



## **Evelyn Lemon**

### **HONORABLE MENTION Grades 6-7**

Grade 6 – La Mariposa Montessori School, Santa Fe NM

Teacher: Katrina Holder

In the essay *Returning the Gift* by Robin Wall Kimmerer, we are invited to consider the question of how we can demonstrate our gratitude to the Earth for the many gifts that we receive. Instead of thinking about the Earth as an endless source of things that we can take and consume, we can help the Earth thrive by taking less and focusing our attention on caring for the planet. I am grateful for the food that I eat and the home where I live. I am grateful for the vibrant colors that come from nature. I am grateful for trees that give oxygen and offer shade. It is human nature to want to take care of the things we love when we feel gratitude.

I feel grateful and connected to nature when I spend time caring for the land. Every Friday during the month of April, I celebrate Earth month by walking through my neighborhood picking up trash. I find so many things that are carelessly discarded; cigarette butts, plastic bottles, and paper fill my trash bag. At home, I make choices to reduce my energy use. I take shorter showers every two days instead of daily. I turn off the lights when I leave a room and keep the thermostat on low. When I finish eating cottage cheese or yogurt, I wash the containers and reuse or recycle them. I also save energy by carpooling to school with my neighbor.

I feel grateful that I go to a school that commits to caring for the Earth. My school built a field of forty solar panels that produces 120% of the electricity we use. Our school director's goal is to become 100% self-sufficient and is exploring ways to use geothermal energy for heat and ways to reduce water use. Winter mornings can be a little chilly because we turn the heat down very low at night, but I feel good knowing that I am helping to reduce energy consumption.

Kimmerer retells the Native American story of Skywoman who needed a place to rest. The muskrat was the smallest and weakest swimmer among the animals, yet it was able to bring up a fist full of mud from the bottom of the water to create a resting place on the back of the turtle. My cats often bring mice into the house. I catch each mouse and release it outside to run and live its life. Protecting these small creatures represents my feelings about being part of the Earth. The smallest creatures have the right to live and thrive. I strive to be a good steward of the Earth. The small acts of caring that I do at home and at school do make a difference. Small acts can also be mighty. I feel so much gratitude for the gifts that I receive from Mother Earth that it feels natural to take care of her.