



## **Mary Helen Brown**

### **HONORABLE MENTION Grades 8-9**

Grade 9 – Rehoboth Christian High School, Rehoboth NM

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## **Protecting the Gift**

I am Dine' and I am deeply connected to the place I live. My family has lived on this land for generations before me, and we will continue to do so for many generations after me. It is my responsibility and privilege to protect and preserve the land that holds the memories and stories about my recent and long ago ancestors. My deep connection to the land motivates me to protect and care for the land by reducing my carbon footprint, researching ways to conserve the limited water sources, and encouraging others about preserving the gifts from the earth.

To reduce my carbon footprint, I can encourage my family and friends to be more proactive with recycling and reducing the use of carbon-based products. I have created a recycling system, and I need to make it a priority to utilize the system at home. I also work with my father on cars; he has taught me how to recycle the oil and fluids from vehicle maintenance to protect the land and water table. I will continue this practice and share my knowledge with others. Another practice that I noticed about my immediate family is our use of wood to provide all the heat in our home. I plan to research the benefits of converting to solar energy, and share that information with my parents.

One of New Mexico's precious resources is water, and water levels have dropped in the general western region of the United States. I need to improve how I conserve water. I do practical things like using the dishwasher which uses less water than hand washing. I need to be better about putting my clean clothes away and not washing them every time I wear them. Shorter showers are an immediate way to conserve water, meaning that I need to be aware of how much water I use when showering. These are small personal things I can do at home, that I can share and encourage others to do as well.

Education is important to help others understand the importance of preserving the earth. I have access to social media where I can learn and teach others. My social media outreach is large and diverse because I am an artist with a loyal following. In my travels as a practicing artist, I have met people who speak and protest their values and beliefs. For example, on the Standing Rock Indian Reservation, there were many protesters who deeply believed in defending the environment. I was inspired by their commitment and determination. Since then, my artwork has been influenced by what I saw and experienced about protesting in person. Art is my way to reach people, to show that the earth cares about us, and that we should be more caring toward the earth and environment.

I can model small changes in my habits to protect the earth. These small personal changes add up if everyone chooses to make their own changes. On a larger scale, I can use my social media platforms to educate others on the changes they can make. Lastly, I can use my art as a voice to show the gifts the earth provides.

#### Works Cited:

Kimmerer, Robin. (n.d.). "Returning the Gift." *Minding Nature* 7.2. [online pdf].

[https://www.humansandnature.org/filebin/pdf/minding\\_nature/May2014\\_Returning\\_the\\_Gift.pdf](https://www.humansandnature.org/filebin/pdf/minding_nature/May2014_Returning_the_Gift.pdf)