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Frugality Joins Sewing for Upcycling Event

Frugal is a funny sounding word, but a serious concept for young people who must learn to appreciate the value of resources in order to become financially strong. It was in the spirit of frugality, but also of creativity, critical thinking, perseverance and project management that 7th grade Home and Careers students created upcycled clothing items that are wearable or useable, using hand and machine sewing skills.

Upcycling is the result of the familiar adage "one man's trash is another man's treasure." We're a throwaway society in many regards. When it comes to clothes, our youth can be termed "the T-shirt generation:" they have a boatload of them, and when clothes don't fit, or they rip or soil in the most insignificant way, they tend to be tossed. Students were charged with designing a new use for otherwise throwaway fabric, commonly an unwanted t-shirt - or many t-shirts for that matter, an old pillow case, a worn out sweatshirt, a torn pair of jeans, or even those mateless socks. The projects they created were a sign of ingenuity and outside-the-box thinking - real conversation pieces. One student created a quilt from her stack of t-shirts; another student created a backpack from an old sweatshirt; a kitten's playpen morphed from an unwanted t-shirt and a men's bow tie originated in a pair of swim trunks. A shrunken sweater warmed up to winter gloves and a men's tie became a cell phone case. Faded jeans became a men's wallet. Many of the projects were embellished with beads, embroidery, or fabric flowers called yo-yos.

After students created their projects - tirelessly, they entered them into a competition for judging by professional upcyclers. That's right - people who upcycle for a living! Several local people - some who are parents of AJHS students, design and create useful goods out of useless or otherwise unwanted items. One popular upcycling item is the memory project - the creation of a stuffed animal, a quilt, a tapestry, or some other item from clothes that symbolize meaning. An upcycler in Auburn creates stuffed bunnies from the clothes of a deceased spouse - something for a widow or widower to "hang on" to. An upcycler in Weedsport creates quilts from the sporting t-shirts that collect through the years. Another Auburnian sells upcycled items on Etsy, the popular e-commerce site for everything handmade. And the list goes on. Junior high school students need to exercise the transition in their brain development that takes them from concrete to abstract thinking. The upcycled clothing project challenges them to strengthen that development with critical thinking skills. With shreds of egocentrism still at play, knowing they will have a product or tangible result from their work provides some of the motivation for seeing a project through to its end amid all the frustration that technical skills like sewing can foster. If that isn't enough, kids thrive on competition with the risk of defeat but the hope of victory.

In the end, everyone wins when learning is clothed in fun from an applied academics course like Home and Careers!

