



MARIANA CLARK

Grade 8

Coyote Willow Family School, Abq

Teacher: Adrienne Elkins

The author of the *A Sand County Almanac*, Aldo Leopold, said in his essay *Engineering and Conservation*: “Our tools are better than we are, and grow better faster than we do. They suffice to crack the atom, to command the tides. But they do not suffice for the oldest task in human history, to live on a piece of land without spoiling it.” It goes without saying tools can easily be used to destroy the world around us. Right now, glaciers are melting, coral is dying, water is poisoned, and rainforests bulldozed, all with the assistance of modern technology. At the same time, however, modern technology can help us to reverse at least some of these effects, whether that means filtering water or protecting endangered species. And many inventions, such as that of nitrogen fertilizer, had both good and poor ecological effects. Nitrogen fertilizer makes growing food more efficient, but it also pollutes water.

In truth, a tool by itself does not destroy the environment, not any more than a weapon could be convicted for a crime. A tool is controlled by the person who holds it. Asking whether a man or a tool is better is pointless, a tool can not think or do, can it? While a tool can do things man cannot, it does not know or care what it does, being an inanimate object. A tool is just an extension of a person’s will. A tool will just do what is asked of it, making any fault or powers not its own but that of its wielder. So while it is true that tools destroy the environment, it must be asked whether that is the fault of the tool, or the one controlling it. While many tools make destruction easier, they do not demand destruction.

Tools have existed since long before recorded history (perhaps because they are necessary for recording history), and many people have managed to live sustainably with them. Many have even made it more possible to live sustainably. Of course this, as mentioned earlier, is not always true. Some tools can not be used without a cost. Gasoline powered cars and trucks, while certainly useful, accelerate climate change. Plastics can be made into a million things, but in the end crowd the ocean with pollutants. With tools such as these, the best way to use them to create a more sustainable environment is to stop using them. This is not true of all things, however. Weather satellites can be used to monitor and prevent effects of global warming. Genetic sciences can help to restore dying species. Many tools have been in use for millennia to help sustain the environment, the people of Jemez have used prescribed fire to sustain their forests for thousands of years. While many of these practices may have drawbacks, it is untruthful to say that they do not positively affect the environment.

I have found something even as simple as a shovel to, when in the hands of many, be able to do great things. While a single person with their lone shovel can not build a levee, dig up a field of invasive grass, or change the world, a community using tools the right way can do just as much and even more than a bulldozer.