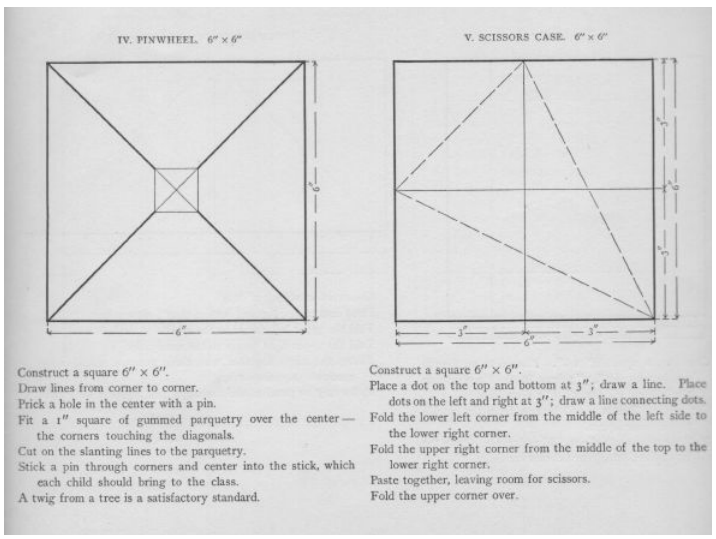
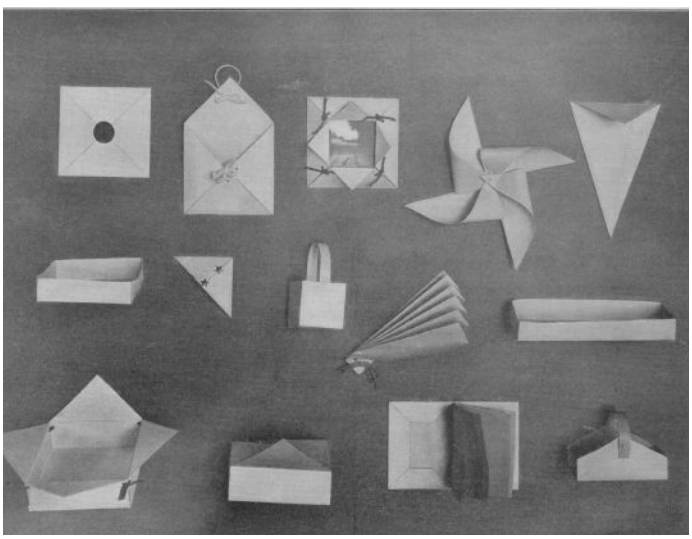
Paper Sloyd

BY DOUG STOWE





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At left, two of the 45 models for the three primary grades. At right, the first year projects. Models were selected to be useful and fun and presented in order of difficulty (upper left to lower right) to match the child's growing abilities. Advanced students were encouraged to create designs of their own.

Paper Sloyd for the Primary Grades (Ginn & Company, 1905) was written by Ednah Anne Rich, principal of the Anna S. C. Blake Manual Training School and the Supervisor of Manual Training Public Schools in Santa Barbara, California. She was a graduate of the Sloyd Training School in Boston, Massachusetts and the Slöjdlärareseminarium in Nääs, Sweden. The book consists of plans, photographs, and instructions for paper models, intended for classroom use.

Paper Sloyd originated in the manual training classes started by Miss Anna S. C. Blake in Santa Barbara, California in 1891. Miss Blake introduced the use of paper folding as a means to prepare early elementary school students' hand and eye coordination and mental capacity for further training in Woodworking Sloyd. At that time, manual training in Santa Barbara consisted of Woodworking Sloyd for boys and cooking and sewing for girls. Like Woodworking Sloyd, Paper Sloyd involved the making of models designed to lead the child from easy to more difficult, and simple to more complex, with the objective of developing a wide variety of skills that could be applied throughout the child's education and life. Early adherents of Sloyd recognized the linkage between Sloyd and brain development and growth in cognitive abilities, and believed that manual training should be part of general education for all children.

I originally became interested in folding paper as a means for my students to develop symmetrical patterns for shaping wood. Many students are more comfortable using scissors than pencils, and to achieve perfectly symmetrical patterns with a pencil is a tough task for most artists. We've applied this technique at the Clear Spring School for making boats and airplanes in the primary grades, unique birdhouses in the middle school, and for designing turned spindles on the lathe in high school. One of the interesting and surprising things I've discovered in using this technique is that in the computer age many students are not experienced or confident at folding paper. The ones that seem to do best are the same students who excel in their math classes. In fact, I've learned that there is a well-documented link between math skills and what is called spatial sense, described by the National Council of Teachers of Mathematics (NCTM) as "an intuitive feel for one's surroundings and objects in them." According to the NCTM's Principles and Standards for School Mathematics, "Geometry and spatial sense are fundamental components of mathematics education. They offer ways to interpret and reflect on our physical environment through abstraction. They support creative thought in all mathematics." When I told one of our parents about Paper Sloyd and its applications for developing spatial math skills, she noted, "No wonder Travis is so good at math. He does Origami." Actually, Paper Sloyd is different from origami in that useful objects are made from paper rather than ornamental ones, and the sequential models were carefully planned for the growth of the child.

According to the Standards, "spatial visualization includes building and manipulating mental representations of shapes, relationships, and transformations." What could be a better teaching tool in this process than the transformation of paper from its original flat plane into three-dimensional, carefully-constructed useful objects? Paper Sloyd!

While it is unlikely that schools will rush out and start new woodworking programs, Paper Sloyd is an effective starting point. And it can be taught at home, too!

Doug Stowe is a contributing editor for Woodwork *Magazine.*