

I remember that when I was in grammar school, I would get a new Crayola box of 64 crayons at the beginning of each year. Each crayon was a different color; each one was labeled and organized in a rainbow-like order. The box was an important, essential addition to our set of learning tools. It could also be some sort of a status symbol.

The main problem with crayons is that they break so easily. When I would bear down hard in my work, especially to color a large area, the crayon would suddenly break with a “snap”. Crayon sharpeners didn’t really help, as the pieces just got smaller and smaller. It was difficult to keep a sharp point to work on fine artistic details.

When my son Zach was growing up, the PBS show Sesame Street had a tremendous video about the manufacture of crayons. It was amazing to see how thousands of crayons were made and put into the boxes. It seemed to be solely a commercial process. I would have never thought of making my own.

But Soozie, the artist and art teacher, did not see it that way. She ends up with thousands of broken crayons that are useless unless they are repurposed. So she converts that mass of wax into large crayons using all sorts of candy molds. She makes smiley faces, cartoon characters, hero logos, and many other items that become treasures to the children. Who else does this?

She makes the crayons off-line, of course; you can’t run a hot wax lab in the classroom. So she does it at home, and mass produces large crayons of all sorts. Why does she do this on her own time? Because she is not just a teacher – she is a creator, a recycler, an artist, a motivator, and most of all: a conduit of love. Her creative process extends beyond art itself to the forging of better relationships with her students, and giving out these unique crayons are a part of that.

Besides, look at all of the benefits! The remade crayons:

- 1) are big, easier for children to handle; not as easy to break,
- 2) are not cylindrical, will not roll off the table and onto the floor to get lost or crushed,
- 3) are made from broken pieces, to show the benefits of recycling,
- 4) have no paper trash (the paper is removed in the melting process),
- 5) are made in shapes the kids like,
- 6) can have glitter added (kids love the sparkly stuff),
- 7) can have variegated coloring, with different layers of melted crayons.

They are such beloved treasures that there is always the issue of whether or not they should actually be used. Some of the students keep them pristine so that they become more a possession than a tool. Soozie uses them as rewards, nominally for behavior control, but more importantly for character and relationship development. And her kids love her for it!

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