

# Waste not, want not

These days most people are used to the idea of recycling. Many countries have schemes where waste, such as glass and paper, are collected. These materials are then reused, often to make similar items, such as bottles or boxes. In other countries, reusable waste is collected by individuals who get paid by the weight of the items they collect. Recycling is good as it reduces how much rubbish has to be burned or buried. But, on the downside, a lot of energy and other resources are needed to collect, sort and then process the items being recycled.

What else can we do with our waste? Well, reusing objects is something that many people around the world, particularly in developing countries, have done for a long time. Broken items get mended or, if they are impossible to mend, get used for parts. Even more interestingly, items which are thrown away are changed into something different which also has a new use. For example, old tyre treads are made into footwear, and plastic bags are woven into bags or baskets.

This idea of reusing or 'upcycling' unwanted or old objects by making them into something different that has a new life is fast becoming popular in richer countries too. In these countries, wealth has created a 'consumer culture' where the buying and owning of goods has become important. This has led to 'throw-away' societies where products are literally thrown away, to become rubbish, the moment they stop working or are no longer desirable.

So, how is upcycling different to recycling? Simply put, upcycling is about using as little energy as possible and keeping the amount of waste produced to a minimum. It is about using something that has lost its use or appeal as the item it is and making it into something else which is often more attractive. Another difference is that with recycling, new products have the same or a lesser value than the original, but that upcycling creates new handcrafted products, such as clothing, jewellery or household objects. These are often of better quality than the original item.

Fundamentally, the basic aims of upcycling are to reduce the number of new items created, save energy and reduce the demand for raw materials such as trees for paper, oil for plastic and so on. It is also about adding value and making an item last longer before being thrown away. It is to do with being creative and seeing how something we think is rubbish can be made useful again. Isn't it time we looked at our rubbish differently?

**1** Which paragraph in the text (1–5) talks about each of the following?

- |   |                 |
|---|-----------------|
| 1 Differences between two ways of reusing waste | paragraph _____ |
| 2 An old idea becomes a new trend               | paragraph _____ |
| 3 Summing up the uses of rubbish                | paragraph _____ |
| 4 The two sides of recycling                    | paragraph _____ |
| 5 Other ways to deal with waste                 | paragraph _____ |

**2** Match the meanings below to the following words from the text.

attractive consumer creative desirable individual minimum value

- 1 pretty or pleasant to look \_\_\_\_\_
- 2 how much money something is worth \_\_\_\_\_
- 3 the smaller number of amount possible \_\_\_\_\_
- 4 one person or thing, rather than a group \_\_\_\_\_
- 5 some who buys things or uses a service \_\_\_\_\_
- 6 good or useful, so that people want to have it \_\_\_\_\_
- 7 having lots of imagination and new ideas about something \_\_\_\_\_

**3** Complete the gaps in the questions with one word from exercise 3 above. Sometimes more than one option is possible. Then ask and answer the questions with a partner.

- 1 Do you live in a \_\_\_\_\_ society where people buy lots of things they don't need?
- 2 How can an \_\_\_\_\_ keep the amount of waste they produce to a \_\_\_\_\_?
- 3 Do like the idea of adding \_\_\_\_\_ to an unwanted object by making it into something more appealing?
- 4 Why do you think upcycled products are becoming more \_\_\_\_\_ in richer countries?
- 5 Are you a very \_\_\_\_\_ person? Do you often have lots of new ideas?
- 6 Can you think of an item of rubbish that you could upcycle into an \_\_\_\_\_ new object, such as a piece of jewellery?

**4** Sometimes a word refers back to something earlier in the text. What do the following underlined words refer to in the text?

- 1 These materials are then reused, often to make similar items, such as bottles of boxes.  
\_\_\_\_\_
- 2 In other countries, reusable waste is collected by individuals who get paid by the weight of the items they collect. \_\_\_\_\_
- 3 In these countries, wealth has created a consumer culture ... \_\_\_\_\_
- 4 It is about using something that has lost its use or appeal ... \_\_\_\_\_
- 5 ... new products have the same or a lesser value than the original, but ... \_\_\_\_\_

**5** Which word from each group has a different sound?

- 1 /a:/ glass are baskets handcrafted saving
- 2 /u:/ value reused reduces culture produced
- 3 /ɔ:/ resource relax more raw for
- 4 /əʊ/ process broken products clothing thrown

**6** Discuss these questions with your partner(s).

- Should people be rewarded for recycling or reusing unwanted items?
- Do people in your country upcycle unwanted or broken objects? If yes, can you think of some examples?
- What could the following items be upcycled into? Think of a few ideas for each if you can: forks, tin cans, old boots, glass bottles.

## Glossary

**appeal** (*noun*) - the quality of something that makes you like it or want it

**burn** (*verb*) - to damage or heat something by fire

**bury** (*verb*) - to put something in the ground and cover it with earth

**create** (*verb*) - to make something happen or exist

**downside** (*noun*) - a bad or negative feature of something that is good in other ways

**lead** (*verb*) - (past simple: *led*) to be the reason something else happens

**mend** (*verb*) - to repair something that is broken or damaged

**raw** (*adj*) - *raw* materials are still in their natural state and have not been changed

**scheme** (*noun*) - a plan you use to try and achieve something

**sort** (*verb*) - to put things in the right order or group

**throw away** (*verb*) - if you throw something away, you put it in a container where it will be removed

**(tyre) tread** (*noun*) - the pattern of deep lines on the surface of a tyre which touch the ground when in use

**weave** (*verb*) - (past simple: *wove*) to make material by crossing threads under and over each other