



From Recycling to Resale: Rebag

Kassandra Castillo Cruz, Kavani Handmade
Puerto Rico/New York

☀ Call to Action

Invest in young people to help them realize their dreams.

Visit the Vieques Youth Leadership Initiative: www.vyli.org.

Check out Kassandra's company on Instagram: [kavani_handmade](https://www.instagram.com/kavani_handmade).

☀ Values

- Vision
- Determination
- Persistence
- Generosity
- Environmentalism

☀ Lessons Learned

Dreams can come true through effort, hard work, and creativity.

Building - or rebuilding - a home is a community effort that will benefit the whole community. The same is true for a country and for the world.

You can find treasures everywhere, if you are willing to look in places others may regard as being worthless.

When Kassandra Castillo Cruz was 14 years old, a friend invited her to join a new youth leadership program, the Vieques Youth Leadership Initiative (VYLI).

When she was asked, "What is your dream for your life, your island, and your community?" Kassandra declared that she wanted to become a top model -- a dream that due to her persistence and hard work eventually came true. But that wasn't her main goal: her main goal was to get a good education and then return to her island so she could help others find ways to realize their dreams too.

Today she is head of operations for Rebag Infinity, a \$50 million worldwide resale retailer that gives consumers the chance to buy and sell back their luxury handbags, giving them a much longer life, and keeping them out of the trash.

☀ Language Arts

What is the impact of the fashion industry on the environment? Choose one branch of this industry -- make-up, clothing, handbags, shoes, accessories, etc. -- and write a research essay about the manufacturing and distribution practices in the industry, and their cost to the environment.

Create a series of Tik Tok videos in which you explain how to keep up with fashion in an environmentally responsible way. Offer advice and resources, from websites where you can exchange or repurpose merchandise, to practices that can extend the life of a purse, shoes, or clothing.

Hurricane Maria was a devastating event for the island of Puerto Rico. Create a presentation in which you explain the ecological damage caused by the hurricane and how it affected the economy, culture, and social fabric of the island. Finish your presentation

by suggesting ways in which people can help in the ongoing reconstruction efforts.

Create a presentation on the effects the U.S. military base has had on the island of Vieques: How did the base affect the island's environment, its economy, and the people who lived there? What efforts were necessary to end the use of the island as a military base? What is being done to restore the island, its economy, and its people?

STEM Activities

Even if you aren't interested in fashion or shopping, you are part of the fashion industry because you wear clothing every day, and will buy and wear a large number of clothes throughout your lifetime. Many natural resources are used to produce our clothes. [Watch this video on the lifecycle of a basic t-shirt](#)¹. How can the industry be regulated to be more sustainable?

Collect data about your clothing at home, then use the data you collected to calculate approximately how many resources went into making the clothes (water, land, and carbon). How much of the world's resources have gone into creating the clothes you don't wear? What could you do with them to keep them in use and to minimize their environmental impact?

In September 2017, Hurricane Maria became regarded as the worst natural disaster to ever hit Puerto Rico, causing billions of dollars' worth of damages and leaving many of its people without power. In this activity, students will investigate the connection between climate change and extreme weather events. What are some ways that the fashion industry and consumer habits are contributing to climate change, and ultimately the formation of some of these natural disasters?

Sustainability Innovations

These companies have followed paths similar to Cassandra's, by developing sustainable advancements in the fashion industry:

- [Mango Materials](#)² produces bio-polyester that can be used as an alternative to the polyester currently being used in the fashion industry.
- [Orange Fiber](#)³ is an Italian-based company that created the first sustainable fabric by reusing citrus-based by-products.
- [Paptic](#)⁴ uses sustainably sourced wood fibers to create a sustainable alternative to the plastic used in packaging.
- [BioGlitz](#)⁵ is a company that has created the world's first biodegradable glitter.

In addition to sustainable products, some companies have also pledged to take action in their communities and help the environment. [Patagonia](#)⁶ is one of the global leaders among businesses who prioritize the materials they use, and environmental and social responsibility programs.

The world of fashion needs more companies to promote reuse and sustainability within the industry. This article by [The Good Trade](#)⁷ highlights 10 impactful ways to recycle and repurpose clothing.

Sustainability Career Pathways

Reused Retail. Did you know [there are more than 25,000 resale stores in the United States](#)⁸, and that selling used stuff is an \$18 billion industry? Reselling is not only a useful business, but a sustainable one too--helping to keep good clothing, furniture, books, and other items out of the garbage and in people's hands and homes. Working for a company like ReBag or ThredUp, setting up a consignment store, or managing a thrift shop are all good ways to help your community and the planet. Curious to learn more? [Here's an](#)

[article about what it's like to work at a thrift store⁹.](#)

Resilience Officer. As climate change intensifies, more cities, regions, and islands have hired chief resilience officers (CROs) to oversee adaptation to and mitigation of the effects of climate change, such as hurricanes, coastal flooding, fires, and increased migration. If this sounds interesting to you, [read more about what CROs do here¹⁰.](#)

Sustainable Fashion Industry. New clothes will continue to be made, of course, but they can be made sustainably. Materials like organic cotton or recycled plastics can be used, and designed in a way that the clothing at the end of its (ideally long) lifespan can be recycled or composted (for example, by not mixing natural and synthetic fibers). [Here is a great introduction to the field¹¹.](#) And an [article¹²](#) on the many ways sustainability is shaping the future of the fashion industry.

1 https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BiSYoqb_VY

2 <https://www.mangomaterials.com/>

3 <http://orangefiber.it/en/>

4 <https://paptic.com/>

5 <https://www.bioglitz.co/>

6 <https://www.patagonia.com/our-footprint/>

7 <https://www.thegoodtrade.com/features/how-to-recycle-and-repurpose-clothing>

8 <https://www.census.gov/newsroom/stories/thrift-store-day.html>

9 https://www.mentalfloss.com/article/625945/thermacell-mosquito-repellent-lantern?utm_content=infinitescroll

10 <https://www.rockefellerfoundation.org/blog/what-a-chief-resilience-officer-does/>

11 https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sustainable_fashion

12 <https://www.thegoodtrade.com/features/sustainable-fashion-jobs>

