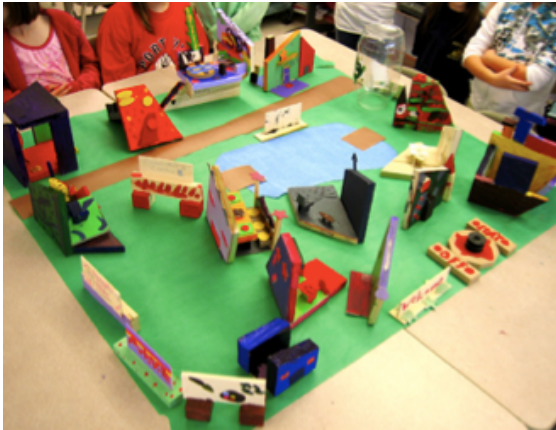


# South Allegheny students learn to recycle trash into artistic creations

By Kelly Fennessy  
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South Allegheny Elementary students are using art to turn one person's trash into another's treasure — and learning a little about themselves along the way.

For the last six weeks, 14 fourth-graders have participated in Art Expressions' Project Eco smArt, which showed students how to use recycled materials in their artistic creations.

"We've been talking about giving art materials and each other a second chance," said Anna Duchene, a certified art therapist who facilitates the program at South Allegheny. "We teach kids tolerance of each other, no matter their abilities or disabilities."

She said using art as the forum "levels the playing field" because art is something in which anyone can participate.

"Kids have a voice, and artwork helps them express themselves," Duchene said.

During each session, students use art techniques designed to help them relax and learn that nothing about the creative process has to be perfect.

Many of the activities also help to build self-esteem, South Allegheny teacher Scott Schork said. He, along with teacher Katherine Dunn, helps with the program each week.

"The projects all have something to do with the way they see themselves," Schork said. "The first week, they made goggles to remind them to see themselves and each other differently."

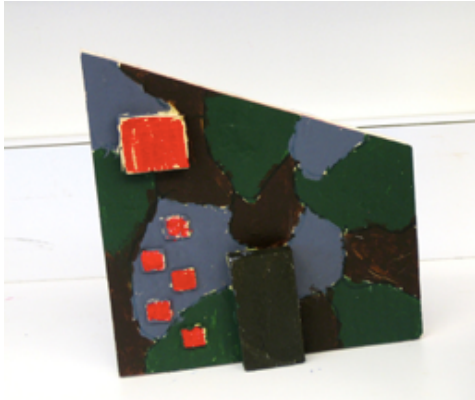
For that project, participants used food boxes, feathers and other leftover materials to create the goggles. The second project involved making houses out of scrap wood, and the creators discussed how they selected their designs and colors.

"You could make your own house doing whatever you want," fourth-grader Carolyn Hapsias said. "It didn't have to be realistic."

Carolyn said she enjoys the Art Expressions program because "you can express yourself and make whatever you want." Using recycled materials is an added bonus, she said.

"It's better because instead of just throwing stuff out, you can reuse it, and it'll look completely different than when you started," she said.

Classmate Luke Poorman said Art Expressions helps him relieve his stress and use it to be more creative.



"I've learned to express all my feelings and just let everything out," he said.

For his house project, Luke created a camouflage building because he wanted to make it both visible and hard to see.

"If I turn the lights on, people would be able to find it," he said. "If I didn't, they wouldn't."

For each project, the focus is on the process, not the product.

"The important thing is that we don't worry about the final result — it's about the creative process," Duchene said. "If you're not focused on the product, kids are free to loosen up and just express themselves."

Each session also involves discussion of topics such as teamwork and self-esteem.

The program was funded through grants from the Grable and Benedum foundations, something Duchene said was crucial to bringing the program to South Allegheny.

"The kids consistently ask if we can do this all year long," she said. "We'd love to; it's really just a matter of getting the right funding. We know that schools don't always have the money for extra arts programs."

The students' artwork will be digitally displayed at [www.projectecosmart.org](http://www.projectecosmart.org). More information about the program also is available on the site.

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