

ALDO LEOPOLD WRITING CONTEST 2026



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I have spent hours floating in a vast ocean of secrets, working to understand all that it has to say. When I was 10 years old, I started scuba diving. Since then I have dived into the library of natural lessons. So far the ocean has taught me immeasurable truths: the benefits of collaboration, the boundlessness of mathematics, and the brutal knife of climate change.

As one is swept away by the beauty of an underwater utopia, there is the opportunity to discover an aspect of life that has been overlooked. The community that runs through the veins of coral dwelling life will reveal itself. Joy Harjo once said, "It's possible to understand the world from studying a leaf. ... It's also possible to travel the whole globe and learn nothing." Sitting for just fifteen minutes and watching as the organisms interact, some discover a tightly bound sense of community. Studying the works of a single clump of coral I see how it adapts to suit the generation. It's a moldable metropolis, taking every organism into consideration as it expands. They coexist in a balance that provides every being with food, shelter, and prosperity.

Twirling through the skyscrapers of coral, I see equations writing themselves. Currents acting as highways, great leaves of seaweed and tiny grains of sand blowing in the breeze, fish whipping around the corner, and pillars of coral stretching the limits of architecture. Joy Harjo reveals, "You can comprehend the laws of aerodynamics, mathematics, poetry and biology through the complex beauty of such a perfect structure." The coral's fingers create patterns and songs, stretching to the surface to share their mathematical secrets. Meanwhile, currents write formulas for gyres and torsions as they whip through the water. With these forces, the fish navigate their surroundings, precisely channeling hydrodynamics and buoyancy.

Still the sea gives a plea for help. Diving through the Great Barrier Reef or off the coast of Cozumel are miles of ancient coral reefs but, in recent years, their health is deteriorating. Day by day, the coral dies, bleached by the sun's UV rays. Fish choke on the plastic that fills our waterways. Global warming is melting permafrost. Invasive species like lionfish are seizing whole civilisations. By paying attention to the subtle signs and listening to every call, we can learn the effect of human actions on others. We can see how selfish human advancement has drastically changed the environment and put wildlife around the globe at risk. The sea teaches us, no matter the decision, we must think of how it will affect everything around us.

Now some might ask, "Why would I listen to a mindless organism when I, a human, am the smartest being on earth?" To that Aldo Leopold could say, "The last word in ignorance is the [person] who says of an animal or plant, 'What good is it?'" If we could learn so much from one small city in the sea, who knows what listening to a biosphere could do. No one species is omnipotent. To assume so is to block out a whole world of opportunities and lessons. Start by listening to Earth's oceans and learn from wildlife in the sea. Then we may follow in their footsteps and create a community of lessons. Through diving, the oceans teach us so much and it's our job to listen. Listen to every song, poem and plea the oceans sing. Absorb every equation and law nature reveals. Consider every action and its reaction. Then take each gift to enhance our knowledge and in turn protect the organisms of the Earth.