Norton Simon Museum

Art-Making Activity: Make a Sketchbook Journal

For ages 10 and up

Van Gogh wrote hundreds of letters to his friends and family that discussed his emotions, beliefs and the paintings that he was working on. Many of these letters also included sketches. In a letter to his brother Theo, he included a sketch of *Head of a Peasant Woman in a White Bonnet* (Sien de Groot), a painting which doubled as a study for his first masterpiece, *The Potato Eaters*. Years later, he wrote three times to his brother and sister about *The Mulberry Tree*, a painting that he felt was the best of its kind.

Make a sketchbook journal and chronicle your days with writings and sketches. Use the prompts at the end of these instructions to help you get started.
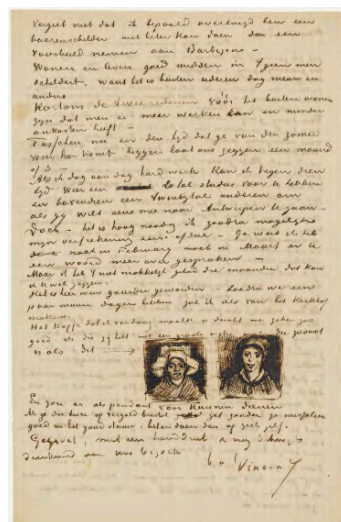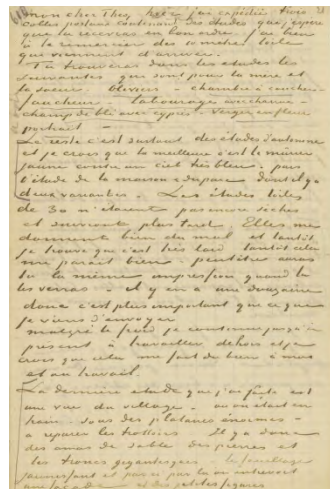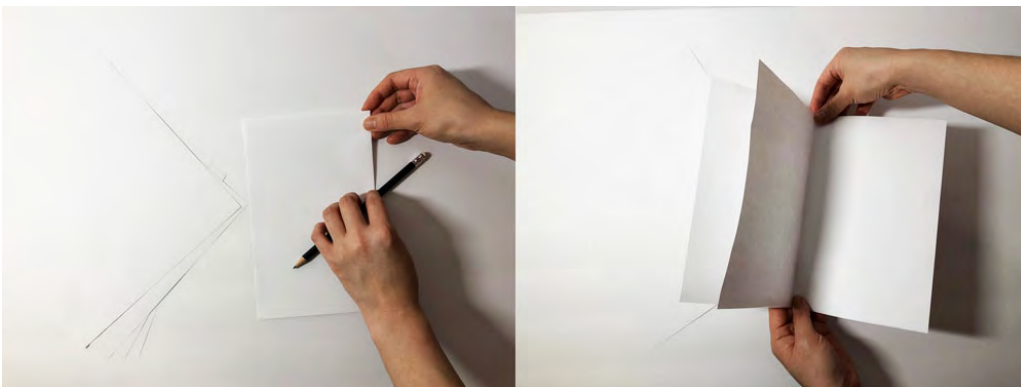
Materials:

- Cardstock or thick paper (1 sheet of 9" x 12" trimmed to 8 ½" x 11 ½")
- White paper (5 pieces, 8 ½" x 11")
- Scissors
- String
- Needle
- Awl (or other sharp tool to poke holes)
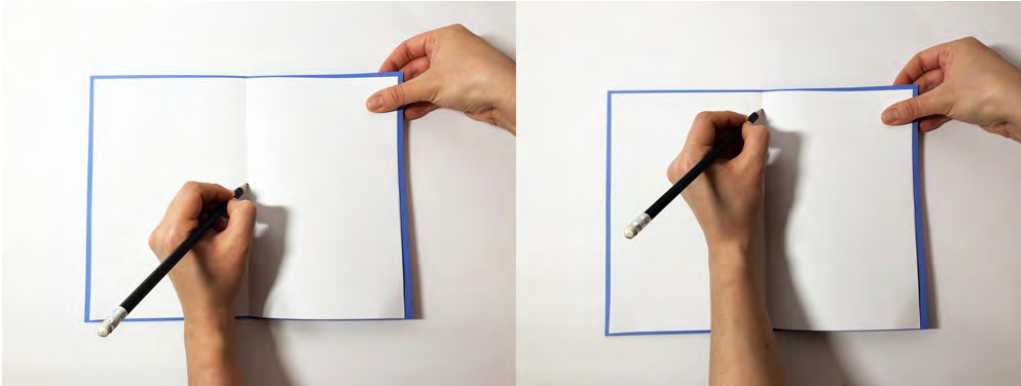- Collage papers
- Glue
- Tape
- Pencil

Steps:

Fold your cardstock in half to make the cover of your sketchbook journal. You can use a pencil to sharpen the crease.


Fold your white pieces of paper in half, one at a time. Nest each folded piece into the other to make the pages of your sketchbook journal.

Unfold your cover and center your pages inside the cover. Using a pencil, make a dot in the middle of the page crease. Make another dot about a half an inch from the top and about a half an inch from the bottom.


Using an awl or other sharp tool (you can also use a needle to poke through each page and cover), poke a hole through all the pages and the cover where you marked with the dots (middle, top and bottom of the crease).
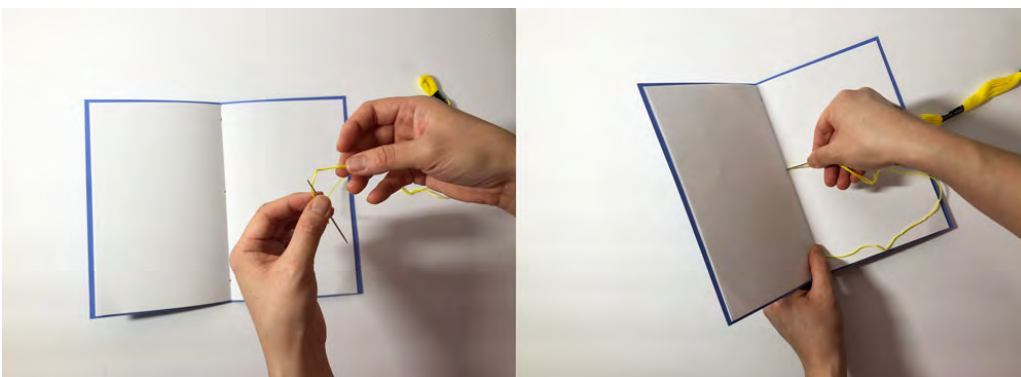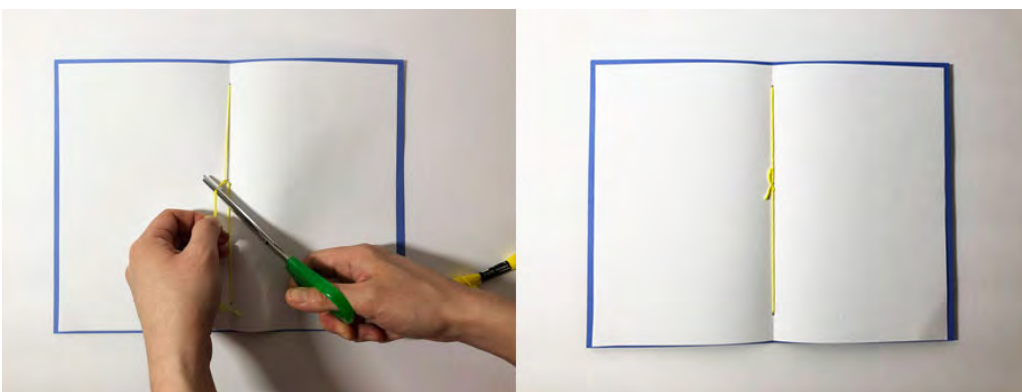

Put your string through your needle and poke the needle and string into the middle hole, leaving out about a few inches of string.
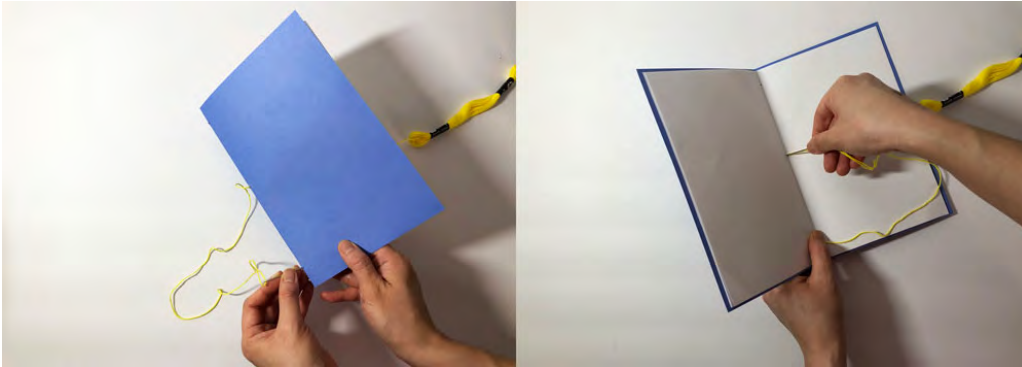
From the outer middle hole, string through the outer bottom hole and back in through the middle hole.
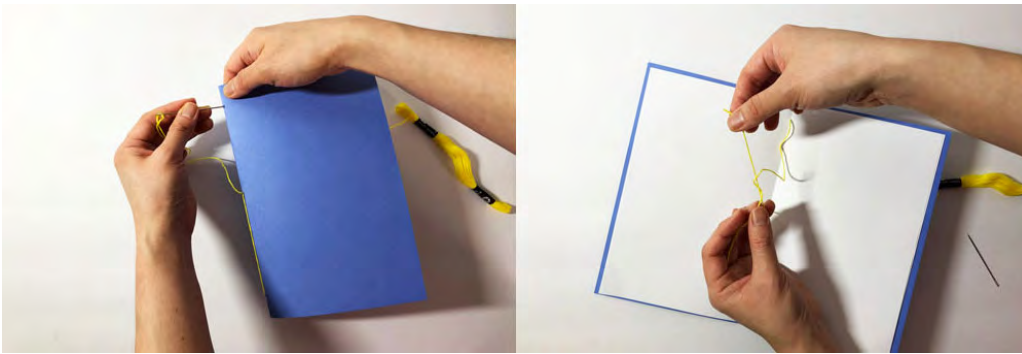
String through the outer top hole and tie the two ends inside your journal, making sure the string is taut.

Cut off the extra string.

Personalize your cover with collage, markers and more!

Below are prompts that can help you get started on your journal. Write and/or sketch your thoughts.

- What is the most memorable thing that has happened recently?
- What are you feeling right now?
- What do you need right now?
- What challenges are you facing? What are some ways to help overcome these challenges?
- What do you notice about yourself that is different from a few years ago?
- What is something that you are looking forward to?
- What gives you hope?
- What are some things that you are grateful for, big or small?
- When do you feel your best? What are you doing? Where are you?
- Write a letter to your future self about what you are experiencing right now.
- Describe a person that inspires you and why.
- Describe a time when someone complimented you. How did it feel?
- Describe something that you're reading, listening to or watching that inspires you.
- Describe a place that makes you feel happy and safe.
- Describe your perfect day. Be specific.
- Finish this sentence and keep going: I am…
- Finish this sentence and keep going: We are…
- Share some of these prompts with a friend and exchange thoughts as a way to get to better understand each other.