

Feature



Harry Potter Wands: A Family Project at Sci-fi Conventions

Philip Gust*

Programs at sci-fi conventions that bring families together are surprisingly rare. Here is a project to build Harry Potter wands that gets parents and their kids working together.

My wife Kathe and I attended our first sci-fi/fantasy convention in 2003 at BayCon, a regional convention held in the San Jose California. There were many programs such as sci-fi writing, space, future realities, and various genres such as *Lord of the Rings*, and some costuming tracks. Although there were a number of families attending, we noticed few kids and teenagers in these sessions, and we wondered where they were.

We discovered that there was a track called “family friendly” with crafts for the younger children, but it was mostly a place where parents could park their children while they attended other sessions. We also noticed that older kids spent most of their time in the “games” room, where there were tables with “role-playing” board games, and a number of video games that were the big attraction.

One thing we did notice is that many of the kids and some parents wore costumes. However few kids attended the “talking heads” costuming panels, and there were no hands-on sessions doing things that would hold their interest.

In the car on our way home after the conference, we had the idea to put on a costuming session that specifically targets both the kids and their parents. We would do



Profs. Estelle Sintra and Lysander Philpotts attend at a Harry Potter book release party.

a prop lightsaber class that they would both enjoy, and have them do it together.

We decided to call it a “family” instead of a “family friendly” project. If a kid wanted to build one, they would have to bring a “Jedi Master” parent along to work with them, and if an adult wanted to build one, they had to bring their “Padwan” kids along to work with them.

The conference program committee was skeptical, but we offered to take on the whole thing, and pay for all the materials ourselves if they would let us try. They agreed, and the next year “Obi-wan Kenobi” and “Jocasta Nu” ran a “Padwan Academy.” We developed a lightsaber kit, made enough for 25 “teams”, and put up posters around the con to advertise it.

To our surprise, more than 25 parent/kid teams wanted to attend. It was a lively two hour session, with a short talk by Obi-Wan on creating a lightsaber before the kits were distributed and the teams went to work at tables in the room. Most of the parts were from a local hardware store (PVC tubes and fittings, sprinkler heads, decorative screws, etc) that cost us less than \$3 each. We pre-drilled and pre-painted parts, so all the teams had to do was fit and screw parts together using simple tools, and use scissors to cut various decorative tapes they could apply.

At the end of the session, we held a “graduation ceremony” where the Padwans showed off their work along with their Jedi Master parents. The program committee told us later that they had never had such positive feedback on any session, and asked would we *please* come back and do something else along those lines next year?

In the car on the way home from the conference, we talked about what we could do next year that would hold the attention of parents and kids as well as lightsabers had. We were nearly home when Kathe said that we could run a magic wand making class as Hogwarts professors.

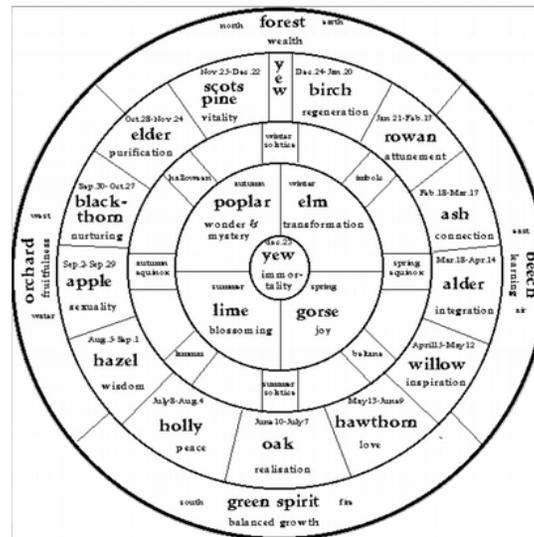
We had both seen the first two movies, and thought it would be fun to put together the costumes. But what could we do about the wands? Some of the “hero” wands in the movie were pretty fancy, although others were fairly simple. We also had to be able to produce kits that were inexpensive, could be pre-finished, and easy enough to put together during a two-hour session at the convention.

We tried different techniques making wands for yourselves, and finally settled on two kinds of wand kits. All of them used a dowel (or round chopstick) for the shaft. For the “natural” wands, we used parts of thicker branches that we had saved from pruning our apple trees. Only certain branches would work, and we had a limited number of those. For the the “manufactured” wands, we used larger diameter dowels that could be

embellished with wooden beads and findings from a craft store like Michaels.

In both cases, we pre-drilled the hole for the wand shaft in the handle. We also pre-drilled or enlarged whatever holes were required in the wooden findings to fit the handles. We could drill holes in the tail end of the handle in class to receive a finial should they choose one. We allowed the child/parent team to select parts from baskets of shafts, handles, and findings.

That year, we assembled enough finished parts for forty wands, and the class once again had more teams who wanted to make wands than we had kits available. A number of kids and their parents were repeats from the lightsaber class the year before, while it was the first time for others. Luckily we had some spare parts and were eventually able to accommodate everyone.



Tree Calendar used by J.K. Rowlings to select woods for Harry, Hermione, Ron, and other characters.

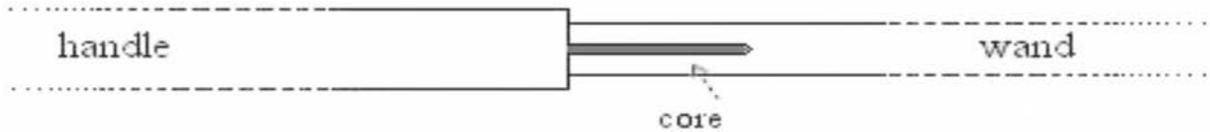
Steps for Creating a Wand

1. Choose your wood
2. Choose your handle
3. Choose your core
4. Concentrate on the properties of your wand
5. Insert core into wand – you will find the insertion point is prepared for you
6. Attach the handle
7. Test the wand – nothing should explode!

The class started out with instruction by Professor Estelle Sinistra (Kathe) about the history of wands, the various woods, and the magical “cores” they could select for their wands and what they meant. She also instructed them on the steps to create their wands, and showed how to inert the core into the hole drilled in the base of the wand shaft before inserting it into the handle.



Inserting the core into the wand shaft.



Wand Cores for the Class

- *Dragon Heartstring* – hexes are a specialty of this core
- *Demiguise Hair* – the very best for transfiguration work
- *Hair from the Mane of a Kelpie* – superb for all spells
- *Ashwinder Ash* – casts the best protection charms

Then, the students and their Parent/Tutors gathered around the work tables and began selecting their handles, cores, wood embellishments, and findings. We suggested parents help younger students select the wood based on their birthday if the student had no preference, and a core that matched their personal traits from charts from Rowling’s source material. That



Students listening to Prof. Estelle Sinstra’s lecture on wand making while Prof. Lysander Philpotts looks on.



Sometimes a small spell helps accelerate the training.

quickly got the parents and students talking, and it was a lively and interactive session as students and their “tutors” assembled and tried out the wands.

Finally we provided instructions on finishing their wands using either stains or acrylic paints and also showed photos of screen-used wands from the movie to give them some ideas. Some of the students actually like the natural wood tones and decided to keep them that way.

At the end of the class period, we gave each student an “official” bill of sale for his or her wand. Then we performed a group magic trick by having everyone stand, walk to the door, waving their wands, and saying “Evanescio!” and thus causing the entire class to disappear!

The form is titled "Swish & Flick" and includes a date field (July 1888), a name field, and a price field. It contains two tables: one for wand specifications and one for box manufacturing specifications. The wand specifications table includes fields for Wand length, Wood type, and Card thickness. The box manufacturing specifications table includes fields for BOX BASE (Length, Width, Depth) and BOX LID (Length, Width, Depth). The form also includes a note: "Write the wand length and the cardboard thickness in the boxes where marked and the magical form will calculate the box making dimensions for you." At the bottom, it states: "ALL WAND BOXES TO BE MADE IN ACCORDANCE WITH THE OFFICIAL WAND BOX MAKING INSTRUCTIONS AND LINED IN A SUITABLE FABRIC FOR PROTECTION AND SECURITY AGAINST DAMAGE DURING STORAGE/TRANSPORT."

Students received "Bill of Sale" for their wands.

In the years since, we have put on a number of other “Family” events at sci-fi conventions like BayCon, including a visit to “Leonardo’s Workshop” hosted by Aviatrix Harriet Quimby, and a hands-on build-your-own space station workshop with a NASA astronaut who lived on MIR and IIS as a special guest. Bringing parents and their kids together for fun activities at sci-fi conventions is essential, and costuming offers some exciting opportunities to do that.

Philip Gust enjoys sci-fi and fantasy costuming, and has particular interests in props, special effects, and prosthetic makeup. He also costumes in historical periods, including Regency, Victorian, and early 20th C.

Wooden Parts for Harry Potter Wands

The following two pages show details of a recent build of wands showing the many variations that are possible from wood turnings from a craft store and the application of colorful paint schemes and effects.



Wood boy/game pieces



Hand-carved twist dowels



Assembled, unfinished wands.



Craft spools



Wood candle caps



Wood Shaker pegs



12"-14" (30-35cm) long craft dowels



Wood craft balls

Finished Harry Potter Wands



Kathe Gust painting wands with acrylics.



Detail of color scheme on wand handle.. Note gold leaf work on twist.



Wands stored in stand.