AT HOME ART MUSEUM ADVENTURE

BAM Permanent Collection Spotlight

James Castle
Idaho Artist | 1899-1977

AN ACTIVITY GUIDE
James Castle was a genius in art. He learned how to draw without anyone teaching him. He made sense of the world around him by creating art. Inspired by what he saw during his everyday experiences, he made complex drawings and constructions. Even though James Castle could not hear, and he could not speak, this didn’t stop him from making art. His artwork shows what is possible with a unique perspective and a creative drive.

Most of us draw when we are young. Then we learn to read and write, add and subtract, etc. Just as writers tell us with words and mathematicians with numbers, artists, such as James, use pictures to communicate about their world.

James used found materials and fashioned his own art tools and media. He rejected commercial art supplies offered to him. Instead he used sharpened sticks for pencils and soot mixed with saliva for graphite.

**Ask**

- Why do you think communication is important?
- How would you communicate if you could not hear what people were saying or if you could not talk?
- Do you think you would tell about your world by making art like James Castle did? If so, what kind of art would you make?
- Can you think of anyone who taught themselves something interesting without any lessons or help? (playing a musical instrument, learning a sport, riding a bicycle, etc.)
- Have you ever made anything from scraps of paper or cardboard found around your house? **Give it a try at home with the activities on pages 4 and 5.**
This is a page from one of James Castle’s books. The cover is made from a cracker box. James Castle made books out of all kinds of materials and even took old books apart and put them back together in his own way. He made his own picture stories.

**Ask**

- How many drawings do you see on the page?
- Has the artist included any words?
- James Castle couldn’t read or write. Why do you think he would want to make books?
- Can you tell what the people in the drawings are doing?
- If you could “read” this story that James Castle has “written” with pictures, what do you think the story would be?

MAKE-IT ACTIVITY: Paper Bag Book

Materials Needed

- One brown paper grocery bag
- Scissors
- Glue Stick

Step 1
Carefully take the bag apart along its seam and lay it out on the table in front of you.

Step 2
Trim off the bottom so that you have a long rectangular sheet left.

Step 3
Fold the paper in half long-ways. Crease well and then unfold. Fold the paper in half the other direction. Crease well. Do not unfold.

Step 4
Fold back one side as shown in the figure to the left. Place the corners together and crease well. Repeat with the other side.

Step 5
Unfold the last two folds. Holding the folded side in your hand, cut along the center line until you reach the first vertical fold.

Step 6
Open the paper so that eight sections are showing. Fold the page in half longways. (If there are pictures or words on the paper they should be on the inside.)

Step 7
Holding on to each side, gently push the ends together to form the pages of the book.

Step 8
Fold the front and back covers around so that the corners meet. Crease well. You should have 6 pages inside for writing and artwork.

Finish book by gluing or sewing the pages together.

Fill the pages of your book with drawings that tell your story.
See the following page for instructions on how to make your own autobiographical portrait page in the style of James Castle.

Boise Art Museum       670 Julia Davis Dr.       Boise, ID 83702       boiseartmuseum.org
MAKE-IT ACTIVITY: Photo Album Page

Materials Needed

- Paper Bag Book
  (or other cast-off paper material such as cardboard or a brown paper bag)
- Pencil or charcoal pencil
- Paper towels or tissues
- Hair spray in an aerosol can

Use cast-off or recycled materials to make your own artwork about the people and places in your life. What are some things that make the people in your life special? How do you recognize them? What are some things that stand out about the places in your life? Think about these details as you create your own photo album page in the style of James Castle.

Remember: James Castle didn’t use words, so draw pictures of your classmates, friends, or family to create your own visual story. What message do you want to communicate about the important people in your life?

Instructions

Step 1
Orient your book page or piece of paper so that it is either horizontal or vertical.

Step 2
Start at the top, left-hand side (for right-handed people) or the top, right-hand side (for left-handed people), to keep from smudging the charcoal.

Step 3
Begin by drawing a sequence of squares or ovals, similar to a photo album or school year-book page.

Step 4
Then fill the squares or ovals with faces or other images.

Step 5
Use only pictures to communicate about the important people and things in your life.

Step 6
When you are finished with your drawings, carefully shake the extra charcoal dust into a garbage can. (Do not blow on your drawing or it could disappear.)

Step 7
Spray the drawing with hair spray in an aerosol can to help fix the charcoal to the cardboard.