



## **Bodhi Lewis**

### **FIRST PLACE Grades 10-12**

Grade 10 – Mandela International Magnet School, Santa Fe NM

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## **Tapestry**

The Earth is a tapestry, and our lives are a gift we have the responsibility of paying forward. In order to return the Earth's gifts, we must remember our *own* nature: positive relationships with our surroundings and our inner selves.

Through my ten years of being vegetarian, I have learned to appreciate animals as beautiful and entwined threads in this weaving of natural balance. No species is more important than another, so none can take more than their share of the Earth's gifts. My plant-based diet has reduced my carbon footprint by fifty-two percent per year compared to a meat-eater,<sup>1</sup> and empowered my gratitude for the gift of food. This thankfulness enables me to become a more educated overall consumer. I consider the implications of what companies I buy from by reading ingredient labels carefully. I am continually using the Earth's gifts with each turn of a faucet, flip of a light switch, trip to the gas station, and so much more. I know that returning these gifts starts with what we can control, so as a consumer, I consciously support and boycott companies. For example, whenever possible I buy products without palm oil and single-use packaging. The economy demands our dollars — we have the power of spending them sustainably. As I grow up, I wield the responsibility to stand up for businesses that prioritize the welfare of the *whole* ecosystem, not their bank vaults.

All species are equally important threads on Earth's tapestry.

I have considered downhearted news around climate change's worsening effect on the natural world for as long as I can remember, and have asked myself ever since childhood — why don't people wake up? The natural world *is* our world, how can we let this happen? I use my voice to better "love and respect... the land as a community to which [I] belong."<sup>2</sup> Last Earth Day, I wrote a newspaper article on how to reduce our plastic footprint in the *New Mexican*. When I was 10, I participated in a Sustainable Solutions fair and focused my project on Red Tide, which was locally affecting us in Costa Rica. A friend's project convinced me to stop drinking cow milk and to this day I don't. I did my tenth-grade personal project on making a wholesome, sustainably-sourced energy bar and I will write a report on my findings; especially how much our food system demands from the Earth. Voicing beliefs is how this generation will become leaders who return the Earth's gifts not just politically, but educationally and morally incentivize stewardship.

A voice is a thread on nature's tapestry: weaving it requires other strings.

I connect with my community to hear my generation's collective voice. I have been fortunate to be surrounded by indigenous culture in my home of Northern New Mexico. I have been inspired by their deeply rooted understanding of our interconnectedness. Last summer I was

selected by the Department of State as a US Youth Ambassador to Ecuador and had the privilege of immersion in an Indigenous Andean community. My peers and I learned the value of effective diplomacy, which I hope to put into practice working internationally in my future. At school, we bring our International Baccalaureate-driven world view to the lens of land stewardship. We know that the modern economy praises materialistic businesspeople. They refuse to change money-making practices even when they pollute entire watersheds. They decimate forests, introduce “forever chemicals” into the ecosystem, and worse.

My peers and I study policy strategies to curb climate change, such as imposing a cost for the right to emit greenhouse gasses or providing incentives for homeowners to go solar. A passion in my heart now burns towards action for a sustainable future — which starts with human rights, animal rights, and peace. For far too long, humans have eyed land and water for its “commodity” and “natural *resource*” rather than as *gifts* that the Earth provides.<sup>3,4</sup> My responsibility as a recipient of the Earth’s gifts is to be educated and well-versed in modern issues. I pay her gifts forward to all living creatures to contribute to balance throughout the ecosystem, not just human societies.

Awareness, communication, and respect weave the tapestry; we cannot rip it.

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.peta.org/issues/animals-used-for-food/fight-the-climate-crisis/>

<sup>2</sup> Aldo Leopold, *A Sand County Almanac*

<sup>3</sup> Aldo Leopold, *A Sand County Almanac*

<sup>4</sup> Robin Wall Kimmerer, “Returning the Gift” pp. 18