

CROSSING THE GENDER DIVIDE: CRAFT PROGRAMMING THAT APPEALS TO ALL GENDERS

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Looking over the world of crafts in general, it is clear that crafting is a predominantly female undertaking.

Many of the most popular crafts like knitting, crocheting and jewellery making are dominated by women crafters. Many crafts, such as paper making, needlepoint, bead work or batik originate from ancient cultural activities and folk art lead by women.

Crafts for men, or men crafters is a theme that does not show up at all in any of the literature. There are no authoritative opinions on the presence of male crafters in society; however, there is strong evidence that highlights the importance of arts and crafts as a way to express individuality and culture, to relax, enhance creativity and achieve a sense of accomplishment. Surely both men and women can benefit from these outcomes?

Various Google searches for “crafts for boys” bring up dozens of websites promoting crafts for the male gender. Many of the suggestions are attempting to move away from the stereotype that crafts are frilly, sparkly, pink, and in general, girly. The boy crafts get the crafter’s hands dirty or use tools like wood burners. The projects are shelves, chainmail, clocks, watches, leather belts or metal-studded t-shirts. However, like all of the “crafts for girls,” the “crafts for boys” also encourage creativity and individual expression.

Other crafts ideas with girl and guy appeal:

- ✓ Dream catcher
- ✓ Personal sticker making
- ✓ Silk-screen self portrait
- ✓ Leather work
- ✓ Bonsai tree
- ✓ Herb garden
- ✓ Wood burning
- ✓ Duct tape wallet

TEACH TEENS TO STENCIL!



Clearly, crafts for boys should be included in library programming. But an important question is how? Mention crafting to most teenage boys and they will recoil in horror.

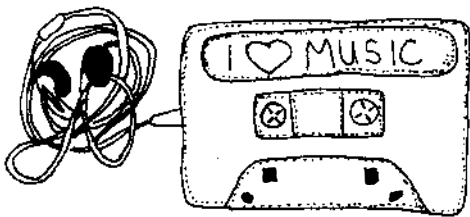
It's up to youth services librarians to remove that pink ribbon from the craft package and

promote projects that don't exclude boys. Andrea Graham, a librarian at Bellport New York suggests ditching the word "craft" altogether if you want to get guys involved (2008). To them, crafting conjures up the aforementioned folk art, or even worse, "girl stuff." Label the activity with a "Do it Yourself" inspired title, and display an already finished example of what the finished project will look like. Have the program take place where the teens already are (near the computers usually) and you will get the interest you are looking for.

The projects themselves have to be enticing. Graham says that she finds the most success when she capitalizes on themes or media that are already being discussed avidly or have been gaining popularity. Movie, manga, and book tie-ins are a sure bet, as is running your ideas by some teen patrons themselves. Make sure you've practiced putting the project together yourself so you are sure it will work, and always have back-up materials on hand in case someone needs to start over.

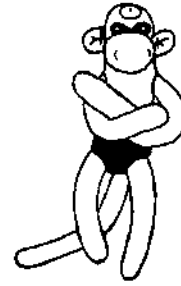
Suggestions

Anything IPOD or MP3 player related is sure to gain interest. Making your own IPOD or MP3 player cozy can be easy and fun, and something the teens can display proudly to



their friends. Check out the instructions at: <http://pimpstitch.typepad.com/.a/6a00e551e eebc08834010536ce3156970b-pi>

Movie and Manga tie-in projects guarantee enrolment numbers. From Watchmen-inspired sock puppets to 'cosplay' costumes, find some great ideas at www.crafters.org.



Personalizing one's own space or clothing is popular with teens regardless of gender. Teaching teens how to make stencils and personalize their clothing or bedroom walls is a low cost programming option, and you can provide pre-made stencilling outlines for teens who don't think they have the drawing skills required. The classic book *Stencil it: Over 100 Step-by-Step Projects* is a great starting resource.

As an extension to a personalized sticker making craft, a summer-long graffiti art program is a good way to get "crafty" and teens to participate in a community beautification project, as well as help prevent illegal graffiti. Begin with brainstorming sessions and discussions, including a conversation about the community's zero-tolerance for vandalism. Invite guest artists to speak about the graffiti style. Practice and plan with felt-pens on stickers and chart paper. Go large scale with outdoor plywood easels and mural paint practice. Finally collaborate with city officials to secure a mural space that will display the teen's final graffiti projects.

References

Graham, A. (2008). DIY is back. *Voice of Youth Advocates*. 31(4), 310-311.

Walton S. (1993). *Stencil it: Over 100 step-by-step projects*. New York: Sterling.

Terminology:

This quick overview of some of the DIY genres will help you plan your YA programs.

Craftaku: This term comes from the words craft and otaku, the Japanese slang term for super fan. Craftaku is geared toward making craft projects based on your favourite characters. For example, using fuse beads to make old-school, 8-bit pixelated Super Mario drink coasters or making Naruto cosplay headbands.

Kawaii: a Japanese term adopted by teens to explain anything that is "super cute." Think Hello Kitty. Examples of Kawaii projects that young adults might like include making a junk-food charm bracelet out of polymer clay and creating stuffed toys out of felt and fleece. (See our Amigurumi section on page 30 in "Getting Started with Knitting & Crocheting in the Library" for more examples of kawaii stuff!)

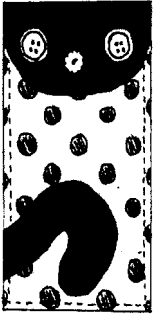
Tech Headz: For the gadget-obsessed teen, there are a ton of awesome tech-based and circuitry projects out there, such as how to make LED light magnets for lockers and making iPod cozies out of duct tape.

Go Green: The heart of the DIY movement is embracing a lifestyle that buys less and reuses more. There is no better way to demonstrate this effort than by offering programs such as trash to treasure crafts, such as making sandwich bag wallets and coffee can bird houses.

Alterna-awesome: Everybody wants to show off his or her unique style. Alterna-awesome projects allow teens to alter their clothing to create a new look. Projects include reconstructing a T-shirt or making crocheted arm warmers.

Morbid Madness: This genre is for your zombie and vampire fans. Morbid projects take the best of Halloween and keep the fun going throughout the year. Ghastly projects include a zombie fashion show in which teens create zombie costumes out of shredded vintage clothing and horror makeup made from cooking ingredients. The teens are then able to show off their creations in front of an audience.

Favourite Resources:



Instructables. (n.d.). *Instructables*. Retrieved April 10, 2009 from

<http://www.instructables.com>

The website has some exceptional, unique and sometimes outrageous craft projects that would please men and women alike. Check the hilarious and useful list of compiled “Manly Crafts” that has ideas for wooden wristwatches, neoprene laptop bags and even a knitted gun holster.

Boys’ Life Magazine. (n.d.). *BL Workshop*. Retrieved April 10, 2009 from

<http://boyslife.org/section/hobbies-projects/projects/>

Boys life is a magazine put out by the Boy Scouts of America. The site is geared towards a slightly younger audience than we would like to see in our crafts for boys programs; however, in scrolling through the workshop ideas it’s possible to find a few gems such as a compact vegetable garden, a radio, and a chess set out of workbench bits and pieces.

Make PlayDough.com (n.d.) *Teen bedroom crafts for boys*. Retrieved April 10, 2009 from

http://www.makeplaydough.com/teen_bedroom_crafts_for_boys-29872.php

This article touches on the differences between girl crafts and boy crafts, and offers some suggestions for crafts boys might like to try for room decor. The website also contains lots of other general craft ideas.

DIY Network. (n.d.). *Creative juice*. Retrieved April 10, 2009 from

http://www.diynetwork.com/diy/shows_dcrj/

The website for the television show “Creative Juice” has some excellent craft projects that are good for older teens. Boys might enjoy creating an LP record room divider, travel backgammon board or a travel chess board. All of the crafts are browsable under the “crafts” tab.

DuctTapeGuys.com. (n.d.). *Duct Tape Guys*. Retrieved April 10, 2009 from

http://www.octanecreative.com/ducttape/new_intro/index.html

Some very unique and quite funny crafts and projects all involving duct tape, of course! Apparently duct tape wallets are very popular with high-school boys. This website has clear step by step instructions for a duct tape wallet with images.

Also worth checking out:

Craftster: <http://www.craftster.org>

Cutoutandkeep: <http://www.culoutandkeep.com>

Etsy – Buy & Sell Handmade: <http://www.etsy.com>

Nintendo Papercrafts: <http://www.nintendopapercraft.com>

Resources

Aronzo, A., & Aranzi, A. (2007). *Cute dolls (Let's make cute stuff)*. Tokyo: San Val.

Berger, S., & Hawthorne, G. (2005). *ReadyMade: How to make [almost] everything: A do-it-yourself primer*. New York: Clarkson Potter.

Bravo, K., & LeBlanc, J. (2005). *Making stuff and doing things: A collection of DIY guides to doing just about everything*. Portland, OR: Microcosm.

Frauenfelder, M. (2007). *The best of Make*. Beijing: O'Reilly.

Nicolay, M. (2006). *Generation T: 108 ways to transform a T-shirt*. New York: Workman.

Niedzviecki, H., & Ngui, M. (2007). *The big book of pop culture: A how-to guide for young artists*. Toronto: Annick Press.

Shoup, K. (2008). *Rubbish: Reuse your refuse*. Hoboken, N.J.: Wiley.

Vitkus, J., Kennedy, B., & Lee, E. (2005). *Alternacrafts: [20+ hi-style, lo-budget projects to make]*. New York: Stewart, Tabori & Chang.