

RECYCLING *renaissance*

Recycling is an important national concern. Our consumer “dispose-of-it” mentality is creating incredible amounts of waste. Every year we generate more rubbish, which increases the need for better ways to put refuse to work for us, and not against us.

Art teachers are one group that can find recycling to be an amazing friend and helper, adding a much-needed boost to our budget. Creatively using expanded polystyrene foam (EPS) packaging noodles, pressed-paper containers and other paper and plastic items that are usually considered waste sets an excellent example for our school and students. We can show them how to actively take part in protecting our environment and community, while having fun and stretching our budgeting dollars.

One way I find recycling helpful is to reuse EPS trays as paint trays and printing surfaces. I use the deep trays to roll paint-covered marbles on top of cut paper to create a marbled look, or to keep small projects organized by class.

Tall, empty baby-wipe containers are great for brushes and storage. Many items, such as oatmeal containers, drink-mix tubs, plastic milk containers and even empty plastic tempera paint bottles, are great for creating sculptures of animals or abstractions.

Cardboard from packaging, pizza boxes and used string or twine all work well with printing projects. Packaging sheets of EPS are great for flat-plane sculptures. It's amazing what everyday, throwaway items can be turned into!

The source for one of my most recent creative ideas came after my school finished handing out the candle orders they had received for a fundraiser project, and were left with numerous boxes and pressed-paper forms that cradled the candles during shipping. Our office manager knew I was always on the lookout for different kinds of recyclable supplies for my art classes, and asked me if I could use them in some way. The boxes were immediately useful as we were close to the end of the school year and in need of containers to store our supplies until fall.

Gathering the pressed-paper forms, I mentally began building a list of possible projects these uniquely shaped items could become in the eyes of my students. One student came to me with a request to use some of the forms to con-



MATERIALS

- Pressed-paper candle packaging
- Tempera paint
- Brushes in various sizes
- Expanded polystyrene foam (EPS) trays for paint palettes
- Plastic milk containers cut down for water

< Amber P.
v Kortney K.



< Katie W.

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

Upper-elementary students will ...

- learn about artist Wassily Kandinsky in a class discussion.
- gain a better understanding of why Kandinsky created his style of art.
- paint their containers using color theory and personal preference.
- learn that art can be created from unconventional materials and still be art.
- be challenged to think outside the box.

struct a castle that his gifted teacher required him to build for class. That left 50-some pressed forms remaining that could be applied to a project capitalizing on their unique shape.

While exploring the Internet and viewing some paintings by Wassily Kandinsky (Russian-born; 1866–1944), I came across one of his studies on colors, *Farbstudie Quadrate* (1913), a series of 12 squares filled with repeating concentric circles. Here, Kandinsky played with combinations of colors and balance. He was not as interested in representing something

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by Nancy E.J. Brooks

KANDINSKY

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in his work as he was in creating a response through color and shape.

In her book *Kandinsky: Compositions* (Museum of Modern Art; 1997), Magdalena Dabrowski states: “For Kandinsky, if that objective element of a painting were taken away, the building blocks of the composition would reveal themselves to cause a feeling of repose and tranquil repetition, of well-balanced parts.”

I began thinking about how the interplay of colors and lack of subject matter worked for him, and I gained a better perception of his painting and, perhaps, his purpose in creating such an unusual composition.

I realized the pressed forms I had been saving resembled this painting in three-dimensional form, minus a few squares. It occurred to me that using these forms to create a 3-D Kandinsky project would be a fantastic opportunity for creative recycling.

I began by introducing Kandinsky and *Farbstudie Quadrate* to one of my fifth-grade art classes. We discussed some of the color theory Kandinsky applied to this work of art. We noted the patterns of warm and cool colors, the use

of complementary and analogous colors, and his sense of balance. I shared my insights about Kandinsky’s painting and asked the students to share how they saw and understood his art.

Then I presented the project I had envisioned to the class. I showed them the pressed forms and explained how they could apply some of the color theory to each level of circles in the square forms as they rose up from the base. They were provided with tempera paint, brushes and plenty of opportunity to mix their own colors. I reminded the students that bright colors as well as pastel colors would create more interest in their compositions, and that dark and light colors would enhance the depth in these preformed containers. The results were stunning!

The students not only learned about Kandinsky and applying color theory in a different format, but they also were challenged to continue looking for ways in which they could discover secondhand purposes for thrown-away refuse. ■

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