

Make Every Day Earth Day

Tammy L. Taylor

It's never too early to plan for Earth Day (April 22, 2009). Last year, our middle-school students collected bread twist ties from September to April for a school-wide Earth Day project. The finished piece, containing over 20,000 ties, is more than sixteen feet high and hangs as a permanent piece in our two-story library.



Getting Started

The project began the first week of school as students in both two-dimensional and three-dimensional art were introduced to the work of contemporary artist Rachel Perry Welty. Welty's work incorporates modern throwaway items as the building material of her work. She uses bread tags, twist ties, cash receipts, price tags, and other items usually placed in the trash. Her twenty-foot columnar works created from bread twist ties inspired this lesson.

After discussions with many classes in sixth, seventh, and eighth grade, students created a project plan and chose an appropriate location in the building. The choice of location was important, as the size and fragility of the piece had to be taken into consideration.

Collecting Twist Ties

Students in both art classes collected bread twist ties. In the two-dimensional art class, twenty or more twist ties could be collected and used in place of one homework sketchbook assignment. A majority of the teachers and students in our building

participated. We collected more than 20,000 twist ties of assorted colors. Students even had family and friends collecting for them.

Creating the Piece

On Earth Day, the seventh-grade students participated in special school-wide activities and presentations. At the art station,

students worked in small groups to link the bread twist ties into sixteen-foot strips. These were then attached to a hula-hoop to form a long columnar sculpture. The actual creation of the strips took longer than we had anticipated and the project extended into the week after Earth Day, as students in all art classes worked to finish the linking.

The Final Artwork

Our fantastic maintenance staff hung the finished piece with the use of a lift ladder. It is a permanent addition to our library, which is two stories high and centrally located in our building.

Students love the project for many reasons. Number one: It looks really cool! It demonstrates that art and

beauty can come from throwaway items. Number two: Because more than 600 students and teachers participated in the project, many feel a sense of ownership. Number three: It serves as a daily reminder of Earth Day and the importance of reusing and recycling materials.

The Future

We are currently collecting plastic bottle caps for our next Earth Day project. Many students have commented on how quickly they are able to collect twenty or more lids. It helps them to realize just how much is thrown away every day and encourages them to find creative ways to use these items. 🌀

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Art and beauty can come from throwaway items.

NATIONAL STANDARD

Students use visual structures and functions of art to communicate ideas.

WEB LINKS

www.rachelperrywelty.com

www.bryantholsenbeck.com/recyclelids.html

www.earthday.net