

Reduce, Reuse, Recycle:

Low Cost, No Cost Activities

MHA Spring Conference

Hand and Feet Warmers:

Cut an old towel into nine inch squares. Sew two pieces together leaving an opening in one side about four inches long. Turn stitched side to the inside. Top stitch all four sides 1/4 inch from edge up to the opening. Add about three cups of dried rice. Fold in the edges of the opening and top stitch closed. This can be heated in the microwave and is a great foot warmer for bedtime, which can be reheated many times. Use the same idea and make smaller hand warmers to go in coat pockets.

Mosaics:

Recycle those broken dishes by making a mosaic tabletop, lamp base, gazing ball, birdbath or bowl. All you need is some heavy-duty glue and some grout. Arrange your glass pieces in your desired layout and then glue each piece down. Allow to dry. Add grout of your color choice following the directions on the package. Let dry and clean with glass cleaner. Now you have a one of a kind work of art. It makes breakage of nice china a little less painful.

Mud Scrapers (GREAT activity for men!):

Save metal bottle caps until you have about a gallon. Recycle a scrap of lumber (three quarter plywood will do) and cut to desired size (about 14x24 inches). Seal this with several coats of wood sealer and let dry. Line up the bottle caps, fluted rims up, in rows. With short nails or sheet metal screws attach each one to the wood. Place outside near your door for scrapping muddy boots on. When full of mud, simply hose it off and allow to dry.

Jars and Bottles:

Recycle nicely shaped jars, such as those that contain instant coffee or salsa. These are great containers for layering cookie or soup mixes in to give as a gift. Just add the dry ingredients in layers and put the lid on. With pinking shears cut a circle, one inch larger than the lid, from a piece of fabric and tie it on with a ribbon. Attach a gift card with the recipe.

Use pretty bottles such as what olive oil comes in and make herb oils or vinegars. You can find a wide array of recipes on-line for this. Tie a sprig of the herb used on the neck of the bottle with ribbon and attach a gift card.

Recycled Plastic Bags:

1. If you know how to crochet, you can use plastic bags to make a variety of things. My favorite is to make new bags. I make purses and beach bags, bags of all sizes. To do this you take a regular plastic grocery bag. Smooth the bag out as much as possible so that it is flat and all of the creases are creased. Then fold the bag twice vertically. Cut off the handles and then continue to cut strips about one inch wide horizontally across the bag. Cut off the bottom of the bag and discard the bottom and the handles of the bag. You can now create yarn from the strips you have cut out. I find it easiest to loop the strips together by slipping one through the other and pulling

tight; don't pull too tight because you might break the plastic. Also I will crochet a bit before attaching another strip of plastic, this keeps the yarn more manageable (it tends to bunch up if you attach too many strips together at once). Now let your imagination go wild, anything you can crochet you can make with plastic grocery bags. I also use produce bags.

2. If you are a painter (or even if you're not actually) you can paint jars or bottles. I have painted beer bottles into vases or candle holders, and baby food jars for storage. I love painting the baby food jars to hold different herbs; this is a great way to store dried herbs from your own herb garden. You can also paint the baby food jars, add a wick and use them for candles, and if you add some essential oils to the wax you will end up with a really nice scented candles. The paint I use is Plaid Gloss paint. You will need to let the paint set into the glass for 36 hours and then bake for the paint to completely set in.

To bake you must put the glassware on a cookie sheet and place it in the oven. Set the oven to 350 degrees, once the oven is heated to 350 continue to heat the glassware for an additional 10 minutes. It is important to let the glassware heat up with the oven to ensure that the glassware does not crack and the paint does not peel.

Once the glassware has been baked and cooled it should be safe to wash in the dishwasher without the paint chipping off.

3. You can paint plastic containers to use as pots for plants or any other purpose that you can think of. You can use any container, such as a butter tub, sour cream container. I've even used salad dressing containers as a watering can for my plants. To let the paint set in on plastic however you must let it set for 21 days before washing or the paint will come off. You can use the same kind of paint in this project as you did for the glassware.

Recycled Light Bulb Christmas Ornament:

You will need:

used light bulbs

6" or larger white doilies

any type of fake Christmas greenery such as poinsettias, mistletoe and even pieces of your fake tree that have fallen off!

gold cord or thin ribbon

invisible thread or dental floss to use for hanging the ornament

glue or a hot glue gun

Simply wrap the bulb in the doily, stretching if necessary to cover the glass part of the bulb. Hot glue the doily in place, around the base of the bulb. Wrap a piece of ribbon around the glued edge of the doily and tie in a bow.

You will use the greenery to cover the metal part of the bulb in any manner you choose. Place each piece of greenery where you want it and hot glue in place. Attach the thread or dental floss to the greenery by tying it in place or using glue and you have a beautiful holiday ornament for your tree or to give as a gift.

Tin Can Christmas Luminaries:

You will need:

Empty tin cans (washed and labels removed)
A design of your choice to transfer onto the can
Hammer
Large nail
Tape
Dish towel

I find that it is easiest to punch the holes in your tin can if you freeze some water in it first. Otherwise the can tends to collapse when you begin pounding the nail with the hammer. Just fill the can with water and leave about 1/4 inch of space at the top for the ice to expand. Leave it in the freezer until it is frozen solid. You may find the can bulges a bit at the bottom during the freezing process, but once you remove the ice use the hammer to flatten the bottom of the can. FYI: It might be best to freeze more cans than you think you need in case you make a mistake and need to start over.

Once the ice has frozen, remove the tin can from the freezer and tape your design to the can. The tape won't stick to the cold can, but you can wrap the tape all the way around the can so it will stick to the paper.

You don't necessarily have to have a design on paper; I also enjoy drawing a design on the can freehand using a permanent marker, or just punch the design freehand without drawing it first. Use a folded dish towel to hold the can in place while you are hammering your design. With the hammer and nail, punch holes around the border of your design, trying to keep the holes even and not too close together. This way you will have a clearer image once the can is illuminated. If you want to hang your luminary, punch two holes at the top of the can. You can make a handle out of a wire coat hanger.

Melt the ice by running the can under warm water. Dry the can with a towel and place a votive candle in the bottom.

These are just a couple of ideas for using recycled materials. There are lots of variations for these projects, just let your imagination go wild. Once you get started you'll be surprised at the ideas you can come up with on your own.

3. Usually buy confetti for New Years? Make your own with a hole puncher, scrap paper and old magazines. Confetti can also be used for mosaic-type artwork!
4. Use magazines and newspapers to make collages, gift wrappers and ornaments.
5. Utilize scrap paper and newspaper to make paper-mache projects.
6. You can melt broken crayons and create new crayon disks. You can also heat up flat rocks and melt crayon pieces onto them to make beautiful letter weights. Another great use for broken crayons is to sprinkle wax paper with crayon shavings and cover it with another piece of wax paper to create nice sun catchers or ornaments by cutting the paper into shapes and tracing forms with black permanent marker for a real stained glass look. Then just attach string!

7. Pieces of yarn and string, combined with glue, can be used in lieu of paint to fill an art project with color.

8. Cleaned half-egg shells and cotton balls make cute little "chicks-in-eggs" ornaments for Easter. Just make a little beak and eyes from crafts paper scraps and attach a string. Really cute!

9. Why throw away old candle stumps and left-over wax when you can make textured ornaments with a cardboard base and molten wax of different colors. Why not make beautiful candle holders from recycled bottles and molten wax drippings!

10. Scrap pieces of soap are not very practical, but why throw them in the garbage? With a bit of water and a bit of heat, several scrap pieces of soap (grated for ease of recycling) can make a whole new bar! Use different colors for a nice design and decorate for a nice look until ready for use.

11. When people in the old times did not have money to buy ornaments or tinsel, they used plain popcorn and cranberries to make a garland for their Christmas tree. Try to liven up old traditions! And when Christmas is over, hang the garland into your trees outside - the birds will welcome the treat and take care of the disposal -*wink*!

12. If you're familiar with Girl Scouts you might have heard about "SWAPs" - all of the items above can be used to make fabulous ones! (Please visit the Girl Scout web page for more information about this wonderful craft!)

Make a Great Recycled Chalk Board or Message Board:

If you look around your own house or re-use it centers or even garage sales, you are bound to find large wooden picture frames. Usually the glass has broken or the picture has been damaged and these frames are hanging around.

Clean the frame, and then paint it a color you would like. If there is still wood backing in the frame, great!.. if not look around for a piece of thin hardwood that would fit this frame.

Paint it with blackboard paint, or glue cork to it. Put it in the frame and now you have a great message board to hang on the wall.

If you are willing to go a little further, and your frame is large, you could split off 1/4 of it or more with a piece of wood trim and put in a painting or a picture. I made one of these frames, and my frame was 2 feet wide by 3 feet long, I used the hardboard that was in the frame, and I taped off 1/4 of it, painted the remainder with the blackboard paint, and the top 1/4 I painted a country scene. I put it in the frame, glued a flat 1 x 2 inch flat piece of trim across and it looks like 2 frames, the top 1/4 with a painting and the other 3/4 with blackboard paint.

It's functional, it's recycled, and it is also a piece of art!

POP CAN ART:

Take a pop can for instance. There are so many things you can do with a pop can and make wonderful creations. First of all, make sure the pop can has been emptied out and rinsed out. You do not want to leave it sticky as it will attract bugs. Cover the pop can with paper and make a body out of it. You can add a Styrofoam ball for a head, and legs and arms could be made out of pipe cleaners and pom-poms. You could use yarn for hair and make all different sorts of people or dolls.

DESK ORGANIZERS:

To begin with, the desk organizers are lots of fun and can add tons of color to any one's desk. It only takes a few things to get this going too. First off, you will need either a soup can or veggie can, tuna can or canned chicken can, acrylic paint or construction paper, some odds and ends baubles, glue and scissors, clothes pins.

If you are using the construction paper, you will want to cut the construction paper to the size of the can. Next, put a line of glue along one edge; place this edge against the can. While holding it in place wrap the paper around and add a strip of glue on the inside edge of the end, then using a clothes pin, clip the edges to the can, and let it dry. While the glue is drying you can do the next can. Select what you want to stick on the outside of the paper, buttons, stickers, pom poms, whatever you have on hand will work great. Glue on the baubles and let it dry.

If you wanted to add a little extra organizing help, you can also glue a large paperclip near the top edge of the tall can, this can be used to hold a message or even a picture when you have stuff in it.

For a tooth brush holder, you can use basically the same steps; you may want to paint this instead for easier cleaning. This can add color and charm to anyone's bathroom.

For scratch paper holders, you can use up those small boxes that you sometimes get from necklaces, or even some of the bars of soap that you just put into the shower. Glue some construction paper on the outside, decorate it with some baubles or simply use a few magic markers to put a fun design on it.

Milk Carton Villages:

You can use the half gallon size or even half and half containers, whatever you can imagine. You will also need a rainbow of construction paper, markers, scissors, glue, even some baubles if you like. Once you have gathered up what you need, cut pieces to fit each side. You can even make a roof to cover up the writing. After you have glued on the construction paper and it has had time to dry, use markers to draw windows and doors. Using some embellishments you can even make a house look like a candy house or a gingerbread house.

Once you have created all of your houses, find a nice place to set up your village, you can then use a string of lights maybe even a white table cloth to look like snow, if you want to make the village appear that it is a winter village. There is so much you can do with this.

Planters:

A large planter with a tree or a cluster of flowers can add a homey touch to the front porch while setting you back \$50 or more. However, if you purchase cat litter in large plastic buckets, you already have a home for your favorite patio plant. Simply save the bucket, punch a few drainage holes in the bottom, and spray paint it. Make sure to choose a spray paint specifically formulated for use on plastics. You can choose from a variety of colors and textures. A classic terra cotta orange will make your planter look like ceramic, but beaten metal, mirrored metal, and textured stone are all commonly available for spraying on. You can add finishing touches with decoupage, hand painting, or glued-on trim.

These planters make a perfect home for a tomato, since the tall, narrow shape provides adequate depth for the roots. Even if you have no garden space in the traditional sense, a few painted cat litter buckets and handful of seeds will give you an eye-catching container garden.

Not a cat owner? Think outside the litter box. Coffee cans, whipped topping containers, and 2 liter pop bottles can all be turned into planters on a smaller scale. Just keep in mind that whatever container you make, it must have drainage holes to provide a suitable environment for the plant.

Candy Compartments:

Need to organize beads, findings, buttons or other small items? Treat yourself to a box of chocolates. The plastic compartments for the chocolates in a Hershey's Pot of Gold sampler, for example, make an ideal tray for sorting and storing tiny things. You can cover the box with wrapping paper or craft paper to give it a more professional look and prevent the wrath of disappointed candy lovers who open it up and find clasps instead of caramels.

We all get them...those unsolicited DVD's of great vacations or those unsolicited CD's for a different internet company. So what can we use them for? I have compiled a list of great ideas.

First, save the case they come in. They are great for replacing that lost CD or DVD case for your old favorites.

Now then, put on your creative thinking caps because here we go:

For a great set of wind chimes get out the fishing tackle box and your fishing line. Using the fishing line, string several of the CD's or DVD's together at different levels and arrange them in a pleasing order. Use an O ring or some other such item to connect all of them to at the top and to hang them from. I have seen some pretty creative arrangements of wind chimes made in this fashion.

Get some craft cork. Usually a very thin sheet is all that is required. Trace your CD or DVD onto the cork and carefully cut it out. Now glue the cork to the bottom of the CD or DVD (or glue to the "ugly" side) and you now have a great coaster. Make a set and give them away as a gift.

I have seen some great photo frames made out of these CD's and DVD's. Use one and glue a small school photo in the center or use one as a center piece and glue several around it and make a collage. Be creative. I have seen some great creative wall pieces made in this fashion.

Use them in your garden when planting. Lay them near the new seedlings or even plant the seeds in the center of them with the shiny side up. The shimmer and sparkle will scare away the birds and save your plantings.

Use them as reflectors for a hard to see sidewalk or driveway. You can anchor them vertically on a stake and put one on each side of the walkway or driveway to help you see where you are going or parking.

Here is a fun one for teen aged boys that like destruction. Hand them a hammer and a small stack of CD's or DVD's and have them go outside and shatter them (wearing gloves is advised as edges may be sharp). You can either leave edges sharp or smooth them with a file and then glue them onto a planter or piece of wood varying the side that is up as a mosaic. Some very pretty ideas have emerged this way.

Here is another clever one. Save them for a year or so and use them to line a wall in a greenhouse. The reflecting light/heat will help your plants grow and you will have again participated in a great recycling program.

Bend them in the middle and connect them and use them as any of the following: a Christmas ornament, or a disco ball hung from a ceiling (You could connect as many as you wanted in every direction and make it as large or small as you like).

If you stack them and secure them together they can make a great lamp pole or a candle holder. Simply purchase the required wiring and light fixture or put in a tall candle and you will have beautifully reflected light.

Snowman Door Stop

Use a 2 liter plastic bottle to make a cute snowman door stop. Sand the bottle slightly, all over. This will help the paint stick to the bottle better. Paint the bottle with white acrylic paint. Get a plastic margarine lid along with the lid from a spray paint can, or something similar in size. Sand them slightly and paint them with black acrylic paints. To give the hat more texture you can add felt to the margarine and spray can lids. Cut a hole, slightly smaller than the spray can lid, in the center of the margarine lid.

Turn the spray can lid where the open side is down and glue it to the center of the margarine lid, over the hole in the center of the margarine lid. Fill the bottle halfway with sand, small rocks or

even marbles. Screw the cap back on the bottle then glue hat on top, making sure the cap from the bottle goes into the hole of the margarine lid.

Cut a piece of felt or fleece to the size of two feet long and two inches wide. Tie the "scarf" around the snowman, about a third of the way from the top. Keep it secure by placing a little glue under the scarf. Use a small circle of black fake fur, if desired, to make ear muffs for the snowman. Glue them to the sides, just under the hat. Draw a face on the snowman with black paint. Use a craft carrot for the nose or just paint an orange dot. Glue real buttons, or ones made from felt, down the front of the snowman, just under the scarf. Use the snowman to hold open a door or just set it by the front steps to welcome guests.

A pal for the snowman can be a penguin. Empty a 2 liter bottle and clean labels and such from exterior. Sand slightly and paint white. Cut black "wings" from craft fur or felt and attach them to the sides of the bottle. Cut feet from orange craft foam or felt. Glue them to the bottom of the bottle. Cut a beak from the orange felt and glue it in the center of the face region. Fashion a hat from fleece or felt. Shape it like a nightcap, made with Christmas colors. Glue onto head, covering the lid of the bottle. Paint large ovals for the eyes, leaving two-thirds of the oval white and painting the bottom part of the oval black. Use pink paint to add rosy cheeks to the penguin.

Candle Holders:

Cut the top third off of a 2 liter bottle. Cover all but the opening in beads by hot gluing them. Glue the lids to an upside-down saucer for unique candle holders. It's okay to eliminate the saucer and use just the beaded bottle part.