages into 5-1/2" x 8" pieces. Plan on a minimum of five pieces per journal.



Materials (required)

Sizzix Paper Leather Sheets, 8-1/2" x 11", package of 10 assorted (01354-1001); need a half sheet per student

Bienfang Calligraphic Parchment Paper, Antique Gold, 8-1/2" x 11", 60 lb, package of 50 sheets (12937-4585); need three sheets per student

Blick Liquid Watercolor, Brown, 237 ml (00369-8005); share one bottle across class

Art-C Chipboard Alphabet Stencil Set, set of 80 letters, 5" x 5" (03197-1009); share one set across class

Fiskars Sparkle Softgrip Non-Stick Student Scissors, 7" (57666-1007); need one per student

Blick Aluminum Rulers, 12" (55430-1012); need one per student

Dynasty Faux Camel Watercolor Brushes, round size 10 (06292-1010); need one per student

Genuine Boxwood Tools, set of 3 (60502-1009); share eight sets across class

Artist Tape, 1/2" x 60 yds (24124-1012); share one roll across class

3M Production Sandpaper, 9" x 11", package of 10 sheets, Medium Grit (34916-1403); share one package across class

Midwest Products Genuine Basswood Strips, 1/8" x 1/4" x 24", package of 5 (33300-2124); share one strip among four students

Optional Materials

Premium Leather Remnants, 1 lb bag (61706-1001)

Realeather Suede Lace Variety Packs, assorted colors, 24 ft (62517-)

Fiskars Shapeboss Stylus (60373-1021)

Assorted Metallized Beads, 8 oz mix (60776-1008)

Realeather 20L Snap Setter Kit (62507-1002)

Leather Stitching Needles, package of 10 (63017-1001)

Waxed Thread, assorted colors, 4 oz, 150 yd spool (63012-)





Preparation, continued

- Using strong scissors or a paper cutter, cut the basswood strips into 5-1/2" lengths.

Process for distressing Paper Leather

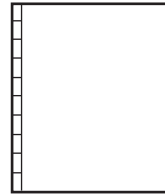
- To distress the Paper Leather, start by crumpling the paper, opening it, and recrumpling it a few times.
- Over time, leather takes on a mottled appearance, especially as it is handled as a book would be. To achieve this look with Paper Leather, stain it with a watercolor wash. In a paper cup, add two parts water to one part brown liquid watercolor. This can be adjusted, depending on the intensity of the color desired.

With a large, soft brush, cover a portion of the paper with the brown watercolor wash and blot immediately with paper towels to lend a mottled appearance. Work with one area at a time. If the color becomes too heavy, mist it with water and blot it with a paper towel to lift more color away.

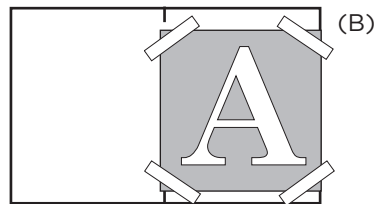
- Repeat the process on the other side of the paper. Set aside to dry.
- Once the Paper Leather cover is dry, use sandpaper to further distress it. Fold the paper in half on the long side and work the sandpaper in a circular motion around what will be the outside of the journal.

Process for preparing journal pages

- While any paper may be used, parchment or kraft paper provides the aged, handcrafted look (A) that complements the Paper Leather cover. Fold a minimum of five sheets of 5-1/2" x 8" paper in half on the long side, and assemble.



- Using a ruler and a pencil on the outside sheet, measure 1/4" inch from the fold and create a line down the vertical length of the page. Create marks on the fold to the line at 1/2" intervals, see (A). Cut in from the fold to the line on each mark to make tabs in each page.



Process for embossing cover

- If desired, the cover can be embossed using a cardboard or plastic stencil that has at least 1/32" dimension to it; flat stencils used for painting will not provide enough depth for embossing. Measure and center the stencil on the front cover of the journal (the right side of the fold) and secure it with removable artist's tape, see (B).



Step 1: Distress the Paper Leather by crumpling it, painting it with a mottled watercolor wash, and sanding it.



Step 2: Prepare the inside journal pages by measuring and cutting tabs.



Step 3: Emboss the Paper Leather cover with stencils, if desired.



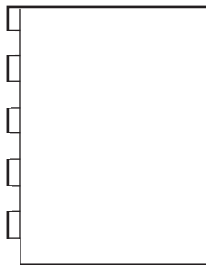
Step 4: Assemble journal cover and pages together by weaving a wooden strip through the tabs.

Process for embossing cover, continued

- Turn the paper and stencil over and emboss from the back side using a wooden tool or ball stylus. Paper Leather is very strong, but will tear if embossed too heavily or if the tool is too sharp. For best results, use a larger tool to stretch the paper against the shape first, then use a smaller tool for edge definition and to reach the corners.
- If the stencil is 2-part (such as the lettering set specified), remove the first stencil from the front of the journal and place the second part inside the embossed area on the back side. Tape it in place, then turn it over and use the embossing tool again along the edges of the letter, this time "chasing" the embossing from the front side.

Process for assembling journal with tab binding

- Fold the cover inside out and repeat step 6 on the fold of the Paper Leather so that it matches the pages (pencil marks will be on the inside of the cover).
- Insert the pages into the cover. Create tabs by pushing and folding inward at every other cut line, see (C). Weave a wooden strip, a piece of leather lacing or a similar item in-between the tabs to bind the journal. For extra security, apply a small amount of glue between the wood strip and the innermost page at the top and bottom tabs.



Options for enhancing the journal

- Create a closure with leather scraps, lacing, beads, or snaps. Leather scraps can be glued to the Paper Leather..
- Paper Leather can be stitched, just like animal hide. Use a needle to add stitching, create a border, and attach items such as beads and and leather scraps.
- Enhance embossing with gold paint or a contrasting color.
- This process creates a soft-cover journal. For a rigid cover, glue a piece of matboard or cardboard to the inner surfaces of the cover after step 10 (before assembling). Cut the cardboard the same height as the pages, but 1/4" smaller in width to accommodate the tab binding. Glue a piece of the paper used to create the pages or a contrasting paper over the cardboard for a more aesthetic look.
- More experienced bookbinders may design foldover covers and incorporate different binding techniques. For example, multiple page signatures can be saddle-stitched and woven into the cover tabs, or case-bound.

National Core Arts Standards - Visual Arts

Creating

Anchor Standard 1: Generate and conceptualize artistic ideas and work.

Anchor Standard 2: Organize and develop artistic ideas and work.

Responding

Anchor Standard 8: Perceive and analyze artistic work.

Connecting

Anchor Standard 10: Synthesize and relate knowledge and personal experiences to make art.

Anchor Standard 11: Relate artistic ideas and works with societal, cultural, and historical context to deepen understanding.