

# ‘Beautiful Oops!’

I am a murderer of trees. All art teachers are. We go through more paper than The Baltimore Sun.

“Can I get some more paper?” asks the girl in the jumper who tugs at my shirtwaist. “I made my house too big.”

“Mrs. Barberry! I need to start over!” one student will shout, holding up a crayon portrait. He’s made an X over an asymmetrical face.

Swish, swish, swish, the sheets disappear before me and become butterflies and monsters and those broads from Frozen and inevitably a conglomeration of squares from Minecraft. And sometimes they’re not perfect. But, isn’t that okay?

I needed an intervention; a way to teach the kids to be resourceful. And creative. And confident in their abilities.

So, I consulted the manual on all of those things. A book that would make the medicine behind my message go down smoothly and sweetly.

Enter “Beautiful Oops” by Barney Saltzberg. With more color than Collin’s 152 crayon collection, fun little characters, and an important message about art and life, it was just what the Lorax ordered.



Each page shows a different “problem,” like a paint splatter or an unsightly crease, along with a whimsical “solution,” like turning it into an animal.

I’ve always loved books with “special effects,” and this one is full of them. From fun textures to flips and folds and an accordion-style pop-up that elicited elated gasps, I never lost a second of attention from even one member of my easily-distracted audience of kindergarteners and first graders.

Naturally, there was an assignment to go along with the book. Can you guess what they did?

I gave each student a piece of paper that was in some way damaged. Some of it was my recycling, some was crumbled up, some burned, some ripped, some with fingerprints, some with eraser-smudged pencil marks, and so on.

I was astonished by the results! A curvy piece of torn paper became a snowboarding course. A streak of highlighter became a kite string. Sharpie dots became a woman’s shirt. A gash in the middle of the page became a pop-up beaver. Collin (he’s my student as well as my son) turned teeth-like cuts into tabs for an x-ball machine. (He may have meant Xbox, but he has no idea what that is...)



*A gash in the middle of the page became a pop-up beaver*



*Collin turned teeth-like cuts into tabs for an x-ball machine.*

The students excitedly shared their assignments to their classmates' amusement. They were so excited about their work that I let them take their "beautiful oopses" home. I just wish I'd taken more pictures!

At the end of class, I reminded them of the real lesson. Instead of throwing something away, why not turn it into something different? Fix it. Change it. Give it a second chance. You never know what a little ingenuity can do.