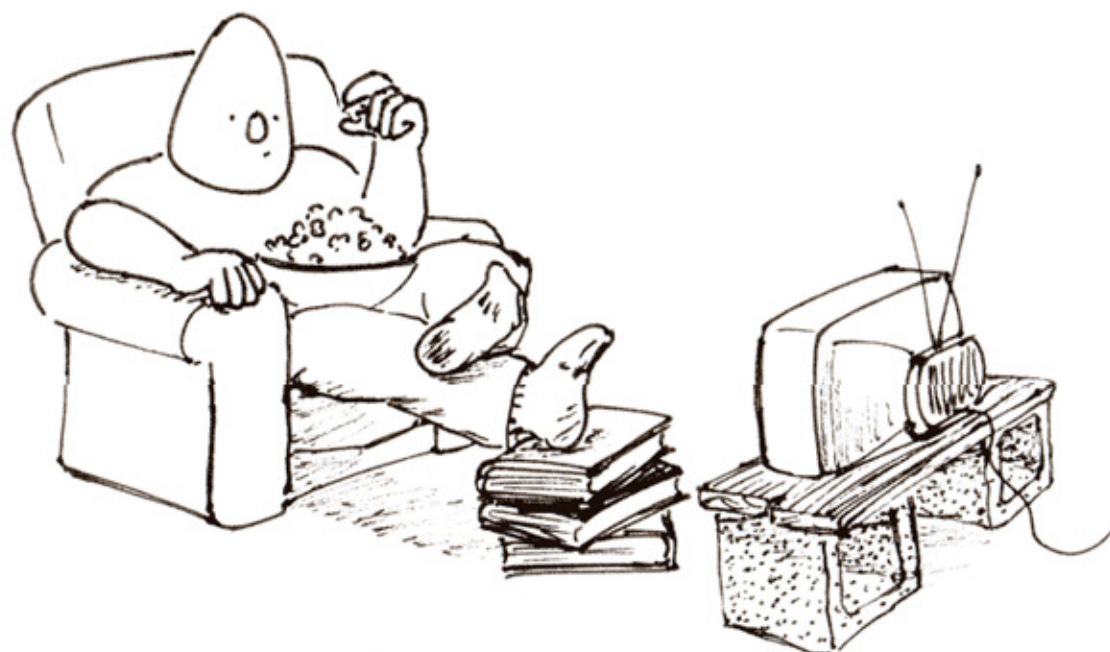


GEEKDAD

RAISING GEEK GENERATION 2.0

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Let's See You Do *That* With an eBook!By Jonathan Liu [✉](#) [t](#) June 13, 2011 | 8:30 am | Categories: [Armchair Geek](#), [Projects and Activities](#)[Follow](#) @jonathanhliu · 826 followers

Books.

They're nice to have around.

Books. They're nice to have around. Illustration: Jonathan Liu

In the digital-versus-paper book debate, I definitely lean towards [paper](#). Yes, I know that Kindles and eReaders and iPads are really cool, and you certainly can't beat them for traveling with a bunch of books and not having to pay a baggage fee. However, there are just some things that you can't do with an eBook (at least yet).

It's a lot harder to lend one to a friend. You can't mark it up and [leave notes in the margins](#) for people to discover later on. In some sense, you never really *own* an eBook; you just purchase the rights to read it.

You can't make a stack of them for your kid to sit on when they can't reach the table.

Okay, that last one isn't really about using a book as a book per se; it's more about the book as a physical object. Although it may have little to do with the actual content of the book, the material substance of a dead-tree book lends it certain properties and abilities that eBooks will never have, regardless of improvements in software and hardware.

Lisa Occhipiniti's recent book, *The Repurposed Library*, celebrates the beauty of books as raw materials with 33 craft projects. Some are simple art objects like wall hangings, mobiles, and ornaments; others are more functional projects like lamps, shelves, and tool bins. Some are simple and require no more than a craft knife and some glue, and others require drills or band saws.



Book Ledge from The Repurposed Library

The book is really well-made, fittingly. The photography by Thayer Allyson Gowdy is wonderful and really shows off the projects — and everything in the background is as tastefully arranged as a Crate & Barrel catalog. (Of course, *my* house doesn't look like that even at the best of times.) Some of the projects come off as a bit twee, but there are also several that I just really love and am itching to try. Overall, I'd say the book seems more targeted to women, but there's no reason a crafty dad couldn't take on the projects, too.

Occhipiniti starts with an introduction to the anatomy of a book, since you'll need to know how they're put together in order to take them apart properly. She also talks a little about judging the value of books (to know whether to keep them or cut 'em up) and where to find good used books.

Of course, the proliferation of digital books actually contributes to the supply of books we can cut up for projects like this, so I suppose there's an upside to that. But I wonder if today's hardcovers will have the same nostalgic quality to them as old books we currently find at estate sales and as library discards.

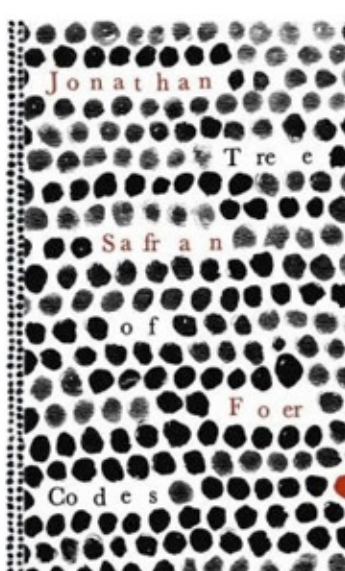
At any rate, if you love books as objects, *The Repurposed Library* is a fun collection of project ideas.

Another book I thought worth mentioning is Jonathan Safran Foer's *Tree of Codes*. This one is both book-as-object and book-as-content, and the result is surely something that wouldn't have the same effect in digital form.

Foer, who is known for experimenting with typography and other techniques in his storytelling, took a knife to one of his favorite books, *The Street of Crocodiles* by Bruno Schulz. By cutting out entire sections of the book and leaving just a few words and letters here and there, Foer created his own story — literally using Schulz's words as his raw materials.

A cut-up book isn't something you'd think could be reproduced easily, though. [Visual Editions](#), a UK-based publisher that specializes in "great looking stories," was turned down by various printers before finding one that wanted the challenge of printing a book with a different die-cut for each page. I think the end result probably isn't exactly what Foer's looked like, since the book appears to be double- (or triple-) spaced, probably so there's more paper to hold the pages together. But it's still a really cool-looking book, and as you read you can see through many pages below the current one.

I'll have to admit, at first I thought the story was supposed to be all the text that showed through the holes, but then I got a lot of overlapping gobbledy-gook. Reading just the text that's left on the skeleton of a page creates actual sentences, but I haven't had a chance to sit and read through this one yet — I'll let you know how the story turns out when I do. Either way, though, it's a book that is fun to flip through (carefully) and is a rare example of content tied inextricably to the physical form. Sure, you could reproduce Foer's story as a digital book, either with the words just strung together like a traditional book, or with the words spaced apart on the page, but it wouldn't have nearly the same effect.



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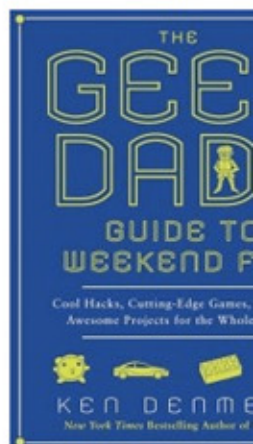
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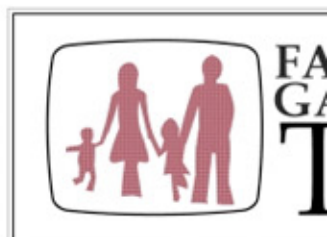
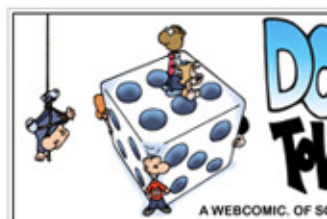


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