

# THE LEOPOLD WRITING PROGRAM

2020 ALDO LEOPOLD WRITING CONTEST AWARD WINNER

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HONORABLE MENTION, GRADES 10-12

## Nature Through a Lens

The other day, I was hiking with my family in the natural preserve near our house. The day was beautiful; it had just snowed, and everywhere there were traces of life, despite the frozen wonderland. Every few minutes we would be enchanted by a paw print in the snow, or a little plant poking its head out of the white fluff, having survived the cold night. This natural beauty that I experience on these walks is everywhere. Everyone can love and enjoy our mother nature, and learn to appreciate all of her wonders. Perhaps because nature is so accessible, we take her for granted, and we collectively suffocate her in carbon dioxide and plastic. Even when we believe that we truly care for the nature around us, we are harming her through our culture's unrestrained rush for economic gain.

When I run into a coyote, or a bunny lying under a tree, or an eagle soaring above this landscape, my immediate thought is to take out my phone and capture the emotion. I want to treasure the moment, be able to look back upon it, and share the experience with my friends and family. I had never before stopped to consider how much I had succumbed to such an automatic response to nature's beauty, and I had also failed to see the link between my experiencing nature through my cell phone and the growing climate impact that factories, including cell phone production plants, have.

It is said that the manufacture of a smartphone produces up to 200 times the weight of that phone in waste. The environmental impact of phone manufacturing is huge, and the demand for smartphones is increasing, showing our culture's reliance on, and addiction to, this form of technology. The constant development of new phones leads to a never-ending cycle of buying and discarding. Consumer demand for new cell phones is creating increasing numbers of discarded phones which also have a detrimental impact on the environment, though not quite as great as the manufacturing process. In the United States, for example, less than 16% of e-waste produced by these older smartphones is properly recycled.

The economy and the value we give to economic status have driven a wedge between us and our natural world. The more money one has access to, the more that wealth leads to a focus on material objects in our lives rather than on the spiritual and natural beauty around us. Today, when I am walking through a park, or sitting in the cool shade of an old oak tree, I find myself observing this beauty through my cell phone lens. My interaction and friendship with the trees has in a way become superficial. I now communicate with them through a screen, as if they are imprisoned. Or perhaps I am the one behind bars, trapped by the structure of our techno-focused society and led by the greed of a world controlled by all-for-profit capitalist organizations. Our culture drives this constant scramble for the newest gadgets, and this dynamic is inevitably polluting our world.

Understanding just how harmful our everyday actions are can help us identify the impact we have as individuals. Oftentimes, when we consider the need for change to save our planet, we talk in terms of large-scale solutions, for example about how the coal mining industry and the oil and gas sectors need to be replaced with green energy. While these improvements are of course needed, we may fail to consider what we can change in our lifestyles, in our daily decisions that may seem small but can have an impact; so it is my individual need for a smartphone, and not just our consumer driven economy, that has transformed my relationship with nature. I need to learn to rely less on my device and use more traditional, non-technological ways of sharing my experiences and stories. Cell phones are only one example of the infinite ways we are harming our relationship with planet Earth, and understanding such seemingly unimportant details is the first step that we, as young individuals, can take to make a difference in our rapidly deteriorating environment.

### Works Cited:

Harneis, Julien, et al. "The Social and Environmental Impact of Mobile Phones: Green Living."  
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