

*Redecorating the Forest* by Kinsey and Cheryl Prestia, USA

We had never made a tactile book before and so it represented quite a few learning opportunities. Incorporating different textures, interesting recognisable shapes and a story line was complicated enough, but sewing all of these things into a safe book was daunting.

A combination of things led to our choice of subject. Kinsey was studying bats and had been to a science camp that had been monitoring the results of a major fire on the local wild life. I work for a fire department that had a public document about the after effects of fires. Together we created our little story.

We decided to use recycled materials where possible and we wanted to have nature represented in the book we created. Most of our fabric was scrap. The page with the lightning bolt was an engineering obsession. We took apart a small toy from the dollar store for the light effect and use old water bottles inside the page so that it made the crackling sound of lightening when the page was bent. I searched the property where I work for just the right pine cones to cut in half; the trees are real pine twigs lovingly sanded down to create a flat side.

The fire engine is an old sweatshirt that was accessorised by recycled spools, buttons and wire. The nozzle is an actual piece of a fire engine, but it has a totally different and unknown purpose when used properly. The fire hose was a piece of scrap wire and an old nut. The bat was made from an old pair of pants.

Everything was secured with floral wire we found at a thrift store. Assembling the book was difficult until we determined that we needed two sheets of canvas for each page. After that it was challenging to figure out the process for setting up the text area and sewing the book together (as neatly as possible!). Our design for binding the book would have been more successful if we had staggered the seams more, but we only learned that after the work was too far along.

With our eyes closed, we felt each page in the hope that we were making the book as readable as possible. The story went through about ten evolutions. We started with a complicated book with too many pages and way too many words. The reference articles on the TBAG website were such a welcome resource. We knew we had to simplify the book to make it useful. It made us think.

We loved this project! We spent hours thinking and visualizing what we hoped would be readable and interesting. We learned so much. Being one of the winners was exciting. My daughter loved the trophy and the certificate with the braille writing. But mostly, we were so happy that the book would actually be enjoyed by a child somewhere. After all, that is the real reason we participated in the project.