



Making Valentine Boxes

A project for building community in the high school woodshop

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In the woodshop at The Clear Spring School, the small private school where I teach in Eureka Springs, Arkansas, we usually spend some time each year with a fund-raising wood project to help support field trips and school travel for the high school students. This project gives the students a chance to contribute directly to the cost of their own education by making and selling products of real value and use. The student's travel, like their experience in the woodshop, helps to put their education in context, making what they learn more relevant and meaningful in their lives. It puts to rest the question that teens always ask teachers: "what's in it for me?"

We could sell candy bars, perhaps, but there is greater value in selling things we have made ourselves. Not only does all the money

come to the school, but the students gain knowledge, experience, and confidence from the project that may serve them well in later life. In addition, the students learn about marketing and product design. We choose our product so that it builds on the technical skills and interests the students have already developed. The need for efficiency and quality of work add another dimension to woodshop lessons. Making something for sale allows me to point toward a more consistent and higher standard of workmanship; reaching that standard involves a level of attention to detail that serves students well in other areas of study. The confidence that comes from mastering a technique translates to other areas of learning.

We have additional work sessions on weekends during the fund-raiser to allow

parents to join the fun. They receive a hands-on demonstration of the value of our program, helping us to build community support. As one parent wisely observed: "In most classes, students learn about the world; in woodshop, they learn about themselves."

Because most of my students have become enthusiastic woodturners, making simple wooden boxes with turned pulls seemed like a good idea, but snow days in November and delays from the construction of a woodshop addition kept us from having boxes to sell during the December holiday season. We were desperate to come up with a way to make boxes fit the next available holiday sales opportunity—Valentines Day. Figuring out how to make heart-shaped pulls on the lathe was one of