

Turning Discarded Book Jackets into Unique Gift Bags

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I came up with this project in 2004 when I was working at Georgia Southern University in Henderson Library. I met a student at the circulation desk who was sporting a purse made out of Capri juice foil packets. It was stitched together and even had a zipper. This gave me the idea and inspiration to see if I could somehow make use out of all our discarded book jackets for the library's recycling display for Earth Day. After several laughable disasters and a huge mess I finally found my pattern.

I no longer sew the paper since I have found gluing the bag together a much simpler and easier task for workshops and sewing machines are hard to come by in batches for a class, anyway. However, sewing the paper on your own has a very pretty effect especially when using brightly colored and contrasting threads on the bag.

Supplies: book jackets, scissors, paper edgers, pinking shears, hot glue gun and glue sticks, ruler, pen, single hole punch, ribbons, chenille stems, scrap cardboard in a variety of thicknesses (gift cards, corrugated, etc.), and decorative odds and ends such as silk flowers, seashells, broken jewelry, etc.

1. Select your favorite book jacket.
2. Close the jacket as you would the book and fold along the length of the binding. Press the book flaps together making sure they are the same size. Some flaps are uneven. The flaps will become the sides of the bags so you want them to be the same width. Trim or refold the flaps accordingly.
3. Cut off the BACK flap along its fold and set aside. If you do not cut off one of the flaps then the print of your bag will be upside down on one side.
4. Cut the jacket in half along the binding fold. Set aside the back cover.
5. Keep the front cover's uncut flap folded under in its original position. Press the edge of the fold down and run your finger (or use the side of a ruler) all the way down the fold to flatten it. With the cover and its flap pressed together, measure a quarter of an inch of the folded edge over and press. Now you have a hem along the edge of the right side of the front cover. Turn over to the back and open up the hem of the flap. Run a thin strand of hot glue down into the crevice of the hem. Close the flap back and fold over the hem again and press with your fingers for a few seconds until the glue is set. Turn the cover back over to face you. You should have a nice seam.
6. Take the cut back flap and match it to the left side of the cover with the right sides facing out. Place paper clips on either end to keep it place as you glue. Fold over a quarter of an inch in the same way as the first side you just glued. With the paper clips holding the paper in place, open one edge of the fold and run a thin strand of hot glue down along the inside of the exposed edge. Press the edges back together and immediately fold over the quarter inch seam (this prevents the glue from seeping out and creates a neat hem) and hold in place until the glue is set. You now have the front and sides of the bag put together.

7. Now take the back cover and continue the process of hemming and gluing to each of the side flaps in the back. The body of the bag is now ready for its bottom piece.

NOTE: Feel free to reverse how you glue the hem. If you want to fold the hem and glue it to be tucked into the inside of the bag as if you are sewing a garment, do so. I like to have the raw seams facing out so I can trim the outside edges with decorative edging scissors for an interesting look, depending on the bag.

8. The bottom is made out of another book jacket or any kind of pliable material you care to use. Measure horizontally along the bottom of the bag on each side. Most bags turn out to be approximately 6" across for the cover and back and 3" across for the side flaps. The extra book jacket, or any piece of sturdy paper that you like, needs to be large enough to fit the bottom of the bag with enough over-hang to glue around either the outside or inside of the bag.
9. On the wrong side of your paper bottom mark the dimensions in pen or pencil and connect with lines using a ruler to form a rectangle. Then measure and draw lines out on each side of the box so that you have tabs. Make the tabs as long as you want to, but drawn straight out from, and only as wide as, the box. The box will now be a rectangular t-shape. The box is the very bottom of the bag. The t-tabs will be glued up and round the sides of the bag. Cut out the bottom and fold in each tab over on the wrong side for easier placement and gluing.
10. Place the bottom wrong side up on your work surface with tabs sticking straight up. Fit the body of the bag down inside the tabs making certain it has been measured correctly and is a good fit.

NOTE: I find that gluing tabs on the outside is easier so I choose an interesting and colorful contrasting paper and trim the tabs with pinking shears or other decorative edger scissors.

11. Choose one tab and spread hot glue on its wrong (inner) side. Working quickly, push the tab into place up against the outside of the bag with one hand while at the same time the other hand is pressing from down inside the bag on the opposite side of the tab. Continue pressing for a few seconds to secure the tab in place. Glue the rest of the tabs in place all around the bag in the same way.
12. Use a hand held hole punch at the top of the bag to create handles. Place the hole punch down over the paper as far as it will go. Holes made too near the top can rip the paper when inserting handles. Either measure where you want to place the holes or simply punch free style. To carry the bag bucket-style, punch one hole in each side flap. For the classic way with two handles, punch two holes each front and back.
13. Select colorful thin pieces of cardboard (greeting cards work well) and cut into 1-inch squares (or any shape you prefer), enough for each hole that you just punched. Punch holes into the middle of each square. Swirl a small amount of hot glue around the hole on the wrong side of the square. Quickly glue the square over the hole inside the bag matching up holes. If the cardboard is thin enough you can glue it on the bag and punch through both the square and the bag saving a step. Securing the holes with a back-up prevents the handles from ripping out of the bag when in use.

14. Select ribbons, chenille stems, decorative trim, wire, or anything else that can be strung through the holes for handles. Measure and cut your preferred length of the handle. Tie a knot on one end. From the inside of the bag thread the handle through to the outside of the bag and back into the next hole. Tie off. Chenille stems and wires can simply be inserted through a hole and twisted around rather than trying to tie it off.

NOTE: For display purposes only I just glue the ribbon handles to the inside of the bag instead of hole punching and tying off.

15. Measure the outside bottom of the completed bag. Cut a piece of heavy duty/thick cardboard the same size and place down inside the bag. This supports the gift bag to help keep it from buckling on the bottom when an item is placed inside and the bag is carried by the handles. Use colorful cardboard or glue on a piece of attractive paper that has been cut to fit the cardboard. It's an extra surprise when the recipient peers in and notices the finishing touch.

16. Decorating the bag with accessories is optional. Leave it plain for a clean look or embellish it with items that accent the title of your book jacket.

NOTE: Did you make the gift bag too front heavy with assorted décor? If keeping for display and not gift giving then simply place an empty jelly jar inside the bag to keep it standing up straight.

Uses & Ideas - Not just for gift giving!

Storage:

cosmetics

cotton balls/tissue

hair clips/Scrunchies

medications/vitamins

craft supplies

cross stitch/knitting

photos

cards & letters/bills

CDs/DVDs

recipes

pet treats

people treats- your chocolate stash!

Keep counters clear; hang bags from cupboard door knobs or on walls. Great for teens who generally aren't keen on cleaning up after themselves. They can toss curlers, nail polish, and other items into the tall bags that hide the contents instead of open baskets that usually end up looking messy overflowing with stuff.

Also... .

Hang on a door knob and fill with potpourri (line gift bag with plastic bag first so essential oils don't bleed through).

Hang from inside front door knob to stash cell phone, bills to be mailed, notes, tickets, etc. for hectic mornings to grab on your way out.

Leave on the staircase and use in place of a basket to carry smaller items.

Make one for every step of the staircase. Line them from the bottom step all the way up to the top of the landing. Talk about a conversation piece!

Line them up across the top of a book case or place in between books on the shelf.

Use as a lunch bag. Another conversation piece!

Keep on your desk at work and fill with tissues, mints, snacks, tea bags, and hand lotion.

Display on dressing table and fill with scarves.

Fill with cough drops, medications, tissues, hand lotion and place on your bedside table.

Set on writing desk at home and fill with stamps and pretty writing paper or use as an unusual trash receptacle (line with plastic bag for easy emptying).

Hang on front door filled with silk flowers for a change from the usual wreath.

Store TV Guide and remote controls on the coffee table.

Use as a center piece. Place a vase filled with flowers down inside the bag.

Keep in your car for maps, tissues, note pads, sunglasses, or use as a trash receptacle- all for easy reach.

Keep next to the phone with a handy pad and pen stored inside.

Hang several bags on an empty wall and stuff with colorful wrapping tissue or silk flowers.

Fill a bag with toiletries and treats for a weekend guest and place on their bed or bathroom counter top. One idea is to buy two identical magazines. Make a gift bag out of one (using wall paper or other decorative paper for the sides and bottom) and place the other intact magazine down inside its twin gift bag along with the other treats.

Use as place cards. Set a small bag at each place setting. Attach a name tag with a tiny craft clothes peg or boutonniere pin. Use miniature book jackets, crop standard sized book jackets or magazine covers to make small bags. These make wonderful party favors.

Be creative! What can you come up with?

People ask me what I do with my own gift bags at home. I have a couple of cook book bags along the tops of my kitchen cupboards displayed with baskets and family kitchen heirlooms. One hangs from the utility room door knob to stash coupons. I keep a rose garden book jacket bag on the floor next to my antique vanity in the Victorian bedroom for a trash can. There's one on my bedside table for the remote controls, tissues, hand lotion, and reading glasses made out of a 1940's book jacket entitled "You Can Sleep Well". This one was very brittle so I had to cover it in clear plastic before sewing and gluing! Our master bathroom has a loft ceiling with skylight and plenty of empty wall space that seemed to go up and on forever so we hung a couple of large oil paintings and a tapestry in there to make it a little more cozy and reduce the acoustics. Then I used my favorite artist, John Singer Sargent, as a theme and created bags out of book jackets of his works and filled the rest of the space in between the paintings. I splurged on sumptuous satin ribbons and collected sparkling bits of old jewelry to enhance these particular bags. Our master bath is now jokingly referred to as "The Gallery"!