LitterARTi
Turning litter into art using an app

THE PROBLEM

An estimated 9 billion tons of plastic has been produced. Of this, 5.4 billion tones has been thrown into landfill and left to pollute the land and seas.

If all this plastic was cling film, it would be enough to wrap around the entire planet (1).

An estimated 2.25 million items of litter are dropped in the streets daily.

226 million cigarette butts per year are thrown onto the ground in England.

In England, 180,000 bags of litter are collected from motorways each year (2).

Recently I ran a session which aimed to encourage participants to think about what impact they can and do have on the environment. The session was named LitterARTi as it combined an app called Litterati with sculpture-making, a form of art.

The session was beneficial for the participants, the environment and myself, and I hope by sharing this article it will inspire your teaching and be a catalyst to educate others on their environmental impact. Please feel free to get creative with the session and make it your own.

We all have an impact on the environment; we must ensure that it is a positive one.
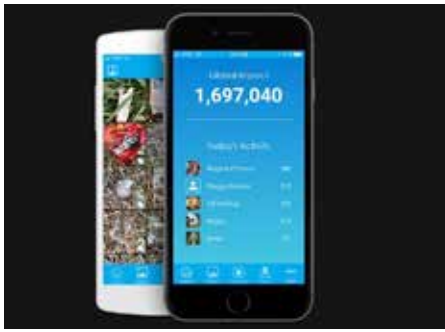
THE SESSION

Initially, participants were asked to download the app or pair up with someone who could. They were then asked to collect litter from around the area, whilst documenting their findings on the Litterati app.

I wanted participants to do more than just collect litter. I wanted them to experience the idea of upcycling to show that they could make something better from what was once considered useless. Additionally, it was an ideal opportunity to provide a time for reflection, something that is highly important for Outdoor Education experiences (3).

The art aspect was added by asking participants to bring back their bags of litter and put the contents together. They were then asked to reflect on what they had learnt and discuss their thoughts. Following this conversation, they were asked to create a piece of art, using the litter collected, to represent what they learned during the session. The group collectively made the art work and explained what it represented and what they had learnt. During one session participants chose to create a boat surrounded by plastic to represent the issue of plastic polluting our seas.

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Kirsty McCandlish has recently graduated from the University of Cumbria with a degree in Outdoor Education. She is now in the process of setting up an outdoor, forest school-style nursery in her local area. She hopes to become a youth worker to help children and young people to achieve their potential, using the outdoors as a tool to do so.

These images are from www.litterati.org

WHAT IS LITTERARTI?

In 2012 the app Litterati was set up by Jeff Kirschner to encourage people to pick up the litter that they see (4). In a similar way to Instagram, users take photos of litter and add a geotag to location stamp where the litter was found. They add hashtags such as #plasticbottle to create key words to identify trends in brands and products. The findings are uploaded onto the Litterati network where users can view posts, examine the map of litter and see the most commonly found items (currently plastic) (5).

Litterati not only encourages people to pick up litter and look at it from a different perspective, it also provides evidence to make changes. For example, San Francisco used data from the app to tackle the littering of cigarette butts, using the evidence to double cigarette tax and using the money raised to clean up.

SESSION OBJECTIVES

1. Introduce Litterati and allow participants to trial it.
2. Clean up an area.
3. Encourage participants to be more proactive in protecting their environment.

RESOURCES

- Litterati app
- Gloves
- Litter bags
- Litter pickers
- Risk assessment
- First aid kit

EXTRA INFORMATION

- Recommended for smartphone users.
- Minimum 1 hour session.
- Adaptable to different group sizes and needs.

To explain the process of a LitterARTi session it can be broken into three main stages. Figure 1 shows a simplified version of the session plan.

STAGE ONE: Introduce

There are two important elements to be introduced. The first is to explain the importance of our impact on the environment. There can be some discussion about various aspects relating to the environment, not just litter picking, for example discussing how eating less meat, not using single-use plastic and turning off lights can make a difference to our environmental impact.

The second element is to introduce the Litterarti app and to ask participants to download or pair up with someone who can.

STAGE TWO: Collect and document

This stage is for the litter picking process. Ensure your participants are equipped with all the information and equipment they need (including access to the app).

In this stage there is no need to separate litter into recycling categories as the litter will be put together for the third step.

Remember to talk about important health and safety aspects like what to do if a needle is found, dealing with broken glass and sharp objects and other relevant information.

STAGE THREE: Reuse and recycle

At this point bring your participants back together. The next step is the artistic stage of the session. Ask your participants to reflect on what they have learned from the session. This will be the

STAGE ONE: INTRODUCE — Explain the importance of protecting the environment and introduce the Litterarti app.

STAGE TWO: COLLECT AND DOCUMENT — Litter pick whilst using the Litterarti app to document, and then create artwork.

STAGE THREE: REUSE AND RECYCLE — Sort litter for recycling and reuse to 'clean away' litter.
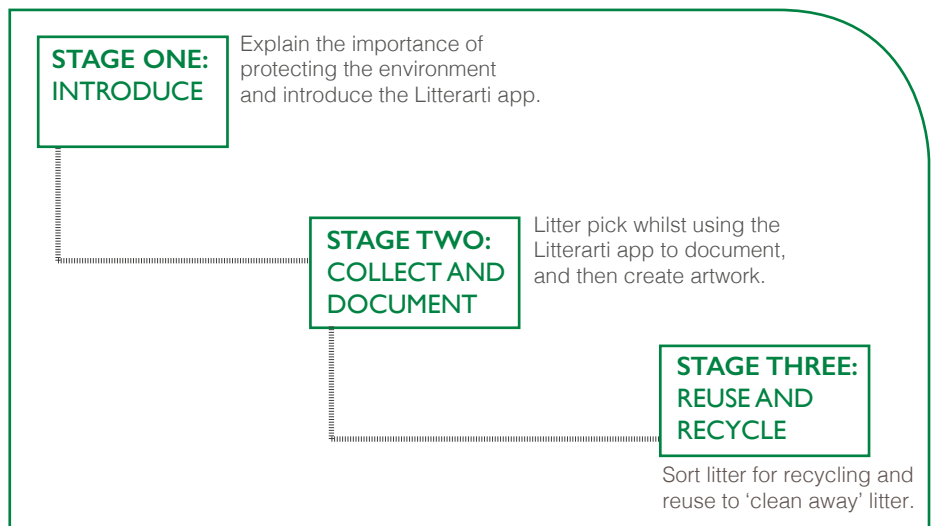
Figure 1: Simplified session plan

focus of their artwork.

The participants will then create a piece of art using the litter they collect. This can be done individually, in pairs or in groups depending on what you feel is best for your session or participants.

After the artwork is completed, each group (individual, or pair) is encouraged to share what it represents in order to reflect on their learning. This allows the facilitator, as well as the participant, a chance to see that learning has taken place.

After the participants have created their art and spoken about it, it is then time to dispose of the litter collected. This time can be used to sort the items of litter into different categories such as recyclable material and non-recyclable.

During this time, participants may discover that they find items they consider valuable. For example, finding tennis balls that can be reused. This allows conversations to naturally occur regarding reusing and recycling materials. The separation of materials can also encourage participants to recycle within their own home.

Stage three creates opportunities to discuss various aspects of Environmental Education.

For your LitterARTi session, you may wish to talk in depth about:
- The reduce, reuse, recycle movement.
- The importance of recycling rather than just sending something to landfill.
- The different materials that can be recycled, and how.

The most important point to take from this article is that we can all positively make a change to the environment. There are countless ways in which we can do so, and this is just one example. I hope you can take some inspiration and experiment with your own LitterARTi session ∎

Please help to protect our planet and educate others on the importance of their impact; Emphasise that every small action can create a large difference.

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