

# Junk Art

## Objectives

Students will be able to:

- ➔ discover that 'junk' or discarded materials can be made into beautiful and interesting art,
- ➔ use the items they have collected to create a piece of art, and
- ➔ to correctly use the terms reuse and repurpose.

## Method

- Students will create art using items that can be readily found rather than bought.
- Students will collect discarded items from their environments to create art using the items.

## Materials

- Small items that students collect from home that they envision could be turned into art. These may include but are not limited to: bottle caps, utensils, bottles, cans, nuts and bolts, old door handles, rubber bands, wood scraps, branches, pinecones, used paper rolls, old cards, bits of ribbon, yarn, etc.
- fishing line
- scissors
- glue
- easily bendable wire
- strong branch
- discarded metal spoons and forks
- photos of art made from reused materials
- cardboard pieces

## Time

30 minutes over 2 days, or 1 hour

## Vocabulary

- reuse
- repurposing



## Background

Reduce, reuse, recycle classifies waste management strategies according to their desirability in terms of waste minimization. This waste hierarchy remains the cornerstone of most waste minimization strategies. The aim of the waste hierarchy is to extract the maximum practical benefits from products and to generate the minimum amount of waste. The first level of the hierarchy is to reduce. In its most simplistic form this means to create less waste. Level two, reuse, plays an important role in programs to divert waste from landfills. Reuse is most often defined as repeated use of an item for the same purpose. Reusing items by repairing them, donating them to charity and community groups, or selling them also reduces waste. In the hierarchy, recycling is the third level. If materials can not be reduced or reused then they should be considered for recycling purposes. Despite progress in recycling, Americans are still generating high volumes of waste. Reusing products, when possible, is even better than recycling because the item does not need to be reprocessed before it can be used again.

Another approach is repurposing. Repurposing is the act of giving an old item new life via a new use or purpose. This type of reuse can sometimes make use of items which are no longer usable for

their original purposes, for example using worn-out clothes as rags. Repurposing cuts back on waste and is another way to keep usable materials from being sent to a landfill. There is no rule book for repurposing because if you can find a new use for old junk then repurposing is a better choice than the trash bin.

Amateur and professional artists alike turn junk into mixed-media artwork. This repurposing may include a two-dimensional art with collages made of old magazines or photos or sculpture made from nuts, bolts, wires and scrap. Wooden surfaces may be transformed with magazine pages, wrapping paper or board game pieces like dominoes or other items glued to the surface.

## Procedure

1. Display pictures of art made from reused material. This can either be done by showing printed versions or pulling up photographs on the computer and displaying them on a screen. Discuss with students what they think. For instance, what materials were used to create these pieces of art? Encourage all answers and ask for reasoning.
2. Demonstrate the creation of a piece of art from the found items. Through this process items are repurposed to create art. One example is a wind chime, made from metal objects tied with fishing line to a sturdy branch. Demonstrate how to attach items by tying fishing line to a branch and to four or five metal objects such as metal spoons or forks. Be sure the objects will touch each other when the wind blows. This process creates a wind chime and art. Define reuse, repurposing and recycling. Ask students during the demonstration what the original use of each item may have been when it was new.
3. Explain to students that they will look around their homes for discarded items. They will collect these items and bring them back to class. Students will use the items they have found to create a piece of their own art. Educators should send a brief note home to explain the activity and ask for parental help. Remind students to take only items that their family does not need. Discuss possible items with the class, referring to the list in materials section.

Alternate: Collect items on materials list and have them available for students to use. If using this method, you may wish to provide students with same set of materials to eliminate distribution issues.

4. On Day 2, have students get the items they have collected and brainstorm a list of things they could create with their materials. List materials needed to make their projects.
5. Allow time for students to obtain their items and materials prior to creating their junk art. Assist students as they need to build or arrange their art piece.
6. Have students discuss their new items and their purpose. Ask them to remember what the purpose of the original materials was.

## Assessment

1. Compare students initial observations to their closing comments.
2. Note the characteristics of repurposing described by individual students to note individual understanding.
3. Note common characteristics of group understanding.

Display the following items:

Gallon milk jug, plastic trash bag,  
paper bag, liter bottle, tin can

Ask: Can you think of a new uses for these five objects? The students can give verbal responses or they can illustrate them.

## Technology Connections

- Have students explore the website <http://familyfun.go.com/crafts/spirit-jugs-673388/> showing items from a reused milk jug and tin can
- Photograph the art and create an online art gallery.

## Enrichment

- Invite a local artist to share artwork made of discarded items. A demonstration of the art process, including securing the items, can help student imagine the possibilities of creating new artistic uses for discarded items.
- Have students organize a class art show.

*Adapted from: Waste Commission of Scott County, IA*