

# QUICK & EASY CLASSROOM

# makeover



"The Reading Corner"

Pillows with beads and tassels give fidgety kids a sensory boost.

Big books take up little space if hung on a drying rack.

Camping chairs make for colorful and comfy reading seats.

Ever wish *Trading Spaces* would drop by? We asked the experts for simple design ideas that are easy on the pocket-book! **By Caralee Adams**

**S**o you don't have a fortune to spend and a team of painters and carpenters at your beck and call? Don't worry. Sometimes it's the smallest design changes that make the biggest difference to you and your students. Our experts know the tricks to transforming a space. Take their advice and watch your room come to life.

#### >>>GO WITH A SPLASH OF COLOR

Instead of painting your whole room, touch up the chair rails, doors, and

shelves using fun, primary colors, suggests Julie Collins, first grade teacher at Gocio Elementary School in Sarasota, Florida. Marlynn Clayton, author of *Classroom Spaces that Work*, agrees. Too much color can overpower a space, she says. It's more effective as an accent.

#### >>>USE BRIGHT FABRICS

Old sheets, tablecloths, and oilcloth are another great way to add color. Collins drapes bright fabrics over tables around the room (which hide her supply >>>

# classroom makeover



## “The Storage/Activity Center”

baskets underneath). You can also use fabric as a bulletin board background.

### >>STICK WITH BLUES AND GREENS

Picking out a classroom palette? Red and orange can make kids nervous. Try light greens and blues, says Mark Montano, author of *Dollar Store Decor* and star of “While You Were Out.” Montano also recommends avoiding dark colors, which can suck out light and make kids sleepy.

### >>USE COLOR TO CREATE NOOKS

Don't break the bank buying screens or shelves to divide up your room. Use color (on the walls and in your lettering) to differentiate the areas instead, suggests Clayton. Make your math area blue and your art center yellow, for example.

### >>BUDDY UP WITH A SHOP CLASS

They might be willing to build you a loft that will let kids experience the room

from a different level, says Clayton. No carpenters on hand? Try a 3' x 3' wooden platform. Cover it with indoor-outdoor carpet. “It can be a spot for reading or a stage for a performance,” says Clayton.

### >>HIDE YOUR STORAGE AREAS

Remember those beaded curtains from your college dorm room? Hang one in front of a stack of boxes or a bookshelf. It will keep kids from getting distracted by cool supplies you plan to use later on.

### >>TURN OFF THE OVERHEAD LIGHT

Floor and table lamps are softer and more calming than the fluorescent lights up above. Collins uses lamps in her reading nook to make it more cozy. Look for lighting at thrift stores and garage sales.

### >>BRIGHTEN YOUR BULLETIN BOARDS

Use Christmas lights as a border, suggests Susan Nations, a teacher and co-

author of *So Much Stuff, So Little Space*. Stock up after the holidays, when they often go on deep discount.

### >>GET KIDS ASKING QUESTIONS

Montano suggests accents that somehow make kids wonder, “How does that work?” Try mobiles or plasma balls.

### >>ADD WINDOW DRESSING

To dress up a window, Mark Montano recommends using washable paints or stick-on mosaics that can easily be removed. You can change them periodically based on the season or whatever holidays are just around the corner.

### >>DON'T FORGET THE CURTAINS

Plastic shower curtains are cheap and colorful, and often tie into teaching themes (like sea life). Hang them using an inexpensive curtain rod (which only requires a screwdriver and two nails per side).

### >>THINK FENG SHUI

Renee Heiss, author of *Feng Shui for the Classroom*, recommends hanging wind chimes by the door to bring the “chi” (energy) in and out. She also places orange peels in a ceramic bowl to get rid of unpleasant odors.

### >>SOFTEN UP SEATING

Montano suggests placing a few beanbag chairs around the room. Some kids will concentrate better if they can stretch out a bit. Jodie Luongo, a fourth-grade teacher in Westport, Connecticut, likes to have kids sit in beach chairs during reading time. They’re comfortable and they fold up for easy storage. A chair hammock is another fun option.

### >>TRY A FISH TANK

“It’s calming,” says Courtney Fox, who puts a bench next to the tank in her classroom at Mount Pleasant Elementary in Wilmington, Delaware. “If kids are frustrated, just watching it can soothe them and let them get back to work.”

### >>INCORPORATE YOUR STUDENTS

Put their pictures in fun frames around the room, suggests Nations. Plus watch how they move about the room and invite their ideas. “The more the room feels like it belongs to the students, the better they’ll do,” says Clayton. And isn’t that what it’s really all about? □

## 2/3 Vertical Right

