Dealing with rubbish

Dolly Chen - Creator of the blog ‘Upcycled Fashion’
Raphael Rossi - Founder of ‘Recycling around’
Fiona Finbar - Greens politician

This is a discussion recorded at a local secondary school, about the importance of consuming less and creating more rubbish.

FF
Hi students of Highdale Secondary College. Thanks for giving up your lunchtime to come and hear about some amazing programs that are happening in your local area. I’m sure that you’ve all heard the slogan ‘Reduce, Re-use, Recycle’ ever since you can remember. Lots of people are worried about the amount of rubbish that we produce every day - and, because you’re here, I can tell that you’re the sort of kids that want to do something about this issue. Many people think that there is nothing new or interesting to say about reducing rubbish, but that’s not necessarily the case. Here today is Dolly Chen, who is the creator of the blog ‘Upcycled fashion’ - she wants to talk to you about how creating new and interesting things to wear doesn’t mean you have to wear recycled plastic bags and shoes made of old tyres to be doing something good for the environment. Also, we have Raphael Rossi, who runs the shop ‘Recycling around’ - he wants to talk about how reducing rubbish works with more environmentally friendly lifestyle choices.

But before they get up to speak, I just wanted to remind us of some of the issues we face in Australia now.

1) According to the Australian Bureau of Statistics, every Australian - including you - contributes about 2 tonnes of garbage every year. That’s just you alone. Not your whole family, not your whole group of friends, just you. That’s a massive amount of garbage.

2) Every time you buy something new, you are contributing to the rubbish problem: think about the clothes you buy (and then only wear once or twice!), the new phones and computers and iPads you’ve had over the years, the presents you’ve given, the food you eat. How much of this stuff comes wrapped in packaging? And when you’re sick of something, what happens to it? Does it just become rubbish for someone else to deal with?

3) Australia only recycles paper, cardboard, aluminium, steel and some plastic. Most other plastic goes overseas - which is not really a great use of our resources. Putting your rubbish in the recycling bin IS better than putting it in the landfill bin, but it’s not as good as re-using it, or, better yet, reducing the amount of stuff you put in your bins.

Dolly and Raphael, what can you tell us about some of these issues?

Dolly
Thanks, Fiona and hi kids! What Fiona is telling us is really important, but I have to say, some of this is pretty hard to understand. And sometimes it’s even harder to know what to do about some of these problems.

Raphael
Yes. Thanks Dolly and Fiona, I totally agree with all of the stuff you guys are saying, but it’s even more important to know that being environmentally friendly can be FUN! So often, the message about being environmentally friendly is about going without, isn’t it? But I really want to focus on how being environmentally friendly can really enhance your life, and make your day-to-day activities a little bit cooler.

Dolly
Oh yes, Raph, I couldn’t agree more. Like for me, fashion and clothes are really important. When I was in high school, I spent most of my time thinking about clothes and what I was going to wear as soon as I got out of my uniform. When I first got a job, I spent most of my money on clothes. I
think I bought a new outfit every week. I thought it was fun, and I didn’t really think about the environment until my wardrobe was overflowing and then I started throwing out a lot of my clothes. And when I had a pile of clothes in the middle of the floor, I really started thinking about my shopping habit and how bad it was, but I didn’t know how to change. It was only when my dad gave me a sewing machine for my birthday that I started to realise that I didn’t have to throw clothes out when I got sick of wearing them, I could cut them up and sew them together to make a totally new outfit. My friends were really impressed with my new wardrobe and wanted to know where I got my awesome new clothes from. I had to explain that they weren’t new clothes, they were old clothes that I’d turned into something new.

Raphael
I love what you’ve got on now, Dolly, is that something you made for yourself?

Dolly
It sure is! One of the things I love about up cycling clothes is that I’m never worried I’m going to be wearing the same thing as anyone else. My clothes are only my clothes, and there will never be another outfit exactly like it. So I can be as original as I like - or, if I’m feeling tired, as boring as I like!

Raphael
That sounds like the bikes in my shop, Dolly. No two of our bikes are exactly the same. We take old bikes that have been thrown away in the hard rubbish, take them apart and put them together in new and interesting ways. There’s a real trend for vintage style bikes at the moment, but a lot of them look exactly the same as each other - my customers know that they’re getting a one-of-a-kind bike. And there’s something really special about that.

Dolly
I know what you mean. When I was at school, I was so worried about being different. I really wanted to dress the same as my friends so I didn’t get picked on or anything. Do any of you kids in the audience feel the same way? Yeah, I thought so. But actually, this is a really sad way of living your life - being worried because you’re not the same as everyone else. It’s actually impossible for you to be the same as anyone else - unless you’re an identical twin - so I think you may as well embrace who you are and let the whole world see you as a unique individual.

Raphael
You certainly are an individual, Dolly. Yeah, my customers feel the same way. And a lot of them come into the shop after they’ve bought one of our bikes and tell me how their new bike is a real talking point. They love how no one else has a bike like them and they really love how riding a bike around makes them feel. You know, we’re really lucky in this area to have great bike paths that are safe and beautiful for riding on. When you ride to get places, you are getting fresh air, exercise, and you’re often meeting new people, or running into old friends, so it can be really social and fun, unlike sitting in a car and being insulated from the world around you. Riding a bike can really make you appreciate your local community.

Fiona
As well as being good for the environment, of course!

Raphael
(laughs) Of course! I guess my point is, that having a fun and unique lifestyle is super-important. You don’t have to be a greenie-hippie type to do great things for the environment.

Dolly
(laughs) I don’t think anyone has ever accused me of being a hippie. I totally hate tie-dyed clothes. In fact, although my interest in up cycled fashion came out of a desire to be more environmentally friendly, it’s so much more than that. I think I’d keep up cycling clothes even if the environment wasn’t such a priority for me.

Fiona

A Ticking Mind Resource
I guess that’s why it’s important for people like you to come and speak to the next generation. We really want them - that’s you, kids - to see that a greener lifestyle is fun, as well as important. Thanks for coming to see these two guest presenters, students. If you have any questions, they’ll be sticking around for another ten minutes, so you can come and ask them one on one.