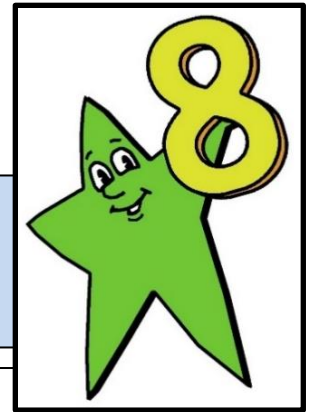


# Getting Artsy with Reuse



eco-cycle

## Snapshot

By repurposing unwanted items into art supplies, students can create meaningful artwork while reducing waste and conserving natural resources.

<https://bit.ly/eco-cycle-zero-waste-schools-guide>

**Objective:** Students will understand that reusing materials to make a sculpture will prevent items from going to the landfill or incinerator, while also protecting natural places.

**Age Groups:** K-12<sup>th</sup> grade

**Setting:** Classroom

### Project Duration:

- Collecting materials:  
1-3 hours
- Creating sculpture:  
1-2 hours

### Materials:

- Internet access
- Smocks for clothing protection
- Found objects (non-recyclable, non-compostable)

## Why This Project Matters:

More and more, world-renowned artists are discovering what teachers have known all along: discarded materials have endless creative potential, and they are often free! Reuse is an essential step toward achieving Zero Waste. Reusing existing items not only reduces waste, but it also saves natural resources and energy by making it unnecessary to produce new items.

## Project Summary:

Most trash cans are full of items that are not recyclable or compostable in your community. Instead of sending them off to the landfill or incinerator, consider them art supplies and get creative! In this activity, students will create a variety of unique sculptures using commonly (or not-so-commonly) discarded items.

## Implementation:

1. As a class project, have students research the website of the local recycling and/or compost program, locating the guidelines for accepted recyclables and compostables. Discuss these guidelines as a class.
2. Have students monitor their household and classroom trash bins and collect objects that cannot be recycled or composted. Have them look for items that have interesting shapes or colors that could become part of their sculpture. Allow 2-3 weeks to gather items.
3. If desired, have the sculpture tie into a theme that the students are studying (e.g., the environment, a historical event, current events, an upcoming holiday, a book they are reading, etc.).
4. Before beginning to create the sculptures, facilitate a discussion about the materials the students are reusing.



- a. Ask where the materials would have ended up if they were not reusing them (landfill or incinerator).
- b. Discuss which natural resources were used to make the materials (plastic from oil, paper from trees, metal from rock/ore, glass from sand).
- c. Explain the environment benefits of reusing these materials instead of buying new art supplies:
  - i. Fewer natural resources are consumed.
  - ii. Plant and animal habitat is saved.
- d. Remind students that the main goal is to reuse items that cannot be recycled or composted, giving them one more life before going to the landfill or incinerator.



5. To create the sculptures, provide the students with the following instructions:
  - a. The only rule: the entire sculpture must be made from materials that cannot be recycled or composted. All materials must be things that would normally have ended up in the trash. Examples of items to include are plastic straws, frozen food boxes, candy and granola bar wrappers, juice and applesauce pouches, foil/plastic peel-back lids (e.g., single-serving yogurt and applesauce containers), netted fruit bags, disposable utensils, odd-shaped plastic, metal or wood items that can't be recycled, old CDs, colorful plastic bags (if they can't be recycled in your area), broken/irreparable toys, other broken/non-sharp household goods, fabric scraps, etc.
  - b. The base of the sculpture is also included in the rule - it must also be made from non-recyclable and/or non-compostable items.
  - c. The sculpture may be any size or shape.

**Extensions:**

- Interview the person in charge of your local recycling program about why certain items can or cannot be recycled.
- Hold an art exhibition at your school to showcase the finished sculptures.
- Have students write a one-page essay about how their sculpture expresses the assigned or chosen theme.

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*Things to consider:*

- If preferred, have students work together in small groups to consolidate their trash items and create larger sculptures.

**Assessment:**

- Ask students to name the discarded items they reused for their sculpture.
- Have them state how reusing these materials is helpful to the environment.

**Related Activities:**

Trimming Holiday Waste – Chapter 7  
Repurposing in the Classroom – Chapter 12  
Making Cloth Napkins – Chapter 13  
Special Materials for Recycling – Chapter 19  
Creative Crayon Recycling – Chapter 20

**Extensions:**  
(continued)

- Ask students to take photos of their sculptures from different angles. Have them each compose a presentation slide featuring their photos and a synopsis of how their sculpture relates to the theme. Gather the slides to create a digital art show.
- Have students brainstorm more reuse ideas for these and other items that would otherwise be discarded.

