

# THE LEOPOLD WRITING PROGRAM

2021 ALDO LEOPOLD WRITING CONTEST AWARD WINNER

MIA SCHLEMAN

HONORABLE MENTION Grades 6-7

## Noticing



During this time, as a pandemic spreads throughout cities, states, and countries, we have to stay in a place that we think we know all about. But have we really looked at our surroundings?

Aldo Leopold stated that land is not solely something that we walk on. The land is a connector of plants and animals, a giver of life, and an astounding mixture of elements that is essential to existence. Having to stay home has made me notice things around me. I knew that they were there, but never got to inspect the meticulous details of the butterfly or bird. While typing on the computer, which seems to be my everyday routine, I feel like I am alone. The computer is the only world around me. However, looking out the window and seeing a flicker with a spotted belly, fiery wings, and an endless smile of curiosity reminds me of the

world outside of my computer. This stunning sight gives me hope for the future. As the bird sits on the house and looks down at me; he makes me laugh. I feel like I know the curious bird. I have a deep connection with him. After this encounter, it turns out that I am not alone after all.

At dusk, I see the welcoming embrace of New Mexico's sunset. The vibrant colors of pinks, blues, and purples remind me that another day is ending. Before the pandemic, I never acknowledged the sunset, already knowing the day is concluding. Now, I look at the sunset and appreciate how it goes down daily over the tall Ortiz mountains, and I take some time to recognize it. This colorful farewell has inspired me to draw the everlasting sunset that burns bright in the Heart of New Mexico. While drawing the sunset; and making sure that its vibrant colors show, I look forward to seeing it again. Like an eternal friend, hope, listener, and reminder of connections.

I have also been walking with my family. I have noticed bumps, crevices, and nooks in the paths. I have observed the arid ground, pleading for a drink to quench its thirst. Although the ground is dry, the resilient chamisa, junipers, piñons, and grasses thrive in New Mexico's soil and call it home for generations. The Pinyon jays and Mexican jays tranquilly pick out delicious piñon nuts from pine trees. The bull snakes slither across the hot sand. Everything is connected in this biome; from the plants to the land to the animals, and I finally understand Aldo Leopold's land ethic.

Land is not just a layer of dirt that covers the Earth's crust. Land is a mineral that connects biota, supports all living beings, and should be cared for by everyone. When noticing these things during the pandemic, I realize I found my *querencia*, where I feel happy and safe. I finally grasp that land is much bigger than myself, it is the foundation of Earth in which all life will forever form.