

# SERT Spotlight



## From Trash to Treasure: Students Learn the Value of Upcycling Everyday Objects

BY LENORE HOOVER, NBCT, ART TEACHER  
LAKELANDS PARK MIDDLE SCHOOL

**THROUGHOUT CIVILIZATION**, cultures have thrived by using available resources. Whether turning soil to clay, braiding baskets from plants, or turning stone and wood into tools. Artists are often at the center of innovation and possibility. In the 21st century, we are at a heightened state of awareness that our natural resources are vulnerable. The actions of individuals and the collective effort of communities are our only hope in preserving resources.

Every August, art teachers begin their year by unpacking a small mountain of art supplies ordered the previous May. Ordering in bulk from our MCPS warehouse saves schools money, but it also means that a year's worth of supplies for 1,100+ students arrives all at once and must be unpacked and stored during an art teacher's first few work days often adding time to an already full set of professional duties. Sometimes, I'm in awe of the meticulous wrapping and packaging used by our Department of Materials Management.

Soothing summer light flooded my classroom after a long day of tasks. In this quiet with the overhead lights off, I fastidiously worked to finish unpacking. It was after five, but I was determined to finish before student orientation the next day. It was then that I surveyed the room and noticed the array of forms, rectangle boxes from paint and erasers, silhouettes of plastic in a variety of shapes from watercolor replacements and puffy green pouches filled with air protecting other items. Highlights and shadows wrapped around the crisp angles and rounded forms.

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# Collaborative Sculptures Made From Upcycled Everyday Objects

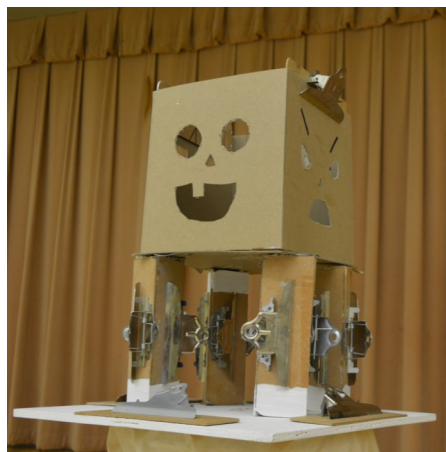
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I looked at these piles and then at a box of clips that I had amassed earlier in the week after cutting them from old legal size clipboards to use for clay storage. These discarded items could be the inspiration and basis of a collaborative sculpture assignment for my eighth graders. The concept of using these “everyday” materials would provide an exercise in how to use shape and form to create movement through repetition. It would give them an opportunity to experiment, reuse and repurpose these “disposable items” with purpose. Simultaneously heightening their awareness of aesthetic concepts of positive and negative space while also creating meaning with and through simple, found objects. My head spun with the names of artists who have worked in assemblage and crafted original works of art from what other may have neglected or disposed. I thought of Tara Donovan, Louise Nevelson, Robert Rauschenberg, Bettye Saar, James Hampton, and so many others.

As in many first-time curriculum units, there were some unplanned challenges and happy accidents. Many students in this level three class hadn’t taken the first two levels of art classes or had opportunities to cull their visual skills or gain technical fine art

expertise. However, in working with non-traditional materials, the art making process became less intimidating and the creative collaboration between students really took precedence. The work of “creating” became enjoyable learning.

As we worked toward completion of the sculptures we discussed ways to display the work and potential needs from the exhibition location – good lighting, a place to look from different angles, safety, etc. It was exciting to see students take ownership of the curatorial process, one of many new Fine Arts standards. As one group worked to hang their sculpture at a very high height, allowing a worm’s eye perspective, others considered possible stands or ways to unify the pieces as a group. A team of students volunteered to work at lunch to design pedestals. They cut and tied muslin around a dozen classroom stools creating a unified display on the front of our school’s stage located in the cafeteria.



An appropriate “everyday” location where students at lunch could approach sculptures and observe more carefully. As a group of students carried studio lights to the stage, students began pouring in for eighth grade lunch. As the student artists adjusted the lighting and positioning of the sculptures, other students gathered around and immediately began commenting “wow, that’s cool!” Our visually-

adept security guard chimed in, too. The few student artists there at the moment smiled with authentic pride and feelings of accomplishment, which were shared with artist peers the next day in class.

Ultimately, the sculptures were not intended as a comment on materialism or consumer culture, or even recycling. However, in the end, we all gained an appreciation for how valuable our resources can be, especially when what is disposable is seen as a potential ingredient for art, imagination and meaningful learning. 🌱





# Turn Off Those Overhead Lights!

**UNLIKE FLUORESCENT LIGHTING**, LED light bulbs are mercury-free and are 100% recyclable – making them environmentally safe. In classrooms, computer labs and media centers teachers are making more use of natural lighting and torchier floor lamps with LED bulbs, whenever possible. [It has been said](#) that the use of LED and/or natural lighting can minimize eyestrain and headaches in the classroom and can reduce the utility costs for Montgomery County Public Schools (MCPS). By reducing high energy costs, MCPS could use the savings towards other areas of the facility that may need more attention. Because electric lighting in buildings can consume more than 36 percent of the school’s total electricity use, using natural lighting when possible instead of overhead lighting is a huge energy-saving practice.

Natural lighting is essential as it’s one of the main sources of how we receive Vitamin D. The benefit of Vitamin D is that it assists in bone growth and helps protects our bodies against health problems. Let’s start to implement this ideology and reap the benefits of sunlight and reduce electrical costs by using the torchier lamps in

selected areas of your school!

As Redland Middle School applies for their first certification as a Maryland Green School, the staff and students know that their day-to-day behaviors must change. Administrative staff are using task lighting in their offices. The teachers are using torchier lamps instead of overhead lights when students are not occupying the classrooms. The school has also furnished their media center and computer lab with torchier lamps. These simple adjustments will conserve energy, reduce utility costs, and help to protect the environment. 🌱

BY TERINA GARCIA  
SERT FACILITATOR

*Redland Middle School’s assistant principal, Mr. Matt Niper, (left) and administrative secretary, Mrs. Cara Witmer, (right) both understand that using energy-efficient lighting offers great environmental and financial benefits. The torchier lamps also add a nice touch of ambience to their workspaces.*



*ABOVE: Members of Redland Middle School’s SERT Team assembled torchier lamps for use in selected locations of the school.*





## MCPS RECYCLES EVERY DAY

Recycling happens in MCPS 365 days a year. Make sure that your recycling bins are always available throughout the year for—

- ICB, ELO, BELL, ESY and Head Start programs;
- Athletic and other school events;
- School breakfast and summer food programs;
- Summer school and camps; and
- Winter, Spring and Summer breaks.

To avoid contamination, recycling dumpsters should be locked at all times and should only be unlocked when recycling materials are being placed into the dumpster.

If you have any questions about recycling, need an extra pick-up, or if your dumpsters need to be repaired, contact the SERT recycling manager, John Meyer, by phone (240-314-4714) or by e-mail ([recycling@mcpsmd.org](mailto:recycling@mcpsmd.org)).

This newsletter is produced by the School Energy and Recycling Team (SERT) program and distributed to school-based SERT leaders and teams, building service personnel, and others who are interested in conservation and sustainability.

As part of the [Montgomery County Public Schools](#) Department of Facilities Management, the SERT program provides opportunities for all schools to participate and receive incentives and recognition for their energy conservation and recycling efforts.

The SERT program supports a balanced environment for the integration of all students to work together in a culturally diverse environment. Our goal is to provide the resources, support, and vision of the future for a successful conservation program at each school. Promoting the connections between human behavior and its impact on the environment reinforces our culture of conservation and increases participation in our mission to conserve resources and recycle actively.

*Warm thoughts and best wishes for  
a wonderful holiday season and  
a joyful New Year!*



PLEASE REMEMBER TO PERFORM A WINTER BREAK ENERGY SHUTDOWN!



### SERT PROGRAM

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