

Get the Rag Rug Bug

This lesson covers textiles and the consequences of landfilling them. Its emphasis is on the 3 Rs, with the reuse of textiles being the focus of the activity: rag rug making. Rag rugs were commonly made in households up to the middle of the 20th century by using odd scraps of fabric on a background of old sacking.

Objectives

- To understand the consequences of sending textiles to landfill.
- To learn about reducing, reusing and recycling.
- To recycle clothes to create a rag rug sample.

Lesson Outline

Discuss what currently happens to waste, problems with this and alternatives:	Discuss what happens to rubbish when it goes in the bin. Show a picture of a landfill site and discuss the impact on the environment.
	Talk about the problems specific to putting textiles in landfill e.g. synthetic fabrics don't break down, natural fabrics e.g. wool produce methane. Outline environmental impact of making new fabrics (e.g. cotton).
	What are the alternatives to throwing clothes/textiles away? Ask children for their suggestions (charity shops, giving clothes to friends/family, using bring banks, charity collection bags from homes, cutting up for rags etc). Link to reduce, reuse and recycle. Compare environmental impact.
Tell children briefly about the history of rag rug making:	Families would have worked together to produce a rug using old clothes saved during the year and an old hessian sack. Traditionally the children were responsible for cutting the clothes into strips, the father would make a frame and stretch the hessian over it and the mother would use part of a 'dolly' peg or similar tool to thread the fabric through the hessian.
	The rug would be put in pride of place in front of the fire in the living room. The following year a new rug would be made and so the original one would have been moved to the second best room.

	Over subsequent years the rug would gradually make its way around the house to the back door and finally onto the compost heap where it would help to keep the contents warm. Here it would gradually rot away (which is why few examples of old rag rugs exist).
Children to make rag rugs in pairs:	Children work in pairs to make a small rag rug panel. One child cuts the fabric whilst their partner threads the fabric through in concentric circles. You could attach all of the panels together and use it in your classroom, perhaps a quiet/reading area.

Extension/follow up activity:	Invite in an older member of the community to talk about other ways to 'make do and mend'.
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Resources you will need:

- Landfill picture.*
- Hessian squares- 1 per pair of children.
- Rag rugging tools (we have some available to borrow- email waste@gloucestershire.gov.uk).
- Scissors.
- Old t-shirts/fleeces/fabric.

*Photo/picture attached below for printing.

Rag rugging instructions

1. Push the tool down through the hessian and then back up to the front so that two holes are made fairly close together (about 3 threads apart).
2. Remove the tool and then use it to push a strip of t shirt fabric (approx 2cm by 8cm) down through the first hole and up through the second.*
3. Repeat this for the second piece of fabric – reuse one of the holes used for the first piece of fabric.
4. Continue, threading the fabric strips as close as possible together. When the design is complete the strips can be trimmed.

*It isn't necessary to knot the fabric strips – the more you add the tighter the hessian will hold the strips and the sturdier your work will become.



