What you’ll need...

- Splash Guard
- Acrylic Paint
- Paint Trays
- Paintbrushes
- 3” x 3” Canvas
- Magnets

Bob Ross was known for the playfulness and calm he brought to his PBS show, *The Joy of Painting*, and for the phrase “happy little” as in “Let’s paint some happy little clouds.” In the same spirit, and in celebration of the Summer Library Program, “A Universe of Stories,” this project will teach you to paint a starscape for a refrigerator magnet. As an alternative, you are welcome to try making your own alien landscape.

**Decisions**

First, you must choose the colors of your happy little painting. Try to think of what objects your starscape will have, and what they will look like. You will probably have some sort of starfield, but there is so much more to space. Do you plan to make planets, nebulae, galaxies, comets, etc.?

You will probably want to start your starscape with a black background. Unless you don’t want to. As Bob Ross says, “You can do anything you want to do. This is your world.” Or “universe” in this case. Start by coating your canvas with paint.

**Space**

Making a starfield can be a little messy depending on which technique you use: splatter painting or stippling. Splatter painting can be difficult due to the unpredictability of the splatter and is obviously the messiest option, but also gives a great scattered star look. Lightly dip the brush in the paint of your choice and then flick the brush to splatter the paint droplets. **Be sure to use a splatter guard.** Alternatively, you can use stippling. Dip the tips of the brush bristles in paint and carefully dab the canvas to create the starfield effect. With stars, **less is more.**

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Planets require some precision, especially for the outline. If you desire, you can use a stencil to help keep the circle round and precise. Also, keep in mind that the texture around the planet should follow the warp of gravity around a sphere. Decide what kind of planet you want. Examples are Earth-like, volcanic, gas giant, ice, desert, and barren. Also decide if you want rings or moons. Larger planets often have both.

Nebulae are very cloud-like in appearance, so we can use Bob Ross’s tips for making clouds; just use bright colors that stand out to make the nebulae bright and colorful. Create clouds using a dabbing technique, then use a second dry brush to fade it into the background. “Remember how free clouds are. They just lay around in the sky all day long.” —Bob Ross

Galaxies come in many shapes and sizes, so “however you think it should be, that’s exactly how it should be.” —Bob Ross

If you’d like to create a galaxy like ours, the Milky Way, then you will want to create a spiral galaxy. Start by using a stippling technique (see “Starfield” on p. 1). Try to concentrate most of the stars in the center and go lighter on the edges. Then take a dry brush and use light brush strokes to follow the flow of the stars and enhance the sweeping spiral look of your happy little galaxy.

You paint stars and comets using similar techniques due to their brightness. First choose a color, usually red, yellow, or blue for stars. Fade from a white or near white tint to a darker shade of your chosen color. The center will be the brightest point. If it’s a somewhat distant star, you’ll want to create bursts of light, but if it’s near, use a gradient for the star’s corona. For the burst, use symmetrical strokes from either side of the center and work your way around the star. Paint a comet the same way, but add one long tail that trails behind and fades out.

Once you’re done and the paint has dried, you can glue a magnet onto the back of your painting. The placement is up to you. It’s a starscape, so there’s a good chance that its orientation on the fridge matters little. Placing the magnet in the middle will keep the orientation optional. If you want to control how the painting “hangs,” then place the magnet at the top.
Real Space Examples

Lenticular Galaxy M104 (Sombrero)
Image courtesy of NASA

Spiral Galaxy M106
Image courtesy of NASA

NGC 3372 (Carina Nebula)
Image courtesy of NASA

Betelgeuse Red Giant Star
Image courtesy of ALMA

Halley’s Comet
Image courtesy of NASA

Wolf-Rayet Star with Nebula
Image courtesy of NASA