

# THE LEOPOLD WRITING PROGRAM

2019 ALDO LEOPOLD WRITING CONTEST AWARD WINNER



## NAVEDITHA BALA BEST ESSAY, GRADES 9-10

My father grew up in a small village—so small it’s not even on the map—called Tana in the Indian state of Tamil Nadu. Tamil Nadu, which is roughly the size of a small country, is located on the southern tip of the peninsula. My dad’s favorite story to tell is about Tana. During family dinners and road trips, my brother and I would listen as he told stories about the village with an L-shaped road cutting through it. My brother and I grew up in an urban city during the digital era. Our dad’s stories of playing outside with his friends on cool evenings, taking vacations to the cascading waterfalls, and spending evenings drinking coconut juice straight from the coconut were magical to us; a couple of times we got to experience the same magic.

When I close my eyes, I can still conjure up the image of verdant hills surrounded by misty clouds, the taste of coconut water, the clusters of trees thick with green that we saw on the way to my dad’s house.

My mom’s hometown, Chennai, was just as beautiful. I remember the walks that I would go on with my brother and my grandmother, listening raptly as she told us stories about my mother’s childhood whenever she passed by something that evoked a memory while we tried to brave the oppressive humidity. I still remember the speckled light filtering through the canopy that the trees’ foliage created. I remember the smell of the string of jasmine flowers that girls traditionally wore in India; after you wore the flowers, your hair would smell like jasmine for hours afterward. I remember examining the beautiful colors of the bougainvillea that my mother would wear as a child.

Sometimes when we visited India, we got to see the cotton farm that my grandfather grew up on. I remember looking across the fields, awed at the sheer vastness of the farm. To me, the cotton seemed to stretch on and on with no end.

But all these beautiful memories only exist because of water. Without water, the verdant hills would be barren fields of red and brown; the bougainvillea and jasmine would wilt and wither away, there would be no rows of cotton, and the speckles of light would grow larger as the canopy started to break down with lack of water. Already, I can see this phenomenon start to occur; the last time I went to my dad’s hometown, the clusters of green trees had disappeared, leaving barren trees and red soil in its wake.

Aldo Leopold’s land ethic discusses the “rightness” and “wrongness” of a thing. If it causes harm to its surroundings, it is wrong. . . . My water ethic is somewhat based on Leopold’s, but it is also based on all the experiences I’ve had the opportunity of having as a result of water. My water ethic states: Our identity is based upon the experiences and memories that make us. As such, it is our obligation to conserve water, as it is so instrumental to our identities. . . . My water ethic applies to everyone; water conservation is an important and significant way to reconnect with your defining experiences and memories. In some way or another, water is the reason we are who we are. . . .



[LeopoldWritingProgram.org](http://LeopoldWritingProgram.org)