

Candace Printz

TEEA 2019 Co-Winner: Environmental Educator of the Year

Art Instructor, El Dorado High School



Candace Printz was talking to her art students about how disheartened they were at seeing trash piling up in the El Paso Desert when they decided to take action. The students came up with the idea to collect the debris, turn it into artwork, and educate the public on how much pollution there was in their community through the art pieces.

Through cleanups, art shows, and presentations to the public, they have been able to change their environment and spark environmental stewards in their community.

In 2015 their art class came up with the project *It's Your World*, where they would collect pollution in the El Paso Desert and turn it into art. The students oversaw each part of the project, from planning the cleanups and organizing what was collected to managing the events for the public.

The project was so successful in its first year that administration at El Dorado High School allowed Candace to create classes devoted to the education of environmentalism through the arts, which has now formed into a non-profit that encourages the public to participate in each step of the process. The cleanups occur regularly with the help of students and volunteers. They pick up the trash in the environment and bring it back to the classroom, where they then sanitize and organize the items by material. Local artists have even expressed interest in participating, and are now able to sort through the materials and take what they can reuse in their own work. The students spend their time in class creating beautiful art pieces and functional items out of the trash collected.

The class has given over 30 workshops to educate the public on the benefits of recycling and has created an annual region-wide art contest, only accepting entries made from reclaimed materials.

This project, through its workshops and art contest, teaches and encourages the local community to reuse plastics, aluminum, and everything else found in the desert in ways that are unique to their own lives. It also shows the community how dumping and pollution from even small pieces of trash add up to affect the environment. In this way, they are helping to eliminate the problem in the future.

The students want to take it a step further and go before the city council to propose solutions to eliminate illegal dumping. Candace has showed her students that they can make lasting changes, and constantly encourages them to pursue their passions—no matter how large.