

Editor's Letter

My first teaching job was as an elementary art teacher in Shreveport, Louisiana. In my classroom I found that the back wall was completely filled with shelves of egg cartons (they were only made of paper then), baby food jars, wallpaper books, pieces of cardboard, fabric scraps, plastic gallon jugs, and cigar boxes full of other assorted items like buttons and beads.

Since none of my art education courses had addressed using such materials (this was a long time ago), I had to quickly come up with inventive ways to use them, since my other supplies consisted of merely crayons, construction paper, glue, and paint.

Despite the many years that have passed since that time, art teachers are still finding imaginative uses for found objects and materials. Even today, while trying to make room in my storage closet, I couldn't bring myself to throw away faded colored construction paper, wrinkled tissue paper, or leftover wrapping paper (all good for collage); bubble wrap (great for sending home clay projects); square cardboard egg carton dividers, paper napkins, and paper straws (from the cafeteria); or a whole case of old-fashioned Christmas lights (from a kind parent, but whatever will I do with them?).

Though collecting such things presents a dangerous encouragement to my hoarding tendencies, it is enjoyable to challenge my students to find ingenious solutions to art problems with these odds and ends. Perhaps now, though, as art teachers, we have even more important reasons to reuse, recycle, and reinvent.

In his new book, *Hot, Flat, and Crowded: Why We Need a Green Revolution—and How It Can Renew America* (Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2008), Thomas L. Friedman presents the challenge he believes America now faces because of global warming, a leveled global economic playing field that has allowed more people to enter the middle class, and a rapidly growing world population.

Friedman calls for the United States to take the lead in a worldwide effort to create effective strategies for clean and efficient energy and conservation that he calls Code Green. He is optimistic that "the intelligence, creativity, boldness, and concern for the common good that are our nation's greatest natural resources" can bring about a real green revolution.

So what might this mean to art teachers? It seems to me that art teachers were "green" long before anyone else, out of both necessity and choice. Through the art problems we present, we are now, more than ever, in a position to help our students understand the importance of leading environmentally sustainable lives for their own benefit and for subsequent generations. I hope the articles we offer this month will inspire and encourage you and your students to think "green."



Nancy and Sylvia Nyawose, an artist from Durban, South Africa, at the International Folk Art Market in Santa Fe. Nyawose makes baskets from multicolored telephone wires, replacing traditional materials that are inaccessible in urban areas.

Nancy Walker