The Book as Art at the Pamunkey Regional Library

by Janet Melton

The Book as Art at the Pamunkey Regional Library started with a workshop for Earth Day and an enthusiastic Children’s Programmer! When we first decided to create a workshop for Earth Day, we began with a brainstorming session to come up with the best ideas. As such sessions go, we bandied about innumerable concepts, eventually settling on making notebooks that teenagers might enjoy using at school. The plan was to save food boxes to use as covers and dividers, and to add a variety of different pages using other papers and materials. We hoped to purchase a binding machine so workshop attendees could bind their own books. However, after investigating binding equipment, the cost proved to be prohibitive given the Library’s current budget.

We needed a new plan. That was when Tracy Anderson, a Children’s Programmer and Library Associate at the Goochland Branch of the Pamunkey Regional Library,

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The final product is quite lovely, and very inexpensive. The journals have a shabby chic sort of charm, and each one is unique.
conducted some research and came up with another idea. We still saved boxes, but they were for the covers of new, more “artsy” journals, and we extended the program to include adults as well as teens. We were able to retain the “Earth Day” theme since the project required recycled materials for both the cover and the inside pages of the journal.

We purchased some colorful papers and some special effects (ribbon, stickers, stamps and ink, tags) to personalize the journals. However, we focused on a more “vintage” styling overall, incorporating pages from old books, pieces of old maps, and sheet music to create book signatures that were later sewn in with embroidery thread. (One of my favorite additions is the old library pockets that once held the checkout card! These make handy little pockets in the new vintage journals for notes, receipts, or inspirational quotes.)

On the day of the workshop, patrons—both teens and adults—entered the library’s multipurpose room to the sound of softly playing music and a beautiful array of materials both old and new from which to make their journals. We allowed two hours, but we really needed three. Those who came to the workshop were treated to a peaceful, creative morning and left with a beautiful journal made with recycled materials and their own hands!

Because most of us who work in the Pamunkey Regional Library (and all libraries, I would imagine) love books, it is really exciting to find a new use for an old book. Although here we only used bits and pieces of the books for our purposes, it still results in continued enjoyment of those old pages. Who doesn’t like to find a beautiful new use for an old treasure?

In the pictures that follow, you will see another way that the Pamunkey Regional Library has begun to use some of these old treasures. We have taken old, discarded,
or donated books and used them to create seasonal decorations! The same staff member who developed the art journal workshop, Tracy Anderson, brought in a rustic pumpkin (pictured above) that she had made by simply folding the pages of an old book into the shape of a pumpkin. She topped it with a real pumpkin stem and set it up on the circulation desk for all to enjoy. The resulting interest was spectacular! Nearly every patron that walked in carefully inspected that pumpkin, and many asked if we could teach them how to make one! Of course, we obliged, and offered the workshop in the fall. Tracy has since displayed a book transformed into an angel, and also created an evergreen tree made out of books for library decoration as well.

What can you create from a discarded book?