



James Castle House Lesson Plan: Found Paints

In this for-the-whole family art activity, you will experiment with James Castle's technique for making colorful artworks from household items.

James Castle was well known for his use of found and homemade materials. This means he would collect discarded and household items to create art. To make his beautiful color works, Castle would leach the pigment from crepe paper or wrapping paper to create rich dyes. He would then apply these colors to paper whose surface he had roughed up to increase absorbency.

Materials

- Found paper or cardboard
- Found materials for paints (see suggestions below)
- Small sticks and/or scraps of fabric
- Small bowls or cups
- Pencil
- Water
- Flour
- Cornstarch

Activity

1. Collect the Materials
 - Go on a scavenger hunt around your home, yard, or neighborhood to find materials that could be made into paints or used as your canvas.
 - Look through your recycling bin for cardboard. Empty out a backpack to find some scrap paper or long forgotten homework. These will make great canvases for your art!
 - There are many materials that can be used to make paints or dyes. Consider using crepe paper, colored napkins, grass, soil, fruit or vegetable peels, flower petals, Jell-O mix, and colorful spices like turmeric, cinnamon, or paprika.
 - Don't forget your "paintbrushes"! Collect small sticks, strips of scrap fabric, or clean old socks.
2. Make the Paints
 - Tear colorful paper products into small pieces. Soak these in a cup filled with an inch of water for 5- 10 minutes.
 - Plant materials will need to be gently simmered in ¼ Cup to 1 Cup of water on the stove for 30 minutes to an hour. Cool completely and strain before use.
 - Spice or soil paints can be made by mixing 1 Cup water, ¼ Cup flour, and 4 teaspoon cornstarch together and then divide into small bowls. Whisk in 1 tablespoon of desired spice or soil into each bowl.
 - All homemade paints will apply similarly to watercolors.
3. Prepare the Paper Surfaces
 - Dip or spritz your found cardboard and paper with water until slightly damp, but not soggy.
 - Use a stick, rock, or butter knife to gently rough up the surface of your cardboard. For paper, gently rub a single damp sheet between hands to give the surface a little tooth.
 - Let cardboard and paper dry completely before applying paint. Use a hairdryer to speed up the drying process.
4. Paint!
 - This can be a messy activity, so work outside or cover indoor surfaces before you begin painting.
 - Lightly sketch your drawing on your found cardboard or paper. Many of Castle's color works were of houses or outdoor landscapes, but you can draw whatever you want!
 - Dip your found "paintbrushes" into your various homemade paints and then press the color into your drawing.
 - Allow your artwork to dry completely before displaying..

