Artist Trading Card Lesson Plan
a free gift for librarians!

cards by Elaine Luther

Why artist trading cards?

There's no wrong way to make an artist trading card (ATC). They're so small, it's easy to start and easy to finish. Even people who don't think of themselves as creative can do this! It's safe and it's social, because at the end of the class, students trade with each other!

Need a last minute art program at your library? Here's a staff-run program you can run at a very low cost, it's even possible to run it using all items that you already have on-hand in the library. It's eco-friendly and fun!

Workshop Description you can use:

Tiny Traders – Artist Trading Cards
Artist Trading Cards are small art – the size of a playing card – so they're a great way to try out lots of different types of art making. In this class we'll try using collage, stencils, stickers, rubber stamping, direct drawing and more. Make enough to keep, more to trade.

MATERIALS:
This class can be run almost entirely on scraps! There's a good chance you could run it entirely on supplies you already have on hand in the library!

What to buy:
ream of white card stock
playing cards from the dollar store*
black construction paper or other black paper, could be scrapbooking paper or card stock
thread
yarn

*sometimes dollar stores have playing cards that are from casinos and have been "clipped" (casinos only use a deck of cards once). These are acceptable for using as a base for cards, but they're a bit difficult to trace for using as a template. Something to be aware of.

What to gather:
permanent markers
regular markers
crayons
colored pencils, specifically black and white
scissors
glue sticks
stickers
labels
newspaper
phone books
magazines
cancelled library books
hole punches in a variety of shapes and sizes
rubber stamps and stamp pads
baby wipes to clean the rubber stamps
Scotch tape
masking tape (optional)

Optional:
It's not necessary to buy pre-cut ATCs, but they are available at a reasonable price from Oriental Trading, 25 for $3.10.

http://www.orientaltrading.com/canvas-home-basics-kraft-paper-artist-trading-cards-a2-13658865.fltr

I don't provide pre-cut blank cards to my students because I want to make sure they know how to do this art project on their own at home.

Students can use actual playing cards from the dollar store to trace their own blank cards to cut out of card stock, or even cereal boxes.

One more option is that if your library has a Silhouette Cameo or Curio computer controlled cutting machine, you could use the machine to cut out cards in advance.

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Background to share with students:

Swiss artist M.Vänçi Stirnemann is credited with coming up with the idea of ATCs in 1997. He established the two rules of ATCs:

They have to be the size of a playing card, 2.5" x 3.5", and they must not be sold, only traded.

More background information is available here: http://www.artist-trading-cards.ch

Lesson Plan:

What to say: Ask students, "Who has heard of Artist Trading Cards?" If anyone has heard of ATCs, you can ask follow up questions, such as what can they tell us about them? or where did they make them before?

Tell the students that there are only two rules with Artist Trading Cards: the size (2.5" x 3.5") and that they can't be sold, only traded.

In my experience, kids are reluctant to trade their cards, I encourage them to make some to keep and some to trade.

Let the students know that we're going to make ATCs in today's workshop and you'll be giving them some challenges, or a creative constraint.

A creative constraint is a limit that actually helps you think of more ideas. If someone says, "draw something," you're likely to come up blank. But if someone says, "draw a gray animal," now you're thinking of elephants and rhinos and mice and hippos!

Artist trading cards themselves are a constraint, because of the size limit.

Each creative constraint, or challenge is a station in the workshop.

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The first challenge is the black and white challenge. This seems limiting at first, kids may protest. But once they get started, they'll see how many, many variations there are with just this challenge.

They can use white paper and write on it with black ink or pencil. They can use black paper and write on it with white colored pencil.

College elements for this station are newspaper, library books that have been cancelled, other books (you could ask Half Price books, they donate books to not-for-profit organizations), phone books, rejected print outs from the computer and rejected photocopies from the photocopier, if these don't contain any sensitive information.

Adults might also look through their bags or purses for shopping receipts, library receipts, old movie tickets, shopping lists, un-used coupons and similar ephemera.

Have scissors available, and also encourage students to tear paper for an interesting edge.

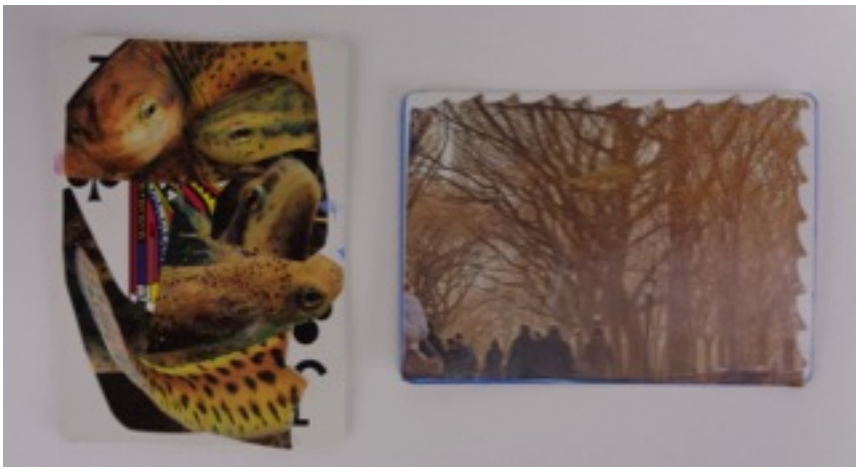
Show students how to work directly on a playing card (requires permanent marker if writing directly on cards), or how to trace a playing card onto card stock (with pencil) and then cut out the card. I usually collage directly onto a playing card, but any method is fine.

Below is a list of additional challenges or stations.

How to set up the room:

One way to set up the room is to have different stations, each one with different supplies on it. Students move from one station to the next as they complete each one. I find that children are happy to move from station to station, adults tend to want to stay where they are.

An alternative to stations is to present the different challenges or themes, sequentially. As the group comes to a stopping point on the first challenge, having exhausted all the possibilities, you present the next challenge and bring out a tray with all the supplies for that challenge.



cards by students

Challenges:

1. **Use only elements of faces from magazines**. Students create collages by cutting out elements of faces from magazines. It's fun to create crazy new faces from pieces that are all different sizes, or an entirely new image, that's not a face.

Variation: Same idea, different image. Tell students to use only images of food. Have lots of cooking magazines on hand! Or only images of plants.

2. **Thread/yarn and hole punch challenge**. Use thread or yarn to create a design by wrapping the card. To establish the starting point, one method is to cut a slit in the card, put the thread through, tape it down, and then begin wrapping. Another way is to punch one hole or multiple holes in the card and then thread the thread through the hole(s) to create a pattern.

One thing to be careful of is to not wrap so tightly that the card becomes warped. This is a great way to use up small bits of yarn from other programs.

How does the look of the card change depending on the background used on the card? Using one color of thread or yarn vs. many colors? This simple idea of card, thread and holes can have endless variations.

3. **Drawing station**. Not everyone likes to draw, but for those who love it, this station will be a favorite. All you need here is white card stock, playing cards and pencils to trace out the shape, and a choice of drawing implements.

Colored pencils and markers are good choices. I usually let people free draw, but if you'd like to prepare something for kids who can't think of what to draw, the "Who/ What/Where" game is a favorite.

To make the game, you need a canister, such as a small oatmeal container, and strips of paper in three colors. One one color, you write various nouns, that's the who. On the second color, you write an activity, and on the third color, you write a setting.

Kids draw three strips, one in each color and that tells them what to draw. An example of what they might see on their strips: "three cacti skiing in the jungle." The more absurd, the more they like it!

Source, and more details on Who/What/Where:
http://www.incredibleart.org/lessons/middle/freetime.htm

For adults. For adults who might not be confident at drawing, you can help them ease into and feel comfortable by providing Dover copyright-free books and tracing paper. They can trace pictures onto tracing paper and add those drawings to their ATCs.

4. **Rubber stamping station**. The creative constraint here can be that you only allow one color of ink, this makes clean up much easier and eliminates the problem of ink pads contaminated with other colors of ink.

For adults, you can allow more than one color of ink. Have baby wipes available, repeatedly stamping the stamp on a baby wipe cleans off the ink, allowing the stamp to be used with a new color of ink.

Three or four stations is a good amount for a workshop, if you have more, students may rush to get through to all the stations. If your library doesn't have rubber stamps, alternate ideas include: using stencils, or using tissue paper to explore issues of transparency.

cards by students

Want more ideas?

Here's a list of 400 (!) theme ideas:

http://gomakesomething.com/ht/thebasics/theme-ideas

Page 2 of this pdf has a list of 9 challenges (good for teens or adults) for ideas on making ATCs:

http://www.edu.uwo.ca/ask/art/lp/extra-atc.pdf

(It also has a nice, concise history of ATCs)

Lots of great ideas for projects for kids on this blog:

http://artprojectsforkids.org/category/view-by-theme/art-trading-cards

My favorite book about ATCs:

Artist Trading Card Workshop by Bernie Berlin

Do you know I do art workshops and public engagement art projects for libraries?

See pictures and learn more, here: ElaineLutherArt.com/libraryprograms

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