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Making Sturdy Cloth-bound Books
Using Heat-N-Bond Ultra

By Edward J. Dwyer and Evelyn Dwyer

Introduction: "Where's the fun? Is there any joy in writing?" These questions jumped into the mind of one of the authors while attending a conference on writing in secondary schools. The messages from the presenters seemed important and rich with good ideas. However, there seemed to be a lack of passion for the craft of writing while considerable attention, and rightly so, was paid to technical qualities. Further, there appeared to be virtually no interest in the physical elegance of the finished product. Whatever passion might have been seemed shrouded in the veil of "gaining competence".

We propose that the road to competence in writing is best paved with joyful experiences. Especially with regard to early experiences with writing in the elementary school. What we present below involves a set of activities we have done with individuals and groups ranging from second graders to university graduate students. Our poor powers to convey, through print, the joy in this activity we hope will not deter you from trying it. The activity is composing and designing a beautiful and sturdy cloth bound book.

We are not going to substantially address the writing of the book in this paper as that would be a substantial report in itself. Our purpose is to describe in detail the construction of the book. There are many ways to write stories. Regardless of the approach, the finished product, the pages that are bound, must represent the best

work of the writer. Consequently, careful preparation involving drafting, sharing, editing, and proofing must be undertaken. The results, of course, will vary greatly depending on the age and interests of the students. Making cloth bound books lends itself to the writers' workshop approach to teaching.

Making Books

Making beautiful cloth-bound books with individuals or an entire class is a delightful and academically sound experience. The children and adults in an entire school, from kindergarten through high school, can all partake. Materials needed are easily obtained. Further, gathering and preparing the materials can also be a highly worthwhile learning experience. Measurements must be precise. Measuring and determining amounts can be an enjoyable and productive mathematics lesson. Of course, the degree of support needed by the children depends on their level of capability.

Materials Needed

1. Heat-N-Bond (Ultra): This product is used to affix cloth to cloth or to other substances. Heat-N-Bond (Ultra), as far as the authors can determine, is by far the best commercially produced material for this activity. This paper is intended for a professional journal, all of which frown on product endorsements. On the other hand, the evident uniqueness of Heat-N-Bond (Ultra) for the purposes describe herein makes the favorably mention of this product unavoidable. It is readily available in craft and sewing stores as well as large department stores. A roll five yards long and 17 inches wide costs approximately $5.00.

2. Mat board: This heavyweight poster board can be found in art supply stores and some bookstores. It is also usually available in places that frame pictures. This costs approximately $5.00 for a piece 32 inches (82cm) by 40 inches (102cm). A piece of mat board this size yields about 49 pieces with the measurements of 4.5 inches by 5.5 inches (11.5cm by 14cm).

3. Heavy weight paper: This paper is generally used to cover reports. It comes in packages in a variety of colors in standard 8.5" x 11" sheets (22cm by 28cm). The designated weight is 110 lb. This usually comes in packages of 250 sheets and costs approximately $10.00. This product is available at all office supply stores.

4. Cloth: Bright patterns with interesting designs or figures often appeal to younger children but any kind of cloth will do. Smooth prints (cotton polyester blends) seem to work very well. Cloth costs about $4.00 per yard.

5. Plain white paper: This can be ordinary paper typically used with photo copy machines. This usually costs about $5.00 for a package containing 500 sheets.

6. A long arm stapler: This is a stapler with a wider range for stapling than the typical desk top stapler. The shorter reaching stapler can be used but is not as satisfactory. The book pages would have to be bent if a short arm stapler were used.

7. Clothes irons: Typically, one needs one clothes iron for every five people making a book. However, use of the irons can be staggered among a large group. Small travel irons are very efficient and take up little space in the bookmaking kit or on shelves. It is easy to borrow extra irons when needed. Also, many people readily

donate their older irons when asked. A new travel iron costs approximately $20.00.

Preparing Materials for Making Books

1. Cut Heat-N-Bond into pieces 8.5 inches by 11.25 inches (21.5cm by 28cm) One roll of Heat-N-Bond is five yards by 17 inches (465cm by 43.5cm) will yield 32 pieces. Measure 11.25 inches length wise using a pattern. A cut file folder works well for making a pattern. Cut at the 11.25 inch mark and then fold the piece in half and cut. This produces two 11.25 inch x 8.5 inch pieces. There are 15 feet in five yards and also 180 inches in five yards (15 x 12 = 180). When 180 inches is divided by 11.25 the result is 16. Since two pieces can be made from one cut, there are 32 pieces per roll.

A shorter piece of Heat-N-Bond is also needed. Cut pieces of Heat-N-Bond 8.5 inches by 5 inches (21.5cm by 12.5cm). Measure 5 inches and draw a line vertically on the Heat-N-Bond. Cut the section that is now 5 inches by 17 inches. A pattern made from a file folder can be helpful. Fold it in half lengthwise and cut. This yields two 8.5 by 5 inches pieces. One roll will produce 72 pieces. (Divide 180 by 5 and this is 36. Since two of the shorter Heat-N-Bond pieces can be made from each piece, you can produce 72 shorter pieces (2 x 36 = 72).

One longer and one shorter piece is needed for each book. The two pieces of Heat-N-Bond required to make a book costs approximately 25 cents.

2. Cut the mat board into 4.5 inch by 5.5 inch pieces. Large sheets of mat board are difficult to cut using a typical paper cutter. Printing shops have heavy duty electronically powered cutters that work

very well and efficiently cut the mat board precisely as directed. The two pieces needed to make the book cover will cost about nine cents each.

3. Cut the heavy weight paper (8.5" by five inches) using a standard paper cutter or have it professionally cut in a print shop. One package of 250 sheets will yield 500 pieces. This will cost about two cents per book.

4. Cut the cloth into pieces nine inches by 12 inches (23cm by 31cm). Cloth is usually sold by the yard with a width of 45 inches. (90cm by 113cm). A typical yard of cloth will yield 15 pieces. The 45 inch width yields five nine inch cuts while the 36 inch side yields three 12 inch (31cm) cuts. Therefore, 5 x 3 =15.

It is important to note, however, that the pattern flow might favor one direction. Adjust the pattern so that the flow of the pattern favors the 12 inch direction. This will provide a horizontal view of the figures on the pattern when the book is in its normal position. With most patterns, the direction of the cut makes no difference.

The cloth will cost about 30 cents per book. However, less expensive cloth is often available. The quality of the cloth is very important since it covers the book and scrimping when purchasing the cloth is not certainly not encouraged.

5. Cut the plain white paper into 8.5 inch by 5 inch (22cm x 13cm) pieces. A standard paper cutter will do but using an electronically powered paper cutter produces even better results.

Assembling the Book

Step 1. Lay the cloth with the printed side down on a hard and clean surface.

Step 2. Place the large (11.25" by 8.5 inch) piece of Heat-N-Bond, paper side up, as the manufacturer directs, on top of the cloth. Leave a border of cloth around the Heat-N-Bond.

Step 3. Using a warm clothes iron, press the Heat-N-Bond and lift the paper off. This leaves the adhesive on the cloth.

Step 4. Place two 4.5 inch by 5.5 inch pieces of mat board on the cloth equidistant from the top and bottom and sides. Be sure to leave a space approximately one-half inch between the pieces of mat board. This space is needed so the finished book will close properly. When the mat board is appropriately placed, gently press the mat board with your hand to keep it from sliding.

Step 5. Fold over one of the corners of the cloth and place it at a right angle on the corner of the mat board and press it with the iron. Make all folds tight, not leaving excess cloth. Using the warm iron, gently press the cloth onto the mat board. The heat of the iron will cause the Heat-N-Bond to affix the cloth to the cardboard. Repeat this procedure until all four corners are affixed to the mat board. Then, fold down and press the sides and ends of the cloth. The book cover is now complete!

Plain fabric can be used and then fabric paint can be used to design a cover. Also, Heat-N-Bond can be cut into the shape of a piece of fabric to affix that fabric to the cover.

Photos of a personal nature or selected from a magazine or other source can be put on the cover. Drawings done with crayons, colored pencils, or markers can also be used. We use a glue stick to

tack the picture to a paper frame made of a piece of the heavy weight paper used for the backing page. The frame is then centered and then tacked to the cloth cover using the glue stick. The frame is not necessary but adds a nice touch.

We then affix the picture to the cover with a piece of clear laminating film. We leave about a half inch border around the laminating film. We use pieces cut from individual laminating sheets. These are sold in boxes of 50 for around $10.00 in office supply and discount warehouse stores. There might well be other sources but we found those made by a company called C-Line work very well. The dimensions of each sheet are nine inches by 12 inches (23cm by 30cm). These laminating sheets require no heat or tools to apply. The cost for laminating a picture on the cover of a book would be about two cents.

Step 6. Take approximately six pieces of plain white paper (5 inches by 8.5 inches) and fold them crisply in the middle. This produces a booklet of 24 pages.

Step 7. Crisply fold the heavier (8.5 inch by 5 inch) cover stock paper in half. Since this piece of paper is heavier, it is better to fold it separately to ensure a crisp fold. Then place this piece with the six pages already folded. This provides the backing page for the book.

Step 8. Slide the pages, which now includes the backing page, into the long arm stapler and staple three times along the fold.

Step 9. Take the cover, completed earlier, and centrally place the shorter (8.5 inches by 8 inches) piece of Heat-N-Bond on the book cover. Be sure equal amount of the Heat-N-Bond are on either side of the center fold in the book cover. As above, heat and remove the

paper.

Step 10. Place one side of the backing sheet directly over the Heat-N-Bond and iron. It is advisable to put a plain piece of white copier or other plain paper over the backing page. This prevents the possibility of scorch marks or residue from the iron from marring the backing page. When one side the backing page is affixed, do the other side the same way. If needed, close the book and iron it from the outside. If mistakes are made during this final assembly process or later when the book is being written, simply rip out the pages and start over. The book cover is reusable.

It is usually preferable to prepare the pages before assembling the book. If errors are made, the pages can be thrown away. However, some children like to prepare cloth bound books to be used as journals and/or diaries.

The procedures described above can be easily followed and produce wonderful, long-lasting books. Further, the cost is very reasonable, about 65 cents per book. Costs can be further reduced through contributions from individual parents and organizations such as the parent teacher organization, school supply funds, and local businesses.

The Bookmaking Kit

Keep a substantial supply of materials on hand. A portable file tote box with the approximate dimensions of 11.25 inches by 17.5 inches (30cm by 44cm) labeled "Bookmaking Materials" can be very useful. Use hanging file folders in alphabetical order with the following labels or something similar: Backing Page, Bookbacks, Cloth, Directions, Ht-N-Bond Large, Heat-N-Bond Small, Lamin. Film, Pages,

Patterns, and Pict. Frames. We also include a travel iron in the kit and an extra folder which holds at least two glue sticks, a sharp scissors, and a ruler. We bring a long arm stapler, extra irons, and even a power strip if the need for these items seems likely. As in all adventures, planning is of paramount success, so we consult with the people with whom we'll be working.

The instructor needs only confirm that a full set of materials is in the box to feel confident about beginning. Further, the tote box can be easily transported. In addition to the tote box, keep a substantial supply of materials cut to specifications on hand. This makes it easy to engage in bookmaking at almost any time and to replenish the bookmaking kit.

The Bookmaking Program

Personally crafted cloth-bound books can become treasures in the classroom and for years to come for the people, including teachers, who make them. This is an exciting and academically productive learning enterprise, one you will surely continue in a regular bookmaking program once you've experienced it. Children can make several books and display them during a young author's conference in your classroom. Parents and other students can be invited to talk with authors. Further, books for the class and school libraries can be produced. Even "big books" can be made given the Heat-N-Bond (Ultra) dimensions (17 inches by five yards). For books such as "big books" that are likely to get substantial ware, there is an easily applied Heat-N-Bond vinyl covering to add further durability to classroom books.

Making cloth bound books is one of the most enjoyable and academically profitable activities one can undertake in the classroom. Making a cloth bound book in this manner can be a wonderful cooperative learning activity and one that encourages critical thinking. For example, the materials and the directions presented above could be given to a trio of students and they could follow the directions and produce a book on their own. Also, this activity works very well across grades. For example, fifth graders can provide support, especially with the ironing, for second graders.

Give making cloth bound books a try and you will see that this is a wonderful experience for all involved, including classroom teachers, whose own books will grace the classroom along with those of their students. Who knows, you might help launch another Jerry Spinelli or Cynthia Rylant!

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