

### Overview

This activity is an opportunity for you to enhance some physical aspect of your classroom.

### Objectives

- To develop or enhance your classroom's layout, arrangement, or decor.
- To set up your room in a reflective and purposeful way, including choosing appropriate furniture, organizational tools, and playful and purposeful decorations.

### Materials

- Depending on how you choose to enhance your classroom, the materials you will need will vary.
- How-To Sheets 1-3
- Camera (optional)

### Instructions

1. Choose a Project
  - This activity allows you to choose between three projects, three different ways you might enhance your classroom:
    - Infrastructure (How-To Sheet 1) – The basic physical classroom layout, design, and plan.
    - Purposeful Decorations (How-To Sheet 2) – Classroom decorations that are visually engaging objects and useful learning tools.
    - Organizational Systems (How-To Sheet 3) – The systems you use for keeping the classroom and materials clean, organized, and easy to find.
  - Karrie's classroom is rich in organizational structure, purposeful decorations, and infrastructure. Perhaps you saw something in her classroom that inspired you. Think back to the teaching example in this section and the *Connect with the Classroom* "Take a Closer Look" activity you completed in Section 2. Use your reflections on your own classroom and your impressions of Karrie's room to guide you in choosing a project.
    - If, for example, as you filled out "The Room" Checklist, you thought you might like to work on defining your centers or adding more shelf space to your classroom, the Infrastructure project might be right for you.
    - If you were inspired by the trees in Karrie's classroom, build your own in the Purposeful Decorations project.

- If you've noticed that materials get lost in your classroom and things are never where they should be, try out Karrie's labeling strategy in the Organizational Systems project.
  - If it's your first year in a brand new, empty classroom, select the project that interests you most.
2. Enhance the Room
- Set aside time to work on the project you have chosen. Remember to gather any materials you might need ahead of time.
  - If you can, take "before" and "after" photos. (It's always nice to have a record of your progress!)
3. Prepare to Share
- Reflect on your experiences in this exercise and have your thoughts and notes ready to share with other teachers taking this course in the *Share Ideas* section.

## Enhance Your Room How-To Sheet 1: Infrastructure

The wooden shelves, plastic containers, and bins in Karrie's classroom serve two purposes:

- Storage spaces for class materials.



- Mini-walls that help define each center's space in the room.



Though Karrie buys shelves and bins that are made specifically for these purposes, there are many inexpensive ways to develop shelving and storage in a classroom on a limited budget. Feel free to use any other materials or ideas that you have, but remember to use crates or bins strong enough to hold the classroom materials you need to store (e.g., don't plan to use stacked shoe boxes to store blocks).

Below are some ideas and suggestions.

## **Materials**

Dollar stores often have a wealth of inexpensive storage units and bins. See what you can find.

Also, any of the items listed below can stand on their own as cubbies, or can be stacked and tied together to make grid shelving units that help divide up the room:

- Milk crates or other plastic bins
- Shoe boxes
- Wooden wine crates (liquor and wine stores often give these away)
- Strong tape or string
- Paint or decorative paper (optional)

## **Instructions**

1. Gather the materials you plan to use to build your shelves or cubbies.
2. If you are using shoe boxes or crates that you would like to personalize, try painting them or covering them in decorative paper.
3. Arrange the crates, bins, or boxes in any manner that suits your room. If you'd like for them to serve as mini-walls, try stacking crates and tying them together with string.

## Enhance Your Room

### How-To Sheet 2: Purposeful Decorations

The three-dimensional trees are, in many ways, the centerpieces of Karrie's classroom decor. They change over the course of the year, with the seasons and with the learning themes. They are cheap and easy to make. (And you can have the children help out!)

#### Materials

- Thick, colored papers (such as bulletin board paper)
- Scissors
- Staples
- Heavy-duty tape (packing or duct tape)
- Paper clips
- String

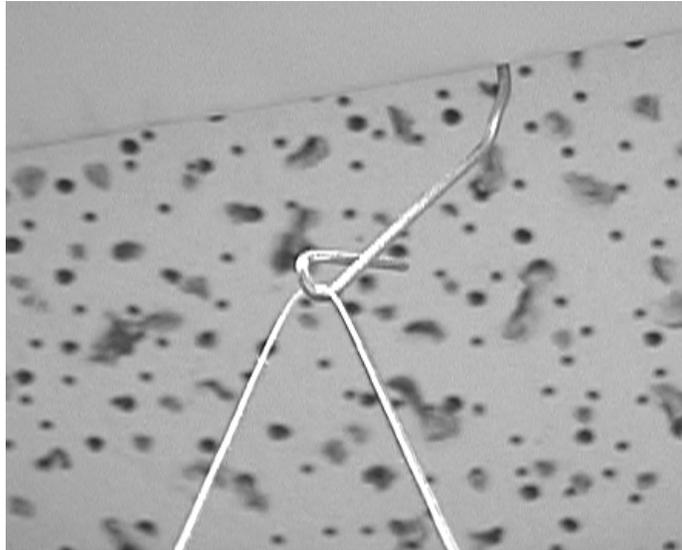
#### Instructions

1. Tape together sheets of brown bulletin board paper (for the tree's trunk).
2. Crumple up the paper until its texture is like tree bark.



3. Tape the crumpled paper to the wall. For extra support, Peggy attaches her tree trunks to the ceiling as well as to the wall using paper clips and fishing line (see picture below).
  - Unravel the paper clip, but leave a 90 degree "hook" at one end and a loop at the other end.
  - Stick the "hook" end through the ceiling.

- Run fishing line through the loop and connect each end of the fishing line to the tree trunk.



4. Using multicolored paper (colors of your choice), cut out leaf shapes.
5. Fringe the edges of the leaves, crumple the paper, and hang them on the tree.

## Enhance Your Room How-To Sheet 3: Organizational Systems

Karrie uses a digital camera to create labels for all the materials in her classroom. Each bin is labeled with pictures of the materials that go in that bin, and each shelf is labeled with pictures of the bins that belong on that shelf. The labels are simple enough that her children can use them to clean up after themselves and to keep their classroom materials intact and well organized.



### Instructions

1. Take a picture of all of the objects that are stored in one bin (any kind of camera will work). Make sure that each object is easily identifiable and recognizable in each photograph.
2. Tape the photograph to the outside of the bin, and then place all the objects inside the bin.
3. Take another picture of the bin with its label and all of its contents.
4. Tape that picture onto a shelf, to designate a storage space for the bin.

Remember that you will need to walk children through the process of using the labeling system. Model the cleanup process for them, and give them opportunities to practice matching objects with bins (and bins with shelves) based on the picture-labels.