



Handicraft

For this handicraft lesson, we will be making our own “ship’s log” by binding our own journal! Stain paper with tea, then sew it into a leather cover for a vintage look to emulate the ship’s logs of the famous explorers of times gone by!

And the best part? You can use it afterwards for nature studies, a sketchbook, copywork, or whatever suits you best!

“I’ve filled him with the Spirit of God, giving him skill and know-how and expertise in every kind of craft to create designs ... he’s an all-around craftsman.”

~ Exodus 31:3-5

Handicraft Lesson

Hand-Sewn Journal



During the Age of Exploration, journals were an essential tool for explorers, sailors, and mapmakers. They kept a “ship’s log” of their discoveries, observations, and sketches from their travels. In this handicraft, students will create their own explorer’s journal by aging paper with tea and sewing it into a simple leather cover by hand.

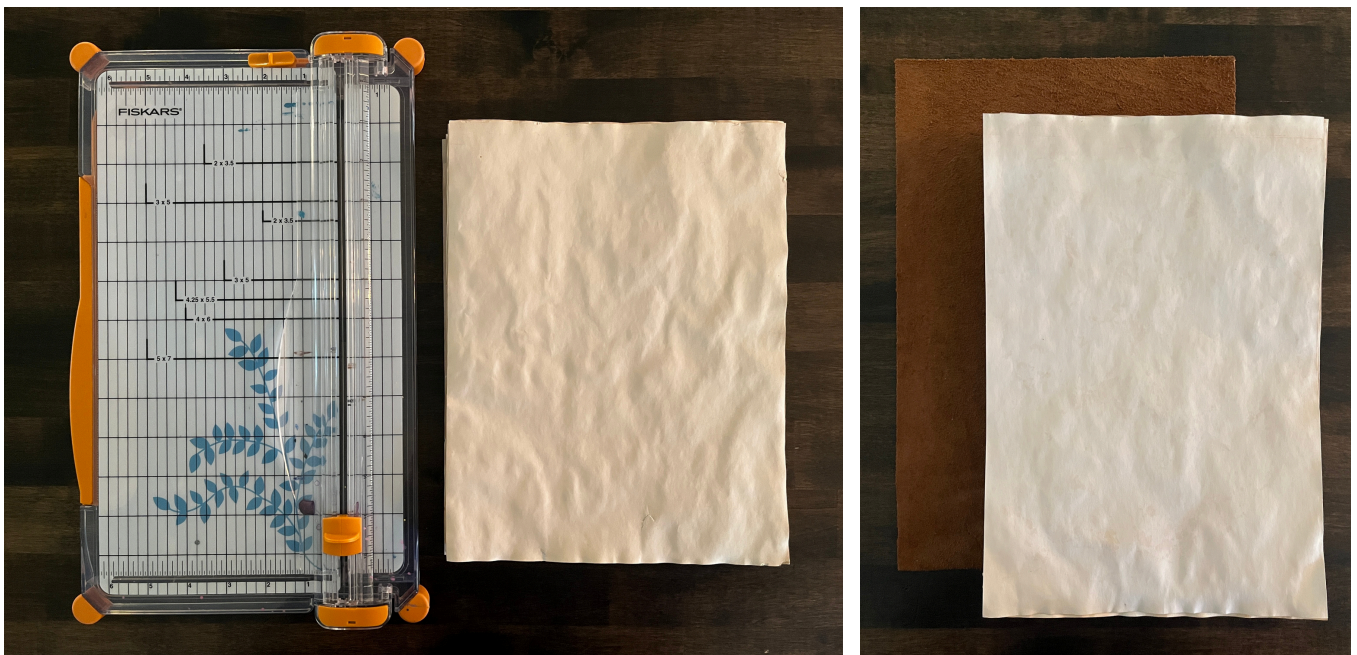
Supplies Needed

- 20 sheets copy paper
- Brewed tea (for aging the paper)
- Shallow tray or pan
- Oven and baking sheet
- Paper towels
- Paper cutter or straight cutter
- Needle
- Strong thread or waxed thread
- Piece of leather (large enough for a journal cover)
- Awl, thick needle, or push pin (for poking holes)
- Pencil or ruler (for marking hole placement)
- Scissors



To age the paper, brew a strong batch of tea and pour it into a shallow tray or cookie tray. Submerge the sheets of paper in the tea so they absorb the color. (This will give the pages an old, weathered appearance, similar to historical journals.) Carefully remove the tea-soaked pages and place them on a baking sheet. Bake them in an oven at 225 degrees for about 5-7 minutes until they are completely dry. The pages will be warped and wrinkled, but can be smoothed out with an iron set at its lowest heat, or placed under a heavy book overnight.

Once the paper is dry, use a straight paper cutter to trim the sheets to the desired size for your journal. To create an 8x5 journal, I cut off roughly 1 inch from the long end and $\frac{1}{2}$ inch from the short end, making the pages 8x10.





Divide the pages into two stacks of 10 sheets each. Fold each stack in half carefully to create two small booklets. These folded groups of pages are called **signatures**.

Mark the sewing holes by laying the folded signature flat with the fold facing up. Using a ruler, mark three evenly spaced dots along the fold: one in the center, one about 1 inch from the top, and one about 1 inch from the bottom. (Alternatively, if you want to make smaller stitches, you can mark five evenly spaced dots.) Secure the pages with a clip to hold them in place.

Using an awl, push pin, or thick needle, carefully poke holes through all the pages at the marked spots. Make sure the holes go straight through the fold so the stitching will line up neatly.

Cut a piece of thread about 2-3 times the height of the journal. Thread the needle and tie a knot at one end.

Begin with the bottom hole. Push the needle from the inside of the signature to the outside, leaving the knot **inside** the fold. Next, insert the needle back into the next hole up, moving from the outside of the fold to the inside. Pull the thread snug, but not so tight that the paper tears. Push the needle through the next hole up, and continue until you reach the top-most hole.

Now, weave the thread back through the holes, going the opposite direction from each initial stitch. The result should have stitches on the outside and inside of the signature. Inside the fold, you should now see both ends of the thread. Tie a firm knot and trim any excess thread.

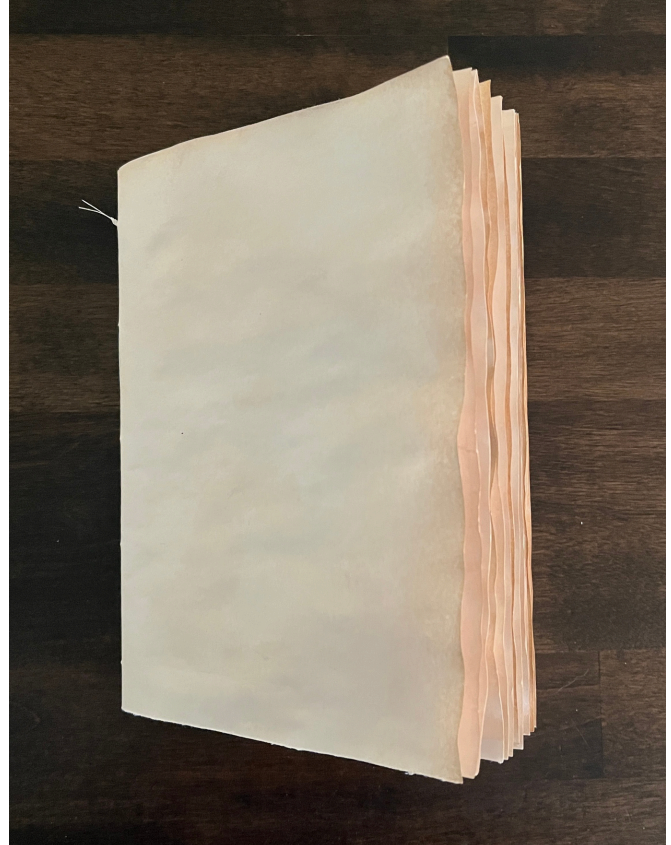
Take your second stack of folded pages and carefully line it up with the first signature so the folds sit together. (Make sure the pages open in the same direction.) Using the holes from the first signature as a guide, mark the matching holes on the fold of the second signature. Use an awl or push pin to poke holes through the second signature at the marked spots.

Fold both signatures so that the spines and holes line up. Place the first sewn signature underneath and the second (unsewn) signature on top.

Insert the needle through the **inside** of the bottom hole of the **second** signature. Wrap the thread around the stitch on the first signature, then insert the needle back into the bottom hole. Push the needle through the second hole up. Weave the needle underneath the lower and upper stitches coming out of the second hole in the **first** signature, then push it back through the second hole of the **second** signature.

Repeat the process through the remaining holes until you reach the top, then tie off the ends. For a visual tutorial of this process, you can also watch [this video](#).

After sewing the signatures, use the paper cutter or a box knife to trim the outer edges so all the pages are even and neat.



Cut the leather to size—large enough to wrap around the folded signatures. Fold the leather around the paper to check the size and placement.

Use a pencil or ruler to mark where the holes from the signatures line up on the leather. Then use an awl, thick needle, or push pin to poke holes through the leather in those spots.

Place the paper signatures inside the leather cover and sew through the holes, attaching the signatures to the leather the same way you attached the second signature to the first. Pull the stitches snug and tie off the thread securely.

Once the sewing is complete, your handmade leather journal is ready to use. Students can fill it with maps, sketches, nature observations, or notes—just like the explorers of the Age of Exploration!

