

TEACHING SNAPSHOTS

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Ugly creatures

Class: Year 9

School: [Wellington High School](#)

Teacher: Kylie Merrick

Category: Classroom activity

This six-week Ugly Creatures unit arose from Kylie Merrick's classroom focus on sustainability and her emphasis on the recycling of resources – she regularly asks for donations of materials through the school notices and also gets useful items from local businesses, sometimes materials destined for the dump.

For the unit Kylie first discusses with her class how local designers have recycled materials for wearable art or make decorations out of leftover fabric. She suggests that they make ugly creatures (also known as crazy creatures or softies) from the materials in her fabric-scrap bins, pointing out that similar items are often sold at expensive prices in shops.

The ugly creatures were to be small (limited to the A4 size of some donated felt), decorated with left-over fabric scraps, and stuffed (with donated filling). Students were able to use any scraps/buttons/donated materials in the classroom and from home, or found objects such as shells or feathers.

The students' brief was to design a creature based on two animals (but not cats or dogs). They were asked to research unusual animals, to consider the different types of body parts, and to combine some features in their design. They also analysed the ugly creatures made by previous classes and those featured in shops, books and online.

After designing their ugly creatures, the students started pattern-making, which wasn't too challenging because Kylie showed them samples and shapes and explained how they had to think in 3D while making a flat pattern. They made their draft patterns from newspaper and modelled the creatures by stapling pieces together, at which stage some realised a feature they'd designed, such as a long neck, wouldn't work as intended because it flopped over. After refining the design, the students made their final pattern pieces.

One of the advantages of all the hand-sewing done in this project is that those students who don't take Textiles again go away with a level of competence which enables them at a later stage to sew on buttons, mend a broken bag handle, etc.

Kylie says that everyone did something interesting and different. "They're really



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gorgeous, and I've never had two the same, they're all unique, everyone has their own ideas." She varies the theme, depending on the class. In previous years a 'Superheroes' theme resulted in some wonderful creatures wearing capes, and a 'Frankenstein' theme produced some equally interesting outcomes. That year she read sentences from the book and students picked out some of the adjectives and sketched ideas as she read to them.

Ugly Creatures could easily be adapted for any level, and is a popular outcome, judging by the number of students from other classes asking to make them as well. Responding to a Year 13 request, Kylie planned to do a small senior project for the last two weeks of the course and invite a local textiles artist who works in this field to visit and work with the students in the classroom. This didn't eventuate, due to students' commitments in that fortnight, but she is considering it for 2009.

