

Recycled Materials

By Andrea Duran-Cason, Norman

[Watch Andrea's Spotlight Video](#)



Summary

1. Big Idea and/or Question(s): **Have you ever considered how much waste your household “throws out” daily? How can we repurpose and/or reduce our waste in creative ways?**
2. Medium(s): **at least 6 plastic grocery bags, scissors**
3. Age Levels: **10-adult**
4. Time Breakdown: **1 hour**

Materials

Almost everyone has a stash of plastic grocery bags! If not, you probably have a friend or family member who would be more than happy to donate theirs. You will need at least 6, and some scissors, to get started but the more you have the longer your rope will be.

Discussion + Activity

- a. **Introduction:** I am Andrea Duran-Cason, a multi-disciplinary artist from Norman, OK. I have been an artist for over 10 years and my practice intertwines painting, installation, performance, and social practice as a way to advocate for animal rights.
- b. **Big Idea and Essential Questions:** How does our everyday consumption effect our environment and others? We often don't give a second thought to our trash once it is picked up by the garbage truck, but our consumption has a great effect on our natural environment, water, and the animals we share the earth with. Microplastics are now found in almost everything! How can artists use recycled materials to reassign purpose and meaning to an otherwise detrimental material?

- c. **How My Spotlight Project Connects:** In my piece, “Hanging in the Balance”, I repurpose plastic bags into rope that connect paintings of endangered animals to wood frames. Reminiscent of a hide being tanned, the rope made of “trash” acts as a metaphor for human pollution as a contributor to habitat loss and extinction. Many artists use recycled materials in their work! Artist Khalil Chistee also uses plastic bags to create sculptures that deal with recycling of identity and question worth of traditional art materials due to their historical context. Other artists using recycled materials include Ptolemy Elrington, Vik Muniz, and Tim Noble + Sue Webster.
- d. **Activity for Investigation:** In this project, you will create rope made from plastic bags. Get creative with ways to utilize the rope! You could create a macrame plant hanger, basket or hammock—weave multiple strands into an interesting sculpture, or just use like a regular rope for many purposes, like a rope swing!
Begin by tearing or cutting along the sides of the bags under the handles. Many bags will have a seam that is easy to tear, but those that don’t you will need to cut. Now you should have a loop connected at top of the handle seams and the bottom seam. Take your scissors and cut along the handle seams, so that you have one long length of material. The bottom seam should now be in the middle. Do this to all 6 bags. Next, knot the bags together in pairs of two so that you have three lengths and lay them out next to each other. Stagger them slightly so that the knots don’t line up. Tie them all together with a big knot at the top. Begin braiding the three pieces together! When you are running out of material, you can continue to tie on more bags to create however much rope you would like!
- e. **Wrap-Up:** Now that you’ve learned one way of recycling materials, consider other materials and methods of repurposing to make art. Take a look at the artists mentioned above for inspiration. Consumption and waste are such a normal part of our lives that we often don’t think about the impact. An awareness of our (especially plastic!) use is the first step to making better choices. No one can be 100% perfect but we can make small changes to reduce our environmental impact such as reusable grocery bags, reducing meat and dairy consumption, and purchasing plastic-free product alternatives.