



Making Other Arrangements

Dale Meyrick Wayne

Our annual school fundraising banquet was around the corner, and rather than cut into the profits by spending money on table decorations, our auction committee asked if the art department would be willing to make them. My students have worked with plastic bottles for years, making glass-like sculptures, a Chihuly-inspired acrylic ceiling, chandeliers, and Christmas trees adorned with ornaments. The auction was to have an Italian theme, so Venetian glass florals were just the ticket to complement décor reminiscent of Tuscany. Could we pull it off?

Gathering Supplies

First, we found bargain-priced 20" (51 cm) tall tower glass vases on the Internet. Their one-inch opening worked perfectly since they filled in quickly and supported the weight of the bottles wired to branches. Our whole student body, from kindergarten through the twelfth grade, was involved in the creation of these magnificent and dramatic decorations. Not only did they serve to add height and color to the

room, they were sold (first come first served!) to the auction guests. They were quite the conversation pieces as people rarely realized they were made out of trash.

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We put out an APB for water bottles and two liter bottles to our school families and area businesses. (Even the green and blue colored bottles work well, but the thicker varieties that sports drinks and juices come in are too difficult to cut and shape.)

and oranges. Students are instructed to mix colors from only one palette. If they want to change colors they must leave their brush and go to a different palette.

I demonstrate how to hold the bottle by putting my index finger in the spout and pinching with my thumb, reminding students not to paint the bottoms of the bottles.

I also gave students the opportunity to roll the bottles in glitter while they are still wet. I set up a table with big plastic containers with about 1" (2.54 cm) of glitter at the bottom. Younger students bring their bottles to me and I dust them with glitter and place them, unpainted bottom down, onto a paper-covered table.

Cutting and Forming

Once dry, bottles can be cut horizontally into petals or vertically into spirals. Students from grade four and up are capable of the cutting step. Pinch the bottom of the bottle to begin the cut using scissors, and then cut off the bottom. Be sure not to stab at the bottle to begin the cut.

The bottles are then cut into either floral shapes or spirals. I encourage students to round the edges of petals for a more organic look. Cutting vertical fringe can be fun and serve as festive centers to the finished flowers. The spirals should be cut about ½" (1.25 cm) wide. You can cut the mouth of the bottle off of the spirals and simply drape them on the finished arrangement.

Using Heat

If you are not going to heat the bottles, the petals can be pinched into place, painted side down, leaving the clear

plastic over the paint to create a magical look of glass.

Bottles can be manipulated with heat, but it is not necessary. (Our students are not allowed to do this step until sixth or seventh grade.) Due to the possibility of fumes, we set up a station outdoors or near a window. Students use embossing guns or hair-driers to heat the plastic until it contracts and takes on an organic glass look. Both tools need to be placed fairly close to the plastic in order for it to begin to change shape. The petals can be pressed open against a surface, then frozen into position using heating and cooling. The spirals look best if you do not apply heat to them at all.

Assembly and Arrangement

Since we use hot glue, older students assemble the flowers. We like to use florist's hot glue since the bottles stay together much better with that than with ordinary hot glue. Students can assemble two floral forms together, sometimes three. Students need to take care not to plug the bottle's spout, since the last step involves inserting a wired floral pick. Once the floral pick is inserted and tacked with hot glue, the flower is ready to be wired into the arrangement.

A wooden dowel, floral reed, or tree branch serves as the armature onto which students can wire their completed flowers. The last step is draping the spirals, and the arrangements are table ready!

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NATIONAL STANDARD

Students intentionally take advantage of the qualities and characteristics of art media, techniques, and processes to enhance communication of their experiences and ideas.

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