

*“Recycling turns materials that would otherwise become waste into valuable resources.”* (Environmental Protection Agency 1). Most people know that recycling benefits the earth but what they don't know is where it goes. I have never known what they turn recycled materials into, but I have been taught that it is good to recycle since I was a little girl. Since I don't know what happens to all the bottles and newspapers I've always been told are recyclable, I wondered if I could use materials that can be recycled and turn them into valuable resources transformed by me. This led me to the conclusion that I'm going to make fashion pieces out of recyclable material.

In order to start my project, I wanted to research the basics of recycling. I started with the general question: what is recycling? I wanted to know the benefits of recycling, why it is important, and how it's done. Recycling is defined as, “A process of separating, collecting and remanufacturing or converting used or waste products into new materials” (benefits-of-recycling.com 1). Basically, recycling is a simple way to turn used things into new things.

Next, I wanted to learn the process of recycling. The first step is the collection of the materials. People throw their recyclable materials into a recycling can, and then they are picked up and brought to a plant. At the recycling plant all of the materials are sorted into different categories. Although a lot of recycling programs ask for materials to be sorted at home, the workers at plants still look through them to make sure everything is in its right place. The next step of the recycling process is manufacturing. The original materials are changed into different materials. For example, plastic bottles and tins become packaging and glass can be manufactured into bricks and astro-turf. Also, Milk, shampoo, and detergent containers are manufactured into wheelie bins, irrigation pipes, and air conditioning hoses. Paperboard, milk, and juice cartons are manufactured into recycled office paper. Soft drink bottles made from polyethylene terephthalate (PET) are manufactured into new detergent bottles, carpet, and recycled fabric. Glass bottles and jars are sorted by color and then melted down to make new bottles and jars. (blacktown.nsw.gov) After all of these materials are transformed into new products they are sold to buyers who resell them to consumers.

In order to decide what I could use for my project I needed to know what, exactly, could be recycled. Therefore, I found out everything that can be recycled in California. It is possible to recycle Batteries, biodegradable waste, clothing, electronics, garments, glass, metals, paper, beverage containers, demolition debris, hazardous waste, motor oil, plastic, organics (food and yard waste), and grass trimmings. (calrecycle.ca.gov) Because of the length of this list I narrowed down my materials to paper (newspaper), plastic cups and bags, and beverage containers (aluminum), all of which can be recycled in California.

After I learned about all the basics of recycling, I wanted to find out why it's so important. In my research I found that it does a lot of things. First of all, it helps extend the use of something. It saves the earth by not overusing resources that we don't have much of. It also saves energy because it takes less energy to remanufacture materials than to start from scratch. Another benefit of recycling is that it helps reduce global warming and pollution by emitting less greenhouse gasses into the atmosphere. Recycling also lessens waste products in landfills because materials being reused aren't getting thrown out. (benefits-of-recycling.com)

After researching the facts behind recycling I thought about what resourceful thing I could turn recycled materials into. My original idea was fashion, but I needed to know more about fashion before I came up with designs or started working. I talked to my friend who always wins first place at the recycled fashion show in Santa Fe. I asked her how she got all of her materials and she said that she just collected them over time. She told me that she has made

dresses out of Harry Potter books, Orbit gum boxes, and Starbucks coffee cups. (Osgood, *interview*)

Looking through the pictures of my friend's dresses inspired me to research recycled *fashion* more thoroughly. I found a lot of websites, such as [recyclerunway.com](http://recyclerunway.com), [trash-fashion.com](http://trash-fashion.com), and [trendhunter.com](http://trendhunter.com), which had a few pictures of recycled dresses. There were pieces made out of gum wrappers, bubble wrap, newspaper, plastic cups, corn husks, caution tape, tires, aluminum, glass, and much more. Along with a lot of outfits made out of things I didn't expect, I found out a lot of people have won things for making dresses out of alternative materials. For example, a girl made her prom dress and her date's suit out of Duct Tape. For this, she got a scholarship for college. Also, another girl won a Scholastic award for making a dress completely out of Duct Tape. I had no idea that using alternative or recyclable materials for fashion was so popular. ([burdastyle.com](http://burdastyle.com))

After looking at a lot of recycled fashion, I thought it would be important to look at artists who do similar things. I found two artists who specifically stood out to me. The first artist that really stood out to me was Nick Cave. Although he doesn't make recycled fashion, he makes elaborate suits out of alternative materials called sound suits. The suits that he makes are big, colorful, hairy, and look like fuzzy monsters. A lot of them are made from dyed hair but some of them are made from spinning tops, plants, buttons, and many other things. These suits are beautiful and really inspired me to make something people want to look at. Nick Cave's sound suits have started a cult of UCLA students who dress up in his suits and go around the country and perform randomly in public. Although this doesn't relate directly to my project, I really love his sound suits and they made me think about the use of fashion is art and the use of alternative materials in both art and fashion.

The other artist that relates to my project is Isabelle de Borchgrave, a Belgian artist who makes historical dresses out of paper. She inspires me because she is able to take something so simple, paper, and turn it into elaborate Victorian dresses. She is able to make something beautiful out of something that isn't necessarily considered beautiful to begin with. Her dresses are stunning works of art that she hand paints. I am amazed by what she is able to do with paper because the finished pieces don't even look like they are made of paper; they are truly beautiful. ([legionofhonor.famsf.org](http://legionofhonor.famsf.org))

Researching artists who work with alternative materials for fashion pieces made me realize that I need to know more about fashion design to do my project. There are many fashion designers out there but I specifically looked at Alexander McQueen. His clothing is so sculptural and creatively different. He says, "For me, what I do is an artistic expression which is channeled through me. Fashion is just the medium" (McQueen). His clothes are so beautiful they gave me chills. He truly pushes the boundaries of what is wearable into his artistic vision. Although I could not create something so dramatically beautiful for my project or out of recycled materials, I found that his VOSS collection from spring/summer 2001 related to how I thought about my project. Alexander McQueen said about the VOSS collection, "These beautiful models were walking around in the room, and then suddenly this woman who wouldn't be considered beautiful was revealed. It was about trying to trap something that wasn't conventionally beautiful to show that beauty comes from within," (McQueen). I realized that this is exactly what I'm trying to do with recycled fashion. I want to take something people consider trash and turn it into something beautiful *and* useful so that people can see the beauty in recycling.

Throughout all of this research I have kept in mind that my main purpose is to get the importance of recycling across. Honestly, I learned a lot more about recycling than I knew

before. I also think that choosing fashion was a good choice because, although difficult, I got to try something that I had never done. I was able to combine two things that I've been interested in for a while, learn about them, and create art out of the two mixed together.

## Works Cited

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