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Grade 6 students, from left, Charlie Sala, Qinnujuaq Iqaluq, Andrew Iqaluk, John Kittosuk and Nellie Appaqaq made plastic bag wallets in honour of Earth Day last week. - photo courtesy of Nikki Wutke

From plastic to fantastic

Sanikiluaq students get fashionable and environmentally friendly

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SANIKILUAQ

Students at Nuiyak School managed to save some money and help save their corner of the planet with a clever class project, creating stylish and personalized wallets from old plastic bags.

One of the school's central themes is recycling and, just in time for Earth Day on April 22, Grade 6 teacher Nikki Wutke's class activity managed to reduce the number of plastic bags destined to end up in the garbage or blowing in the wind by reusing them for a fun, practical fashion statement.

"It's something interesting for the kids," said Wutke, adding it's worthwhile even if the activity is hectic with 15 kids using needles, thread, a hot iron and plastic. "For most of them this their first time sewing. The strings get tangled and kids poke themselves, but it's a good activity - definitely hands-on."

Students used four shopping bags, cut and ironed together with paper, which fuses together to make a material like a fabric. Wutke liked the activity because it incorporated a mathematical component, too, with students measuring pieces of plastic. Students then ironed the pieces into a useful form with pockets for coins, cash and cards and add their own splash of personalized colour.

Wutke, who made her own plastic bag wallet, came across the idea on the Internet. She said the project lends itself well to both the school-age individual and the more sophisticated fashionista.

"You can make purses out of plastic bags too," said Wutke, who said she is setting her sights next on another problematic, single-use material used too often in the hamlet - Styrofoam.

"We use so much styrofoam, it drives me crazy. Anywhere in the North is isolated, especially on (Belcher) Island, so recycling is hard to do," she said, explaining how she and others looked into the cost of shipping recyclables out. "It causes more of a carbon footprint to send things down south."

Wallet-making was an apt activity for Earth Day in Sanikiluaq, where the Northern store raised \$6,128 in proceeds from the \$0.25 fee for plastic bag sales, which, on April 22, went to environmental initiatives.

Environmentally-friendly behaviour, it seems, is encouraged when consumers feel it in their wallets. This year the North West Company managed to use 3,780,263 fewer plastic disposable bags across Nunavut and Nunavik as part of its Greener Tomorrow program

The money in Sanikiluaq will go toward the expansion of a student garden at Paatsaali Elementary School. The local campus of Nunavut Arctic College will also receive money for an educational land trip with elders and the hamlet will receive money to make improvements to the community's dump site.



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