

# UPCYCLING MANUAL

**Reuse and Recycle** 





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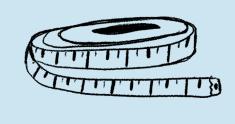


### **CONTENTS AND DESCRIPTION**

This activity highlights the school's commitment to sustainability by integrating workshops and projects inspired by the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), with a particular emphasis on upcycling and waste management. Students engage in hands-on activities that promote responsible consumption and production (SDG 12), as well as climate action (SDG 13). The approach encourages practical learning about reducing waste and creatively reusing materials, reinforcing the school's sustainable profile. This concept is highly adaptable and can be implemented flexibly throughout the school year, beyond a designated sustainability week.

The purpose of this course is to highlight and promote the sustainable and green profile of the school, as well as the numerous practical approaches and themes related to sustainability. The course has been part of the workshop week held in Graz at GIBS (Graz International Bilingual School). All students involved in the Erasmus+ Green Empowerment of Schools project chose to participate in a school workshop focusing on one or more of the UN's SDGs, specifically Goal 12: Responsible Consumption and Production.

The Arts and Crafts team gave new life to clothes and accessories that the students brought to the workshop. An old shirt was transformed into a beautiful shopping bag, just the right size for a baguette, and was presented in a fabulous fashion show. Most of the students had never used a sewing machine before, so it was a successful first experience for them.



## **PROJECT OBJECTIVES**

How does this project work?



- > Students as agents of change
- **Enhance existing programs**
- Real world application
- > Improving green skills
- > Action learning





## STRUCTURE & FRAMEWORK

The workshop can be carried out as an intensive three-day session or adapted in length and scope, depending on requirements, resources, and other factors. The structure can easily be scaled down to just a few lessons or expanded over a longer period to fit different contexts and topics.

We asked the students to bring an item from home (clothing or accessory) that they could upcycle. A few did bring items, but the majority did not, so we used boxes of donated used clothing. The Climate Action Group had organized a "Twice but Nice" Used Clothing Sale, and the unsold items were collected for further use. Examples of upcycled items were shown, and students could choose whether to take an existing piece of clothing to modify or repurpose it for something else.

Examples included pants that were too short, embellished at the bottom; visible mending on garments with holes or stains, where patches were applied; a shirt turned into a bag; jeans transformed into bags; and T-shirts converted into frisbees or pillows/cushions. After presenting these examples, students had the opportunity to look through the provided items, choose one, and brainstorm ideas for their project. The teachers circulated and offered suggestions.

Students were asked to make a design sketch on paper and discuss the process with the instructors. We had 16 sewing machines set up (after maintenance), and students worked in pairs. Those with little or no sewing experience received instruction on how to use the machines. Other materials available included ribbons, ropes, buttons, and other embellishments.

### **TARGET AUDIENCE**

The course is primarily aimed at students aged 12–19 who have a level of maturity that enables them to work actively in groups for extended periods and upcycle old clothes for their own purposes. It is therefore particularly relevant for students in this age range who are working with sustainability and rethinking the way they use resources, such as fast fashion. The concept can be adapted for different types of schools and contexts in various countries.

# ONLINE BASIC SEWING MACHINE INSTRUCTIONS

- How it works
- How to thread the machine
- Sewing basic seams and how to keep them straight
- A Beginner's Guide To SEWING! How to use a sewing machine
- https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=oD KpZm7OaM



# WELCOME TO THE UPCYCLING WORKSHOP!

#### > Kick-off & Warm Welcome

We begin with a friendly introduction to the workshop, where you'll meet your instructors and fellow participants. Get ready for a creative and hands-on experience!

#### What is Upcycling?

Discover the philosophy behind upcycling—transforming old or unused garments into fresh, stylish pieces. Learn how this sustainable practice helps reduce waste and encourages mindful fashion.

#### Sewing Machine Basics

Our instructors will guide you through the essentials of operating a sewing machine. Whether you're a beginner or need a refresher, you'll gain confidence in threading, stitching, and troubleshooting.



Choose from a variety of provided fabrics or bring your own pre-loved clothing. These materials will be the canvas for your unique creation.



#### **Design & Planning**

Sketch your ideas on paper and discuss your vision with our instructors. They'll help you refine your concept and plan the steps to bring it to life.



#### Collaborative Creation

With 16 sewing machines available for 30 students, you'll work in pairs or small groups. This setup encourages teamwork, idea-sharing, and mutual support throughout the creative process.



#### **Construct & Customize**

Bring your design to life! Cut, sew, and embellish your upcycled piece with guidance from instructors and feedback from your peers.



#### Showcase Your Work

Celebrate your creativity! At the end of the workshop, all finished pieces will be proudly presented in a fashion show on the catwalk—your moment to shine and inspire others.





# TURNING AN OLD SHIRT INTO A BAG

#### **MATERIALS NEEDED**

- Old polo shirt
- Scissors
- Sewing pins
- Needle and thread (or sewing machine)
- Optional: fabric chalk or marker

Have the student choose an old polo shirt that they no longer wear.





Cut off both sleeves carefully along the seam.

From the cut-off sleeves, cut two shoulder straps of equal length (about 20–25 cm each, depending on desired strap length).





Turn the shirt inside out to prepare for sewing.

Place the two straps inside the shirt:

- Pin one end of each strap to the top edge of the shoulder opening on each side.
- Pin the other end of each strap to the bottom hem on the same side of the shirt, allowing 1 to 2 cm of the strap to stick out beyond the fabric edge.





Sew the sleeve holes closed, stitching over the pinned straps to secure them. Then sew the bottom hem closed as well. Make sure to backstitch (sew back and forth) several times over each strap end for extra strength.

Turn the shirt right side out, and your bag is ready to use! Time to grab your baguettes or whatever you want to carry. Bon appétit!











# TURNING AN OLD SHIRT INTO A FRISBEE

#### MATERIALS NEEDED

- Old polo shirt or any sturdy cotton shirt
- Scissors
- Needle and thread (or sewing machine)
- Cardboard or a plastic frisbee (optional, for shape support)
- Fabric marker or chalk (optional)

Have the student select an old shirt that is clean and in good condition.





Lay the shirt flat and cut out a large circle from the front or back panel of the shirt. Aim for about 25–30 cm (10–12 inches) in diameter — big enough to throw comfortably.

If you want extra stability, cut out a circle of the same size from a piece of cardboard or use an old plastic frisbee as a base.





Turn the fabric circle inside out.

Sew around the edge of the fabric circle, folding the edge inward about 1 cm as you sew to create a clean, reinforced border.





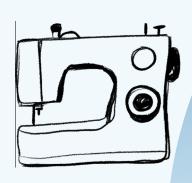
If using cardboard/plastic for structure, sandwich it inside the fabric circle before closing the border completely. Make sure the edges are sewn tightly to hold the shape.

Turn the frisbee right side out, and you're ready to toss your upcycled frisbee!

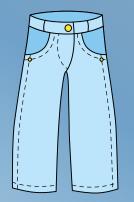


#### **TIPS FOR SUCCESS**

- Use a dense, sturdy shirt for better flight.
- Reinforce the edges well so the frisbee holds together during play.
- Decorate the frisbee with fabric markers if desired.







# TURNING JEANS INTO BAGS

#### **MATERIALS NEEDED**

- Old pair of jeans
- Scissors
- Sewing pins
- Needle and thread or sewing machine
- Optional: fabric glue, decorations (patches, buttons)

Have the student bring an old pair of jeans that they no longer wear.





Cut across the jeans just below the back pockets to separate the top portion (this will become the bag body).

Turn the cut jeans piece inside out.





Sew the bottom edge closed, making sure to backstitch at the seams for extra durability.

#### Decide on the handles:

 Option A: Use the existing belt loops and attach a strap made from leftover denim or fabric.



• Option B: Cut two strips from the lower leg sections for handles (about 4 cm wide and 40–50 cm long).



Attach the handles to the top edge of the bag on each side. Pin them in place first to check the length and fit.

Sew the handles securely to the top edge of the bag, reinforcing the stitching for strength.

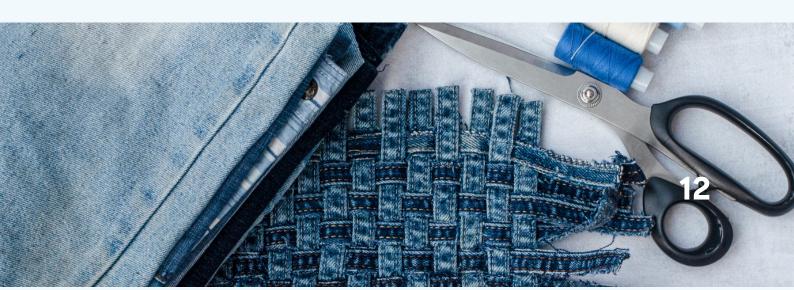




Turn the bag right side out. If desired, decorate with patches, buttons, or fabric paint for a personal touch!

#### **EXTRA TIP**

Use the back pockets as handy external pockets on the bag!



# UPCYCLING A TETRAPAK INTO A PURSE

#### **MATERIALS NEEDED**

- 1 empty Tetra Pak
- Scissors
- paper template
- a metal paper fastener
- thick, transparent Sellotape
- a punch
- magazines
- an elastic band



#### Prepare the Tetra Pak

- 1. You need an empty juice or milk Tetra Pak.
- 2. Slice carefully along one vertical seam.
- 3. Wash, dry, and flatten it into a rectangle.













#### Make a rectangle

- 1. Cut off the side of the Tetra Pak where the spout is.
- 2. Cut off the base of the Tetra Pak.
- 3. The rectangle left over will be used to make the purse.



#### Trace the Template

- 1. Print the template (p. 16)
- 2. Place it over the flattened carton (shiny side facing down).
- 3. Trace the purse (cutting outline) onto the carton.

#### Stick pictures onto the cut out template

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1. Cut out the template you traced.

2. Stick pictures from magazines with glue to make a collage on your purse.



#### Make your purse water resistant

1. Stick thick, transparent Sellotape onto your collage to make it water resistant.

2. Cut around the purse to remove leftover Sellotape.

#### **Assemble the Purse**

1. Fold the outer parts into the centre of the purse.

2. Punch a hole into the middle of each flap.





#### **Add Closure**

1. Fasten 3 flaps in the centre using a metal paper-fastener.







#### **Close purse**

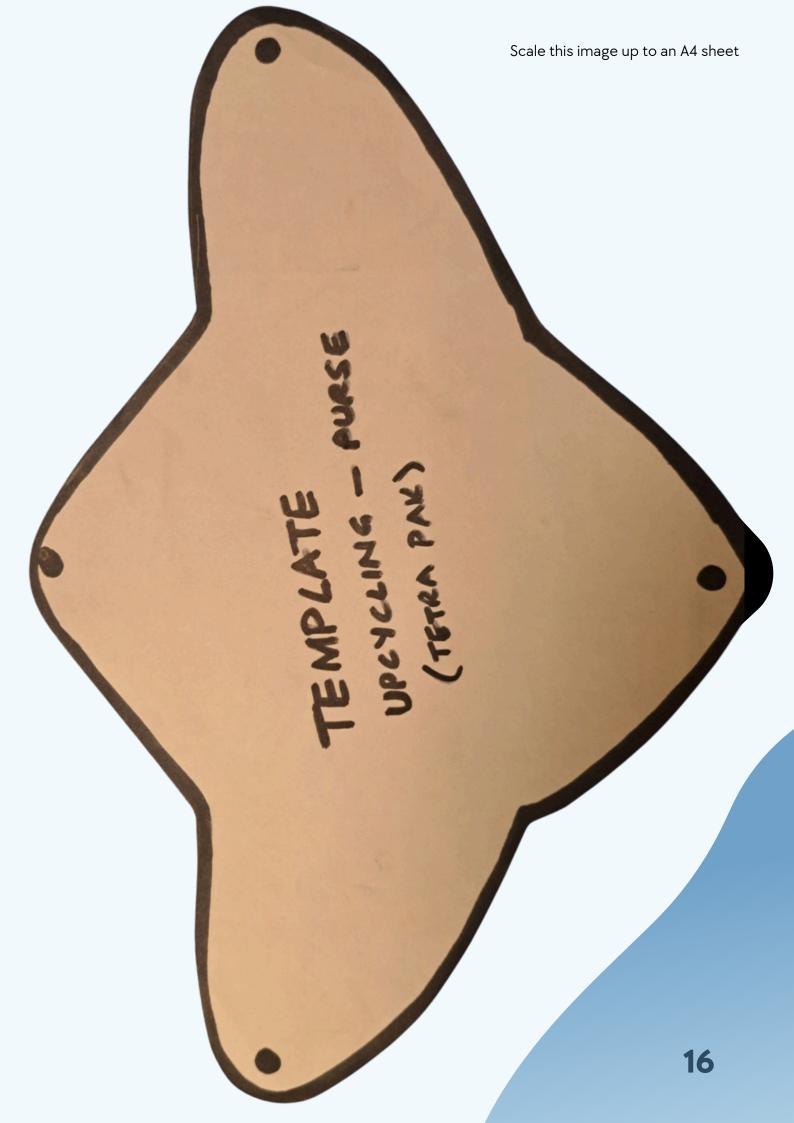
- 1. Thread an elastic band into the last hole and secure it by making a knot.
- 2. Wrap the elastic band around the purse to keep it closed.





Done! You now have a durable, water-resistant purse made from upcycled material.





## Our students at work during the workshop











## **OUTCOMES**

#### General

- Translate specific activities at the school to user-oriented and catchy content
- To enhance the perception of the school as working with sustainability

#### Green didactics and "empowerment"

- To visualize and disseminate how sustainability and green initiatives are a part of the curriculum by involving students in communicating results – internally as well as externally through social media (fashion show)
- To inspire to active participation by involving not only students participating in the workshop, but others as well (fashion show – invitation to the parents and students from other school of the school district)
- To disseminate results internally and externally
- To promote ownership among students and a feeling of empowerment





### **ORGANISATION**

Classroom teaching, teacher presentations, group work, fashion show - upcycled products on stage



#### **GIBS GRAZ**

Georgigasse 85 8020 Graz





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