

THE LEOPOLD WRITING PROGRAM

2019 ALDO LEOPOLD WRITING CONTEST AWARD WINNER



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BEST ESSAY, GRADES 6-8

Aldo Leopold believed that we should treat land, water, and animals as we would anybody else in a community and that they should be listened to and be given rights of their own. For land, water, plants, and animals to be treated as part of a community, we must listen and treat them with respect, but we often don't follow this. The Rio Grande, for example, is often mistreated. Farmers, industries, and cities can buy portions of the water that flow through the river, but the river herself is not promised her water. Unlike people, she has no rights to her own water and, because of this, she is going dry.

Walking along the river, I can tell the river is thirsty for her water. When I was small, my family would walk the river almost every day and the sandbanks would come and go seasonally. Because the river was higher, I never considered trying to wade across. This summer in Albuquerque was different. The sandbanks didn't disappear. In fact, some haven't gone under water in years, and this summer was the first time I was able to cross the river and not worry about the danger. In fact, I hardly got my knees wet.

Leopold once wrote, "We can only be ethical in relation to something we can see, understand, feel, love, or otherwise have faith in." He believed that it was important to stay in touch with nature and extend our ethics past our own self interest to include nature into our community. Leopold believed only by feeling part of nature do you understand the water, land, plants, and animals.

Only those who visit the river regularly can hear the river's plea. Since the river and her water are so low, it is almost impossible for the river to flood into the cottonwoods as she once did. As a result, many of the cottonwoods are growing weaker and dying. After a strong wind storm a few years ago, I remember walking by the river where many old cottonwoods had fallen and blocked the path. When these cottonwoods die, I worry that new generations won't replace them because the river doesn't flow into the bosque as she once did. If we don't have cottonwoods, where will the summer tanagers, the porcupines, and engraver beetles feed? Where will the cavity dwellers such as northern flickers and screech owls, who make their homes in the cottonwoods, live? On what will the male prairie and fence lizards do their pushups in the sun?

What we must do to treat our river as a precious and valued member of the community is acknowledge her and treat her with love and respect. To do this, we must give our river and other water sources rights to their water first instead of last. If we do this, we can be sure she will use the water well to provide for the many organisms that live alongside her.



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