

# SCSC WRITING CONTEST

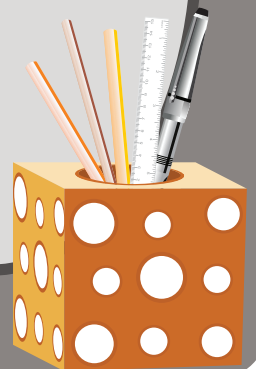
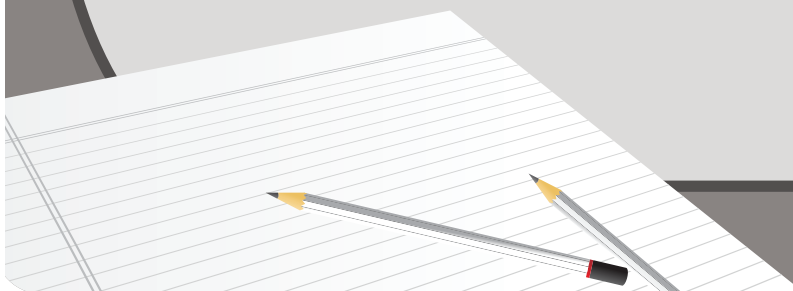
For Students in Grades K–12

**2017–18 Theme:  
Conservation & Sustainability**

Sponsored by



In Partnership with



The SCSC Writing Contest provides students with an opportunity to express themselves through fiction, non-fiction and/or poetry. This contest was established to encourage the love of language and writing for all students and as a way to recognize the talented young writers in south central Minnesota. SCSC is partnering with Minnesota State University, Mankato. Students in grades K– 12 attending public, private or homeschools are eligible to enter. Up to three pieces per category and submissions in multiple categories are welcome.

*The views and opinions expressed are those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect the views and opinions of the sponsors.*

*Note to Readers: Some of the works may not be appropriate for a younger reading audience.*

COPYRIGHT © 2018

*This anthology is a joint project of South Central Service Cooperative and Minnesota State University's education department. Copyright reverts to authors upon publication.*

## CATEGORY DESCRIPTIONS:

### **Poetry:**

Arrangement of words in an artistic and purposeful manner that expresses the writer's thoughts and/or feelings about a subject of their choice using style and rhythm (ex: sonnets, haiku, free verse).

- Limit three entries per student
- Maximum length is two pages, double-spaced per entry

### **Fiction (Imaginary/Fantasy):**

Stories that describe imaginary events and people that entertain the reader with realistic details, involving characters who experience a conflict (ex: historical fiction, realistic fiction, fantasy, science fiction, mystery).

- Limit three entries per student
- Maximum length is five pages, double-spaced per entry

### **Non-Fiction (True/Factual):**

*(Choose one or more non-fiction types)*

**Personal narrative:** A true story that describes a real event or experiences in the author's life.

**Information:** Factual writing to convey knowledge of a topic and research findings.

**Essay/Opinion:** A feeling or thought you have about a subject or topic, supported by research.

- Limit three entries per student
- Maximum length is five pages, double-spaced per entry

**All entries should relate to the 2017– 18 theme: Conservation & Sustainability.**

**Conservation:** careful preservation and protection of something

**Sustainability:** using a resource in a way that it is not depleted or permanently damaged

## **Thank you to all those who worked to begin the SCSC Writing Contest and this first anthology:**

To the staff at South Central Service Cooperative for promoting the contest, gathering and cataloging submissions, and designing the anthology layout.

To the students and staff at Minnesota State University, Mankato education department who served as judges and provided feedback to students on their writing submissions. Also, to the MSU print services for anthology printing.

To Coughlan Companies for their donation to program.

To the teachers, parents, friends and relatives who encourage students to express themselves through writing.

Finally, to the students who shared their work for this year's contest. We are most grateful.

**For more information, visit [www.mnscsc.org/writing-contest](http://www.mnscsc.org/writing-contest)**

# Table of Contents

## POETRY

<i>The Mess</i> , Price MacPherson . . . . .	2
<i>Recycling</i> , Price MacPherson . . . . .	2
<i>A Walk in the Woods</i> , Belle Miller . . . . .	2
<i>Save the Earth</i> , Julia Shabrack . . . . .	2
<i>Our Planet</i> , Ben Anderson . . . . .	3
<i>End the Pollution</i> , Drake Eastvold . . . . .	3
<i>The Angel Tree</i> , Sasha Jakovich . . . . .	3
<i>Hugo</i> , Ethan Grannis . . . . .	4
<i>A Tired Mother Earth</i> , Becca Johnson . . . . .	4

## FICTION

<i>Saving the Snow Leopard</i> , Evan Zika . . . . .	5
<i>The Badly Beaten</i> , Makenzie Benschoter . . . . .	6
<i>The Polluted Town</i> , Benito Briseno . . . . .	7
<i>Kingdom in Pollution</i> , Kylee Eckmann . . . . .	7–9
<i>What People Could Eat</i> , Chance Jacobson . . . . .	9
<i>Long Living Feathered Friends</i> , McKenzie Lang . . . . .	10–11
<i>The First National Park</i> , Preston Miller . . . . .	12
<i>Little Not Litter</i> , Martha Price . . . . .	12–13
<i>When the Wind Blows</i> , Martha Price . . . . .	13
<i>Truth Lives</i> , Rachel Evans . . . . .	14–16
<i>The Amazing Adventure of Willow and Scorch</i> , Audryona Johnston . . . . .	16–17

## NON-FICTION

<i>Teddy Roosevelt</i> , Newman MacPherson . . . . .	17
<i>Summer/Winter Fishing</i> , Ryan Zika . . . . .	18
<i>Why You Should Keep the World Clean</i> , Price MacPherson . . . . .	19
<i>Why You Shouldn't Litter</i> , Rose MacPherson . . . . .	19
<i>Saving the Planet</i> , Aaliyah Bauer . . . . .	20
<i>An Easy Way to Preserve Nature</i> , Grace MacPherson . . . . .	20–21
<i>Different Types of Pollution</i> , Eric Sheppard . . . . .	21–22
<i>Pollution and How It Affects Us</i> , Noah Spear . . . . .	22
<i>To Live in the Wild</i> , Sean Zika . . . . .	23–24
<i>The Boundary Waters Through the Eyes of a Newcomer</i> , Aaron Baxa . . . . .	25–26
<i>Mountaintop Removal Mining</i> , Mattilyn Brown . . . . .	27–28

# POETRY

## The Mess

By Price MacPherson, Grade 2  
*Home School, Mankato*

We were at a national park,  
And it was very, very dark.  
It was night  
And I slept tight.  
I woke up  
And saw my pup.  
I opened the tent,  
And out I went,  
But what a mess I saw,  
Littering is against the law!  
So I hurried with a dash,  
And picked up all the trash.  
Of Earth, I'm a friend.  
Now this is the end.

## Recycling

By Price MacPherson, Grade 2  
*Home School, Mankato*

I like to recycle and do all the work.  
I'm digging and digging, and oh! Its' a cork.  
Look there's a bottle cap,  
And I see a torn-up map.  
I found a broken cup,  
And my bags are filling up.  
Very soon I'll take them out;  
The truck will jostle them about.  
Recycling is my chore.  
I take the bags out the door.  
I think about more,  
How nice it is to have this place,  
I like looking at it with my face;  
But let us keep it extra clean,  
So that is the way it can be seen.

## A Walk in the Woods

By Belle Miller, Grade 3  
*Sacred Heart School, Waseca*

When my family walks in the woods  
it is pretty because the birds are flying  
and the sun is shining so bright.  
The trees look like they were planted by angels.  
When we walk in the woods  
we see deer tracks, turkey tracks, raccoons,  
pretty flowers, fire flies, and a river.  
We walk on the frozen river during winter  
and find a stick to make sure it's thick.  
Grandma and Grandpa love when the  
grandchildren come and visit  
and go for a walk in the woods.

## Save the Earth

By Julia Shabrack, Grade 3  
*Franklin Elementary School, Mankato*

Save the Earth  
More people need to be birthed  
Recycle more  
Or life will be a bore  
Littering is bad  
It makes the earth mad  
Instead of driving, try biking  
or maybe hiking  
Turn off the light  
It will give you delight!  
Turn off the sink  
and don't waste our drink

## Our Planet

By Ben Anderson, Grade 6  
*Blue Earth Area Middle School, Blue Earth*

Water was blue, now it is grey  
You are killing our planet  
Don't make litter, throw it away instead of throwing it in the bay  
Help save the planet  
Don't make litter or extra trash – use it again  
Save water instead of wasting it  
Thanks to people who polluted the bay  
Fish used to swim freely now they dodge trash you threw in the street, sea, bay, lake and the trash you were too lazy to throw away  
The dirtier we make the earth, the shorter we have the earth  
Ride the bus, reuse things  
The better we treat the earth the longer we have it  
More and more places on earth are being polluted everyday  
We are shortening our own lives by polluting places  
Even smoking is hurting the earth  
Let's quit polluting our planet

## End the Pollution

Drake Eastvold, Grade 6  
*Blue Earth Area Middle School*

End the Pollution  
Pollution is taking over the world  
We must focus on rehabilitation  
The world might stop its swirl  
We have to start the conversation  
Soon we will have no reason  
We must do something about it  
First we need to start reusing, reducing, and recycling  
Start cleaning the world up a bit  
The sky will be blue  
I must admit  
A lot of people think this world is kinda eww  
So let's start the rehabilitation  
The world will be clean  
The grass will be green  
The fish will be healthy  
That will overwhelm me  
Animals will be growing in population  
No more dehydration  
The whole world will be happy  
Let's make this the end of pollution  
Let this be our solution

## The Angel Tree

By Sasha Jakovich, Grade 6  
*Dakota Meadows Middle School, North Mankato*

There is someone who helps people's needs  
They give within the tree  
It is sad, but they are unknown,  
forever and ever to be shown.  
It happens on the time of the year,  
where people share, give, and be sincere.  
Now four kids want to thank this deed,  
for seeing others' needs come true.  
They tie a wish to the tree  
and then wait to see...  
What will happen with the Angel Tree.

## Hugo

By Ethan Grannis, Grade 7

Lake Crystal Wellcome Memorial Secondary School

It all started on Thanksgiving break  
It was a long trip we had to take  
We went to get my lizard  
Joy he felt in his gizzard  
Going home, I stayed awake  
We built a stand to hold the tank  
In the garage dad found a plank  
I stapled dad's finger  
A pain that would linger  
He had me his son Ethan to thank  
His original name was Pogo  
I later named him Hugo  
He wouldn't eat his greens  
Unlike animals with his genes  
But when he pooped I said OH NO!!!!  
He likes to play my video game  
For me that is to blame  
He likes to watch TV  
And watch J.J. Watt D.E.  
For a lizard he is very tame  
When he gets a bath it's only by me  
A role that fits me to a "T"  
Everyone else he will escape  
Why does he do it for goodness sake?!  
He is everything I want him to be

## A Tired Mother Earth

By Becca Johnson, Grade 11

St. Peter High School, St. Peter

Child, I am aging.  
With a wrinkled surface and sad eyes  
I have held your hand for too long,  
lent you all the resources that you'd need to grow,  
kept you safe from my wrath.

Child, I am sick.  
You filled my lungs with factory smoke and my  
stomach with oil.  
When I cough out detritus  
you shoveled it back down my throat.

Child, I am lost.  
You've torn apart my skin for city buildings and  
highways,  
drawn water from my veins and soiling what I had  
already given you.  
You have pulled and torn me apart so much  
I can hardly recognize myself.

Child, I am tired.  
I've carried the bones of you under my skin,  
kept you at bay in my arms,  
given you warmth and peace.  
Yet you claw at my very being.

Now with rotting flesh I realize that  
you will not open your bleeding eyes for me.  
And I will no longer fight you.

# Fiction

## Saving the Snow Leopard

By Evan Zika, Grade 4

Jefferson Elementary School, Mankato

Ten-year-old Alex was walking through town in Russia when he saw a white blur shoot by!

"OMG! What was that thing?"

It looked like a tiger, but he knew tigers didn't live in this part of Russia. Alex raced home, just in case it was after him!

Once he got home he got on the computer and did some research about white cats that lived in Russia. All that popped up was a white tiger and a species he had never heard of, it was smaller than a tiger, but way bigger than a house cat. The caption said "Snow Leopard." He clicked on the site. The first sentence said, "Snow Leopards are a very endangered species."

"Woah, that's what I saw in the park today."

So Alex read the next sentence. It said, "They are mostly killed by poachers for their fur coat."

"That's very sad," Alex said. He turned the computer off and went to his room to start packing for tomorrow. Alex was going to run away for a couple days and try to save the snow leopard. Alex is going to try to stop poachers and other people from killing them.

In the morning, he snuck out of bed and got started. He got fruit and canned food, ate breakfast and went on his way. He bought a train ticket with the money he had packed (\$350.00) and got on the train that was going to the town where the snow leopards were. (He forgot the name.)

Alex got off the train, said "Thank you," and off he went to find the snow leopard.

When he was doing research at home, it said they lived on the top of Blackberry Mountain. So he got off the train that went to Blackberry Mountain and he started to hike.

When he was hiking up he saw beautiful scenery and wildlife. He saw a mountain goat and an arctic fox. He kept hiking and finally after what seemed like four days he found what looked like a snow leopard den. So he peeked inside, and sure enough a family of snow leopards was all curled up inside.

"Ahh," Alex said.

He pulled out the signs and posters and started to hang them up. The posters said, "Please don't kill snow leopards. They are beautiful animals and you will have to pay a fine of \$15,000 and spend 2 ½ years in jail!"

"There," Alex said. He took one more peek at the beautiful view, hiked back down and got on the train that took him back to his home.

Once he got home, he sat down on his couch and turned on the TV. As soon as he turned it on, the news popped up and it said, "Posters hung up to save the snow leopards."

Alex smiled, "I did it."

In the end, people and poachers stopped killing snow leopards. Alex kept taking care of them. He even became a zoo keeper and his main exhibit was the snow leopards.

# The Badly Beaten

By Makenzie Benschoter, Grade 6

Blue Earth Area Middle School, Blue Earth

Once upon a time there was a girl named Chantel Kimp, a seventeen-year-old teenager. Our story starts in New Orleans. Chantel is a very conservative person. She loves helping people and the earth. She loves animals most of all, so she hates animal cruelty.

"Let me tell you a story that happened to me that I'm not supposed to say, but I'll give you an exception," Chantel says.

"It all starts like this...", she says.

"I was an ordinary girl with an ordinary life. When all of a sudden, a gust of spring air went by me in the late April breeze. I see some trash – a water bottle blow by. I hurry to grab it, but it went into the Bayou St. John. I saw an English Bulldog chained to a pole with its food and water out of its reach but full. Poor thing, I thought in that moment. I could just leave it there, but it was across the river. The river is a wide stretch, so I headed towards a bridge, called the Magnolia Bridge. I made it across the bridge and headed towards the poor dog."

She takes a breath and thought, "After that I made it to the bulldog. He or she was so terrified, and I thought it thought I was going to hurt it. I slowly approach it and it started to bark. I look around and find the dog's dishes and no owner. It was as though he had been here for a few weeks to a month or two.

"It seemed that maybe the owner or someone comes and feeds and waters it or the food and water has been there the whole time, but it seems that he or she was just left to die." She stops and wipes her eyes, like I said she hates animal cruelty. She continues.

"I looked at the poor thing and saw that his or her ribs are showing because he or she is very hungry. I sit next to the dog as it calms down and eats for what seems like the first time in a while. I untied the bulldog after it's done eating and I picked up everything that was left.

"We head across the bridge when I saw that bottle from earlier and I bring the dog to the river. I reached for the bottle and a rock that was holding me slipped into the water making me fall in.

"I let go of the dog and the rapids pulled me with them. I just saw everything flash and I think I was about to die but then I'm grabbed out of the water by who? The English Bulldog that I saved!" she continues.

"I was saved. As I lay on the ground, the dog snuggled up next to me, I found out later that it was a girl. I just lay there for a while and then I got up and grabbed the little pup. We both head to the vet to make sure that she didn't have anything and in the few moments, I grew very close to her and I stopped and crouched down and asked, 'Do you have a name?'

"I then looked for a collar, but these was none. 'Do you want a name?' I asked.

"The dog tilts her head and wags her tail. 'Okay, let's see, Macy, Lucy, Bugs, Jelly,' I go on and on with names. Then I say this name, 'Behr,' and the animal wags and jumps up.

"We head to the vet and go inside.

"The nurse at the desk asked me, 'What can I do for you miss?'

"'Oh. Um. I found this dog chained up, with its food and water out of reach, abandoned at the side of the river. It's a she. She answers to the name Behr. I fed her and I gave her water. I brought her here to make sure she is healthy and okay.'

"'Oh, okay, let me take her to the back,' the nurse says and takes Behr to the back.

"I took a seat restfully in the waiting room and almost fall asleep a few times.

"I hear a rustling by me in the waiting room. It's a blur when I open my eyes to find a boy around my age sitting next to me with papers. My eyes are all blurry, but I couldn't make out his facial features, I felt confused in the moment. I get up and stand. Behr comes out later.

"'She is perfectly fine, just hasn't been eating or drinking for a while,' the nurse says.

"'Oh. Good. I have a question miss. Can I adopt her?' I asked excitedly.

"'Yes! You can, but because of her breed she will be \$126.99,' she said.

"'Oh,' I said. 'Umm.' I check my bag. Happily, I had enough.

"I bought Behr, even knowing how my parents would feel. I took her home and she is still mine today," Chantel finishes.

"Once I saved Behr, I knew this was something that I wanted to do for the rest of my life. I'm Chantel Kimp, and I am an agent for a society that helps save animals and is against animal cruelty.

"Shhhhh, don't tell anyone. It's a secret between you and me," Chantel finishes.



## The Polluted Town

By Benito Briseno, Grade 6

*Blue Earth Area Middle School, Blue Earth*

One day a businessman named Will heard something that sounded like a tornado alarm. It frightened him so much. All of the people in town thought that it was a false alarm. Right after they said that, a huge TV turned on and said, "This is not a drill. Don't drink any of the water from sinks or anything until further notice." He thought that it was crazy that no one could drink water because of some random thing that no one knows about. Will wanted to go home and relax after hearing that.

While he was walking home he stumbled upon a man selling clean water. The man asked quietly, "Would you like to buy some water?"

"Yes," Will said.

He walked into his house and was glad he saw that man selling water. He sat down and turned on the TV and it said, "Breaking news. We just found out that companies stopped importing clean water to our town today."

With what Will just heard, he packed up his belongings and water and went to the bridge to try to leave. While he was driving down the bridge and was stopped by a police officer by the exit. The police officer said, "You can't leave. This is now a quarantine zone."

"What?" Will said. "How am I supposed to live here?"

"I don't know," the officer said.

A little after that Will went back home and went in the sewers to get out of his town. He got lost and found his way out a year later. When he got out he was lost by a road. He saw a sign that said the next town was five miles away.

Will thought he'd die of thirst until he looked at the supplies he brought along. He saw five bottles of water. He thought he drank it all on his trip in the sewer. He opened a bottle of water so he wouldn't be thirsty all of the days he's walking.

Will saw another sign that said a half mile left. He found a town and lived a happy life there.

## Kingdom in Pollution

By Kylee Eckmann, Grade 6

*Blue Earth Area Middle School, Blue Earth*

Once upon a time there was a beautiful princess named Alesha and a handsome prince named James. Princess Alesha's father was King Reed who was married to Queen Reed. Prince James loved Princess Alesha very much, they were meant to be.

One day, Princess Alesha was down at the market greeting people. There was trash everywhere! It was also way too loud. People were coughing and getting sick because there wasn't clean air, clean water, or a clean Earth. It was also too loud. It was a very disappointing sight for the princess to see and hear.

All of a sudden, everything went silent. The princess could see the people talking but she couldn't hear them. There was so much noise pollution all around her. Princess Alesha had gone deaf! This was very frightening. Her life is going to be terrible.

She ran back to the castle stumbling over trash that was all over and coughing because of the bad air. The princess was extremely scared!

"Why is our world so unhealthy?" the princess thought.

When she got to the castle she ran to her mother and father.

"Mother, Father! I have gone deaf from all of the noise pollution down at the market!" said the princess

with fear in her voice. It was strange for her to not hear her own voice. She would never hear the loving words of her mother or father. She is worried, scared, glum, and dizzy.

"Oh dear, come to mother," said the queen as the king sat there in shock. Princess Alesha didn't know what her mother just said. That made the princess very glum.

"Mom, don't you remember? I can't hear you!" said the princess starting to cry.

The queen came over and gave her daughter an amazingly, big hug. The princess hugged her back.

"Mom, I want to go back to the market and pick up the trash! There is too much! People are getting sick because of the pollution, and now I have gone deaf!" said the princess. The queen shook her head saying no. The princess didn't like her answer and started to cry. She ran to her room, all she wanted was to help people.

Little did the royals know, Prince James heard the whole conversation and he loved the princess. Now she would never hear him talk again. He knew he had to do something. He had an idea! He will go to the market and save the people from pollution! He knew it would be hard because people just keep polluting the earth, but he can try.

He starts up the stairs to tell the princess his great idea. Unfortunately, he remembers she won't be able to hear him. So, he walks back down the stairs and makes his way towards the market.

Up in the princess' room, Alesha cries louder than ever, but doesn't realize it. All she wants to do is help people and save the planet from pollution. Unfortunately, her parents won't allow it. This angers the princess.

The princess heard what Prince James is doing for the world. She is in awe with the prince's heroic deeds. She wishes she could give him a big hug as a thank you.

Down at the market, the prince stumbles across a bunch of trash. He starts picking the trash up.

"This is terrible to see our world being trashed! If only people would recycle and not litter, then our world would not be so polluted," says the prince.

A woman crouches down and starts helping the prince. This makes the prince smile knowing that there are people out there who also want to keep our world clean. They start to talk.

"I'm sick of all this trash around our town! This place used to be a lot nicer until people started to litter," says the woman. "People are getting terribly sick from all this pollution! My son, Hudson, has come down with the sickness. It is very tragic. Oh! I'm Veronica! Nice to meet you, who are you?"

"I agree with you very much, ma'am. I'm sorry to hear about your son. I'm Prince James," said Prince James.

"Your Highness! You shouldn't be having to clean up this trash, let me do it!"

"NO! I must do it. I'm trying to save our world from pollution. My love, the princess, has gotten sick from the pollution. She has also gone deaf from the noise pollution," says the prince sadly. They finish picking up the trash. They recycle and dispose of it.

She walks towards her house to check on her son. The prince runs to her and gives her a \$10 bill.

After cleaning the town, the prince hikes to the beach and starts cleaning there. There is so much trash! That means trash is getting into our water. That is not good for the fish. The fish can eat that trash and then it stays in them. When we eat them, we also eat the trash the fish ate. Thinking about that makes the prince gag.

"Why is our world so unhealthy?" thought James. "If only our world was healthy and free of pollution."

Back at the castle, the princess sits in her room writing a letter to her parents about why she should go help clean the world and make it healthy again.

*Dear Mom and Dad,*

*I should be able to help clean our world from pollution. I should do this because it'll keep our world clean. This planet is overly polluted. People are going deaf and getting sick from all this pollution. If this doesn't stop, all our people will be sick! We don't want that. Our world is diseased. We need to do something about it. That is why I should be able to help clean our world!*

*Your daughter,  
Alesha Reed*

The next morning, Alesha gives her parents the note. The king and queen read the note and they discuss it. They wrote a note back saying she is not allowed to go back out there. She ran back to her room crying.

She screams, "All I want is a healthy world and to make a difference!" She disappears up the stairs with tears coming down her face. When she reaches her room, the prince has sent her a text saying she needs to make posters about conservation. She got out her colorful paper, crayons, markers, scissors, glue, and glitter. She got straight to work.

When she is done, she gives the posters to the prince and he puts them up all around the world.

Prince James bought many plane tickets to travel the whole world. He cleaned every beach, ocean, village, town, and field. It may have taken months, but he cleaned the whole world. The planet is now pollution free! Everything is perfect now! There are no kinds of pollution, nobody is sick, and everybody is happy!

Down in the kingdom, the princess and prince are happily married. With the pollution gone, the princess can hear again. She is ecstatic about being able to hear again. The world live happily ever after. The End.

*Author's note: It is important to keep our planet healthy because this planet is our home. You might not be able to clean the whole world like Prince James did in this story. You can do small things such as recycle your items, pick up trash when you see it on the ground, invest in a reusable water bottle, and bring your own cloth bag instead of a plastic one. Those are just a few of the many, many things you can do to keep our world clean and healthy. If you can do some of those small things, we can have less pollution in our world.*

## What People Could Eat

By Chance Jacobson, Grade 6

Blue Earth Area Middle School, Blue Earth

It was a Saturday morning when Jack, a local businessman, decided to go have lunch at the restaurant in which he owned. Jack owned a local seafood restaurant called The Seaside Shante.

When Jack arrived, he ordered the fish special. When it arrived, he started to eat and he noticed something was wrong with the fish. As he looked closer, he noticed there was plastic in the fish. Jack didn't know if something had accidentally gotten in it when cooking the fish. So, Jack went to inspect the fish and as he did, he had noticed that a lot of the fish had ingested plastic.

So, Jack decided he needed to shut down the restaurant temporarily until he could get to the bottom of the issue, as he didn't want his customers to get sick or choke.

Jack contacted other local restaurants asking if they were having the same issues and to give them a heads up about the fish. Jack then contacted a local fisherman who was also his best friend, John, to explain his concerns about the water life and the possible pollution.

So, Jack and John decided to take out John's boat and go diving to see if they could find out what was going on. In doing so, they had come across a lot of garbage in the water.

Jake decided to go in front of the council to see if they would help eliminate the pollution in the local waters as it was contaminating water life and risking local businesses. The council agreed and the whole community came together to help clean up the waters.

Jack finally felt safe to reopen his restaurant. Jack never noticed the issues with the fish again and the community continues to make sure the waters are safe for people and the water life.

# Long Living Feathered Friends

By McKenzie Lang, Grade 6

St. James Middle/Senior High School, St. James

"Beep, beep, beep," went my alarm clock just like normal. Hi, my name is Isabella, I am 13 years old. I am going to be taking you with me on my journey to save a forever friend.

This day started like any other, the hardest choice was what clothes to wear? You see, it was harder for me to figure out what to wear because I had to look just right. I picked out my jean jacket, lacy navy blue shirt, my favorite blue and red scarf, jeggings, and my tan boots. Then the next most important thing was my hair. I got out my curling iron and I curled my hair, well, at least the bottom half.

Then my mother said, "Honey, you only have 15 minutes!"

"Whatever!!!!"

I got going on my makeup. First the foundation, then my mascara and then most important, my eye shadow. But, of course, I added glitter on top of my eye shadow. Then I did the "final" touch. Lip gloss! It smelled like watermelon, my favorite!

Then, I hardly had any time, so I quickly shoved everything in my galaxy pink, blue, and purple backpack. This included my laptop, iPhone, sunglasses, wallet, math and history textbooks, my pencil case, my notebooks, and my accordion folder.

Then my mom was giving me that look again when I walked downstairs. The look like, "Could you take any longer?"

Anyhow, we got in our Buick Enclave and we went to school. I was very eager to go to school because I was a huge fan of eagles and we were part of a committee about eagle protection. There was going to be a meeting after school because they track the eagles and one of the many eagles was missing.

You see, eagles mean everything to me and that day at school I could not think about anything but them. For example, my math teacher asked me a simple question and I could not answer it because I was thinking about the missing eagle.

The never-ending school day was over, so I went running outside. My mom was there and we went home to drop off my backpack. Next, we had to pick up my little brother, who was 5, from daycare. Then we went straight to the meeting.

I honestly did not want there to be any bad news. But of course, there was. We were at the meeting and then the speaker came out and told us everything that they knew.

"Well, hello everyone and thank you for coming on such short notice. We have an issue and it needs to be solved fast. One of our eagles we have been tracking since she was born, is not on the radar. We need to figure out where it is and fast."

The meeting was over and my mom had to go back to work. I was home alone. Well, my annoying brother was home, but he does not count. Finally, after what seemed like forever, my mom got home with wonderful news.

"Sweetheart, the eagle has been spotted in our area!"

"That's great!" I said.

I was so happy! I went up to my treehouse to do my homework. When I was up there, I heard this weird noise. I was getting a little unsure about what it was, but I knew it was not a human voice. It scared me stiff, so I looked up out of the treehouse and was amazed at what I saw.

I saw a mama eagle and some chicks. I wasn't sure at first, because it could have been any eagle and her chicks, but I was not sure so I got on the phone. I called the leader of our committee, Mark Johnson, and I told him everything.

"Hi, I am looking to talk to Mark," I said.

"Okay, please wait on hold."

"Okay," I said.

"Hello?"

"Hi, my name is Isabella and I have a couple of questions and concerns with an eagle I found," I said.

"Ok."

"Well, then let's get to work on things!"

He said that he lived a couple of hours away in Wisconsin and we lived in Duluth, Minnesota. Also, he wanted to bring his team of experts and do check-ups on the mama eagle and her newborn chicks.

I was so happy to know that she was in our tree the entire time. I went and slept in the tree house that night. As I started up into the night sky, it reminded me of my dad and his love for constellations and my forever eagle friend.

My dad used to love the stars and that is why when he left us I became more interested in astronomy. He died from stage 3 lung cancer. It spread and he was gone five days before his 32<sup>nd</sup> birthday.

It was hard for all of us and we were never the same after his passing. He had a favorite constellation, it was Cepheus. Every evening I could see that constellation and it reminded me of him. He was always smiling and he always found something positive in everything. I try to keep living like him, but it hurts to know, someone who was so strong just left. At his funeral, we just thought over and over, "How did this happen?"

Soon after he passed, we moved. It was hard for all of us. Now my mom was left to raise us, so she wanted to get a different house to prove to us that we could still do it without dad.

Right then and there I had a meltdown, I cried. I missed him, and I had a picture of him on my wall. I held that picture tight and I sobbed. I cried my heart out because I missed my dad, old home, and my friends back home in Rochester, Minnesota. It was only the first couple of weeks in our new home and we were finally getting the new furniture. That is when my love for eagles started to kick in.

We lived on a two-acre property in the country outside of Duluth. I was on our swing outside and I noticed that there were a few eagles on our property. I went inside and got my tablet and started to do some more research on eagles. I was doing research on the eagles and I noticed they had a lot in common with my dad. To start off with, eagles were beautiful, strong, and protective just like my dad. It was as though he was there but in an animal form.

I was going to go to school the next day, but I woke up with a cough, high fever, and a headache. I did not want to get anyone sick so I stayed home. I told my mom I was going to get some fresh air to help with my headache and it was a beautiful spring day. I went to my treehouse to say good morning to mama eagle and her chicks. I climbed up to my treehouse and I noticed something. She was gone.

I started to panic and I ran back inside the house. I went to find my mom and I said, "Mom, the eagle is gone!!"

She reassuringly said, "Sweetheart, Mark was here last night after you went to bed early because you did not feel well. They transported them to the raptor center to examine them and make sure they were healthy and could be released back into the wild."

I knew I could trust my mom, so I went back outside because after I ran my headache had gotten worse. Then I climbed the ladder to my treehouse. I could tell she was gone because there was no noise from her chicks. The only thing from her that was still remaining was her empty nest.

I was still happy though because I knew that I did everything I could to help the mama eagle and her chicks. But, always and forever that eagle and her chicks will be in my heart, just like my dad.

The next day I was feeling a bit better and I went to school. My writing class had a new assignment that I was thrilled about. We had to work on an essay of our choice. Obviously, I wanted to do my project on eagles, so I went to my teacher's desk and got it approved. My class was getting ready to start on our project and I wanted it to be a personal narrative about the things I have been encountering with the mama eagle and her chicks.

That night when mom got home from work, she had great news. The mama eagle and her chicks had been released back into the wild. They were healthy and strong.

I worked hard on my essay. I also wanted to prove to my teacher that even though I was sick, I could catch up and be ahead of everyone else in my class. I turned it in the next day and my teacher said that she liked it. I was happy for two reasons: 1) I was glad to be back on track, and 2) I was glad that she liked it.

My essay was not only going to be entered in a contest but the money I will earn from participating in the contest is going to go to the eagle protection conservation program.

Every time I see an eagle it reminds me of my dad, strong, beautiful, protective and he is free of pain and illness. He is with God!

# The First National Park

By Preston Miller, Grade 6  
TEAM Academy, Waseca

A long time ago, there was a man who loved the wilderness. He even thought he was part of the forest and other people, but he thought he was more. As he got older, the planet started cutting down trees in the forest he lived in. He got real mad about it.

He went up to the workers' boss and argued about it, but he lost the argument. That just made him even more mad. He started sneaking to the equipment and destroying it. That way it would take longer, but they kept getting supplies. So, he had to take a last resort. He had to tell the president because the president can stop it.

The only reason he can talk to the president is because he's his friend. So, he goes to the president. When the man tells the president, he agreed to try and stop the destroying of the forest. They go to the boss and the boss agrees.

The president makes the forest a national park and the only person able to live there was the man who did it all. That is the story of the first national park. The end.

# Little Not Litter

By Martha Price, Grade 6  
Maple River Schools, Mapleton

I hate winter. Especially when you've warmed the chair you've been sitting on and it's 20 degrees below zero outside. It's morning and the bus pulls up, so you have to jog down your mile-long driveway and try not to slip and fall flat on your face. Well... that's exactly how I felt today. Except I actually fell in front of everybody on the bus.

"Come on Meg, we're already late!" screeched the bus driver, while the children laughed hysterically at me.

I walked down the aisle, sure my face was redder than a tomato, then sat down next to my friend, Lucy.

"Did you see it? I'm so embarrassed! I'm trying to impress everybody, but so far, I'm failing miserably. Wait, did it look that bad?"

Lucy then pulled out her sketchpad and tore out a completely finished sketch of me in mid-air, my eyes as big as baseballs, legs shot out awkwardly. It *almost* looked funny.

I looked at my fall picture and then glanced over to the sketch that Lucy was making. It looked like an Earth with people holding it.

"What's that for?" I questioned her, with suspicion.

"A project, silly."

"Well... what kind of project?"

"Saving Earth... leave me alone. Busy right now. Go!"

I hopped in the next seat over but kept on glancing at the pencil in her hand moving back and forth, then back and forth again. Words! They read, *Little not Litter*. Little not litter? Saving Earth? I know anything is possible, but did Lucy think that the Earth is dying. This led me to one conclusion; I would have to either wait or ask.

Lucy suddenly burst out, "Here. Come sit with me! I'll tell you... if you come"

I scooted over as she explained to me.

"It's not a project. I've been taking forever to instill awareness in dying coral reefs, and I think I've succeeded. My mom and I spent a couple days by a coral reef last year, and we saw the coral, but it was... it was grey. Dead.

"So, I asked my mom what the problem was. She said, 'People. They don't care about what goes in the ocean. But the animals and plants... they are dying, because of us. We need to use less and think more about where it goes. We need to use little and not litter.'

"Ever since we got back, things just weren't the same. Whenever I saw trash, I threw it away. I told aunts and uncles to never use too much, and I improved my way of living, and I want others to, too."

I tried to make it not make sense, but what Lucy said made sense, surprisingly. Lucy always made sure I threw away my garbage and brought eco-friendly materials for school projects. And, now she needed help from me!

I looked at her sketch of me with googly eyes and flying limbs, and crumpled it up into a ball and proclaimed, "I don't care if I'm a clumsy, almost friendless person, because you're the only friend I have. I will help you even if it takes my reputation away to bits and pieces, I don't care! So, what time should we meet?"

And that was only the beginning.

## When the Wind Blows

By Martha Price, Grade 6

Maple River Schools, Mapleton

"Did you know the average American uses 3,600 gallons of water per year?" I read aloud from the book I checked out from the library.

My teacher, Ms. Almon, had my class make a report for presentation. But I had not one single idea! It was due tomorrow, a report about conservation.

"Laura... we have to get to work. This is due on TUESDAY. We need ideas!" Mia called from behind me, her warm breath creeping on my back.

Look, I was thinking really hard. I think we talked about resources, but I didn't really listen. Something about trees, oil and saving stuff. I was paired up with Mia, the smartest girl I knew, and she was asking me for ideas? I was clueless, so I sighed and told her.

"Mia, I don't have any ideas. That's why I checked out this book. But I do know when Ms. Almon told us about the poor children in Africa and – "

"Laura! That's a great idea. We could write about conserving water and money for the people in Africa. They have almost nothing, and we have everything. We conserve for them, so they get more necessities. Win-win!"

"But it's not like our presentation is going to change people's minds. Like, can't we make a bake sale or raise money? I REALLY need extra credit for social!" I proclaimed.

Mia was so excited, she started hugging me and smiling until I was sure her mouth would get tired. Raising money for people in Africa, explaining how we can conserve more for people in need. It was brilliant! And this whole thing was my idea, hard as it is to think.

We got to work on my idea starting this afternoon. With a piggy bank and a hand drawn poster saying, "For the people in Africa and our Earth! (also my social grade)." Mia didn't like the end saying, but I protested it was my idea so in the end, I won.

We went around our town, only seen as a bunch of kids trying to beg like poor dogs on the street. Lots of people had this kind of look that read, *what in the world are you doing, trying to get enough money to buy a new skateboard?* Then we would walk on further, finally deciding to get a cow bell from my house and add glitter to the already flashing poster. But still... no luck. I was starting to think social was a lost cause.

"Mia... let's go home. It's almost 7 o'clock, and I'm soooo hungry and tired. We're just kids, remember? People aren't going to conserve and change just because of us. Let's just go home now."

I tried to walk away, but Mia pulled my arm back and commanded me, "Hold on. You were the one who had this idea, and now you're saying it's nothing. We may be just kids, but who ever said kids can't change the world? When the wind blows, you don't just go inside, do you? Fly a kite, do something, that's it! The wind's blowing, so just fly. Fly like you never will again, because now's our chance to fly. Help the children who don't have enough of anything. Who wish they could have the things we wasted every day. Now's our time to shine!"

A familiar voice behind me answered, "You're right. It's your time to shine. Turn around!"

I turned my body, seeing the mayor, Mr. Clutch. He held a big jar full of money, and gently set it in my hands. Then he informed me, "It's yours, Laura. Sixty thousand dollars for the children of Africa. The citizens of this town have decided to donate this money and start a water conservation program because of you. You've proved that kids can change the world, and how we think of it. Thank you!"

From that moment on, I knew that he was right. When the wind blew, I never complained again.

# Truth Lives

By Rachel Evans, Grade 8  
Home School, St. Peter

I wish the woman was alive. Just for a moment more. Just enough that I could get close and ask her, "Was it worth it?"

People hurry past me on the street, glancing at the corpse, then averting their gaze, as if they can deny such a treasonous woman existed. I avert my gaze as well, not wanting people to think I was associated with her.

My boots scuff against the crumbling cobblestone as I walk toward Demeter Avenue. At each block I glance over my shoulder, occasionally stopping in an alley or store. My skin crawls as I near Atticus's towering brick apartment.

I go to the side of the building, where a rusted metal stairway clings to the wall, the brick crumbling around the supports. I ascend the stairs, trying to step lightly with the balls of my feet. The metal creaks and groans. A shiver runs up my spine. I yank open the wooden door and lunge inside the dusty attic.

Atticus sits at his roll-top desk, his already bent back hunched over a precious piece of parchment. I gulp as I see the words on the parchment. Mine.

"Were you followed?" Atticus asks.

"No."

I stare at the floor as I walk closer, careful not to step on any of the weak spots or a loose board. I stand behind him and stare at the wall, unable to watch him tear apart my writing.

*Scratch.* Three minutes. *Scratch.* I glance at the piece of parchment, my eyes widening in surprise. Never, never have I seen him make so few edits.

He dips his quill in the inkwell.

"Cedric, instead of watching me could you be a dear and make sure no guards are coming to kill us?"

My stomach rolls.

"Sorry."

I walk over to the window and pull back the tattered curtain and stare out over the tightly packed brick houses. The sun glints off the solar-paneled roofs, causing me to squint. For a moment I think I see a glimpse of grey, but then it's gone.

The glass inkwell clinks behind me, causing me to jolt and turn. My heart beats harder than a guard's fist as I walk back to the desk.

Atticus faces me, leaning his chin on his hand.

"Well done, Cedric. I made a few grammatical changes, but I think *Elefthería* is ready.

I swallow.

"R...ready?"

"To be distributed...?" he raises his eyebrows.

"Right, right."

I stare at the inked words on the parchment, the tenth draft of the manuscript I started writing five years ago, when Atticus took me as his apprentice.

"What's wrong?"

Atticus's chair creaks as he stands.

I run a hand through my caramel hair, causing it to stick out in every direction.

"I saw a woman today. A guard found manuscripts on her. Her body is probably ashes by now."

"That's normal."

His voice catches for a brief moment, and I catch the flicker of pain in his blue eyes.

"Is it worth it?" I whisper motioning to my manuscript.

"Is it worth writing and selling words that can kill?"

"Would you rather write Dimokratía's propaganda?"

"No, but..."



"So, you would rather not tell the Truth? Would you rather not share the Greater Story, the One who gives life instead of this nation of death?"

I stare at the broken floorboards. A lump clogs my throat, and tears burn my eyes.

"The Truth is worth it."

He steps closer until his face is inches from mine.

"I taught you how to write for a reason. I wanted you, the next generation, to take a stand against Dimokratía and give these people hope."

"Atticus..." my voice cracks, "We're going to die."

His blue eyes mist over.

"But the Truth lives"

Rain soaks my clothes as I race down the cobblestone street, other people doing the same as they run for the cover of warm buildings. Droplets of water run down my face and cling to my eyelashes. I duck under an archway two blocks from Atticus's apartment. Thunder rumbles overhead and the heavens let loose their furious torrent.

It's been two weeks since I've last seen Atticus, besides a brief meeting where he handed me a few copies of *Elefthería*. It's the story of Weslyn, a young man who commits a heinous crime but blames it on another, and later finds forgiveness in the Creator and confesses his crime.

*Bang!* I jolt and freeze as three gunshots rent the air. A man screams, rattling me to the core. Before I know what I'm doing I'm running, sprinting toward the source of the noise because it's too close, too close to Atticus's apartment.

I slip on the slick cobblestone and fall hard to my knees. The rough stone scratches my hands, making them sting like I've been pierced with a thousand needles. I struggle to my feet and race the last few feet to Demeter Avenue.

I skid to a halt. Lightning cracks a few yards away, but I barely hear it. Because all of me is numb as my gaze latches onto the steel grey soldiers dragging Atticus's bleeding and broken body. Atticus's head bumps, bumps, bumps against the uneven cobblestones.

I start walking in the opposite direction as the guards draw nearer, trying to hide my tear-streaked face. All this because he taught me to write? All this because he wanted to share the Truth and not just some government propaganda?

"Where are the books?" a guard with a high-pitched voice snaps.

"They're bringing them, sir," a different man growls out, "and we found an order receipt. We'll be able to arrest the other two men involved."

My. Heart. Stops. Beating. I glance over at the apartment, where two soldiers descend down the metal stairway, piles of books in hand. I walk around the perimeter of a small grocery store. Then as soon as the guards are out of sight, I sprint toward my apartment.

By the time I reach my apartment I'm soaked to the bone, but I don't care. I barely stop myself from slamming into my apartment door.

A piece of paper is nailed to the wood. My gaze sims over the familiar words of Order 96, which strictly forbids teaching or learning writing unless you are government personnel, and reading books not distributed by the government. I rip it off and crumple it in my fist.

Just then the apartment door to my left opens, and a balding man steps out. The man and I stare at each other.

Then he smiles at me, showing several missing teeth, and rips off the notice on his own door. He steps closer and waves the paper in his hand.

"A man wants to know the truth, not this fluffed-up rubbish Dimokratía produces," he whispers.

My heart stutters.

"Wait here a moment."

I reenter my own apartment and kneel on the floor next to my straw bed and pull up the loose floorboard. Five copies of *Elefthería* lay in the hole, bound with cloth and twine. I close my eyes, the numbness in my heart consuming every inch of me. *Is it worth it? Is it really worth it?*

Somewhere in the apartment a door slams. My breath catches in my throat. I grab the copies of *Elefthería* and step back out into the hall. I glance around. There's no one except the man and me.

His eyes widen as I hold out the stack to him.

"You...?"

"Yes."

I place it in his hands, my own shaking. My throat buns with suppressed tears.

"They know what I've done. I need you to distribute this for me. The people need the Truth."

He flips through a few pages. Tight lines are drawn in his face.

"We could get killed."

"That's why you need to hide these now."

He opens the door to his apartment. I swallow, choking out my next words.

"But even if we die, the Truth lives."

## The Amazing Adventure of Willow and Scorch

By Audryona Johnston, Grade 9

Mankato West High School, Mankato

At night, in the deepest part of the forest there were two friends, one a wolf, the other a dragon. "It's good to see you again Scorch," greeted Willow.

"It's good to see you too," Scorch replied.

Suddenly, something falls from the sky and lands with a thud. "What is that?" yelled Willow.

"I don't know!" growled Scorch, "It looks like a box."

"Should we open it?" asked Willow.

Suddenly the box opens and sucks the two of them into it.

"Aaaaaaaah!"

THUD! Willow and Scorch crash to the ground.

"Greetings chosen ones Willow and Scorch, my name is Huffy," smiled Huffy welcomingly.

"How do you know our names and what do you mean by chosen ones?" asked Willow.

"And what are you?" added Scorch.

"I am a Hufflepuff, a magical creature. We are balls of fur with big feet. You two are the chosen ones so of course I know your names and I'm the one who sent the magic box to get you" explained Huffy.

"Where are we and why are we here, wherever here is?" exclaimed Willow. "We are in the magical land of Hufflandia," reported Huffy.

"Well, how do we get back?" demanded Scorch.

"First, you two need to defeat the evil that has possessed King Huff-n-Puff, which causes him to lie without knowing it. Then come back here and the magical box will come and take you home."

The king's castle is on top of that mountain," explained Huffy, as he turned and looked far off towards the east.

The sun was setting, so the two of them stayed the night at Huffy's. By early dawn they were off, heading toward the mountain. After some time, they reached a wide valley with a large river rushing through it.

Scorch suggested, "Get up on my back and I will fly us across the river."

Willow leapt onto Scorch's back and stuck her paws between the large brown scales on his neck and hung on tight.

With thundering wings and lightning speed, they were soon flying high above what looked like a blue ribbon stretched across the beautiful turquoise valley below. Finally, they reached the bottom of the mountain.

They continued up the mountain by foot to save King Huff-n-Puff from the evil spirit. The sun was beginning to sink behind the mountain. There was a beautiful pink and purple sunset as they climbed the rocky path towards the castle. It was becoming night when they reached the top of the mountain.

They found a cave and entered it carefully, but it was empty except for a small tunnel entrance. They found a stick and Scorch lit it up, for a torch, with his fire breath.

"Let's sneak in here, so we can surprise the evil spirit before it knows what happened," whispered Willow.

They crept upwards until they came to a small room where they found a box that the evil spirits seem to have come out of. They took it with them as they softly tip-toed the last fifty feet of the tunnel to where a streak of light showed them the way.

Willow blew out the torch and peeked into a grand hall from behind a big statue. They could hear many people talking with the King and saw a thick shadow hanging around his head.

Before anyone saw them, Scorch jumped out of hiding and blew a large breath of fire with a lot of smoke, distracting everyone's attention.

Meanwhile, Willow quickly slipped behind King Huff-n-Puff's throne with the box, without being noticed, she caught the evil spirit by surprise. Then she sucked the shadow away.

"Yeaaaaah for Willow and Scorch!" yelled everyone. Then they all rejoiced, and King Huff-n-Puff thanked them for saving him from the evil that had gotten hold of his mind. After a great celebration in their honor, Willow and Scorch returned the next day back to the place they had met Huffy.

Huffy appeared and Willow and Scorch both told him, in their own way, that if they ever needed help again someday to send the box for them. They promised they would come back to help the Hufflepuffs.

They suddenly found themselves in the box again and before they could blink they were back in the deep forest where their adventure had begun, to their surprise, no time had gone by at all.

"That was amazing," they both yelled with excitement. They looked around and were glad that they were together for their adventure, but even happier to be back at home in the forest.

## **Non-Fiction**

### **Teddy Roosevelt**

By Newman MacPherson, Grade K  
*Home School, Mankato*

Teddy Roosevelt was a man who loved nature. Theodore was his real name, but everybody called him Teddy. He worked hard to bring a nation to greatness. When he was young he was sick, so he imagined going outdoors instead of actually going outside. He wanted to be like the American heroes that he read about. He loved to learn about animals and insects. He liked to read books about nature. He took long walks outside with his parents and traveled to see the world.

Time went by. Teddy became a hunter and loved birds. Before he was the president, he had many jobs in the government. When he was president, he had six kids and played with them a lot. He set up national parks and monuments. He had the idea to make national park ranges. He tried to keep wild animals safe. He got sick when he was traveling and didn't get better. We remember how he loved nature when we look at his face on Mount Rushmore. He left America even better than it was before.

# Summer/Winter Fishing

By Ryan Zika, Grade 1

*Jefferson Elementary School, Mankato*

## Some People Fish

Fishing is a sport. It can be exciting, and it can be very boring. Fishing is fun for some people and it's not for some people.

## How to Fish

To fish you need a fishing pole, tackle and bait, sinkers and a tackle box, then you can fish.

## Catch and Release

You can keep some fish, but you have to release some too. Otherwise, there would be no fish left to catch.

## Eating Fish

You can eat some fish that you catch. You can smoke some of them or you can put them on the stove.

## Winter Fishing

For winter fishing you need an auger, a scooper, and tackle just like in the summer. You can use a fish house, or you can sit in a chair on the ice.

## About Fish Houses

Fish houses can be small or they can be big. You can have a TV in your fish house. Some fish houses don't have heaters or holes to fish in.

## Kinds of Fish

There are bass, walleye, crappie, perch, sunnies and a lot of other fish in lakes, rivers and oceans.

## Lakes I Have Fished In

Lakes I have fished in are Madison Lake, Ballantyne Lake and Eagle Lake and lots of other lakes too.

## My Rainy Lake Fishing Adventures

One of my favorite places to fish is Rainy Lake. I had a lot of fun fishing there. I caught a lot of walleyes and I caught a few bass too.

## A Rainy Lake Catch and Release Story

It was a sunny day and I was fishing with my Grandpa on Rainy Lake. Suddenly, my bobber went down! I reeled and reeled. My Grandpa got the net and scooped the fish in the net. It was a big walleye. I was so happy that I caught a big walleye. It was 23 inches so I had to let it go because you have to let some fish go so that they can make new babies and so there will always be fish to catch.

## Why You Should Keep the World Clean

By Price MacPherson, Grade 2  
*Home School, Mankato*

The Great Smoky Mountains, the Mississippi River and the Old Faithful Geyser are all beautiful. We should keep places like these clean so that they always look amazing. There are three reasons why we should do this: First, it makes the world look nicer. Next, God created the world. Finally, we should keep the world clean so we stay safe while running and playing.

First of all, imagine you are at a beautiful landscape like the Grand Canyon or Niagara Falls. Now, look again. This time, imagine trash is covering the whole canyon or waterfall! It's pretty hard to imagine that because it's never actually happened. But if it did, it would look ugly, so we should keep the world clean.

Secondly, we should take care of the world because God created it. God made it for everyone because He wants us to enjoy it. God is very creative. Everyone likes seeing landscapes and going to national parks!

Last of all, we should keep the world clean so that we don't trip when playing or running. I like playing tag and Ships-Across-the-Ocean, but I don't think I would if I kept tripping on bottles while playing. This is why I like to keep the Earth clean.

Because the world looks nicer, God created it, and for safety reasons, we should keep the world clean. I'm glad that we have a nice world to live in and that I can help keep it clean.

## Why You Shouldn't Litter

By Rose MacPherson, Grade 4  
*Home School, Mankato*

Sometimes I see trash by the sidewalks and it makes me feel sad that someone would want to litter. I think that it is important to not litter. This is because the community stays nice if you don't litter, you could recycle things instead of littering them and we should take care of the world by not littering.

First, not littering keeps the community clean. If you litter, then there is garbage all over. If the garbage is on the sidewalk, then people or animals could hurt themselves. If a sharp piece of litter is on the road, then a car might go over it and get a flat tire. That is why not littering keeps the community nice.

Also, you could recycle things instead of littering them. When you recycle things, then they can be made into new things. For example, I once saw a bench that had been made out of recycled milk cartons! Since recycled items are made into new things, recycling saves materials. You can also reuse things in your home. For example, we use empty salad containers for closet organizers. These are some reasons why it is better to recycle things instead of littering them.

Last, we should take care of the world by not littering. Then the Earth will stay nice for our children. Not littering shows respect to the government officials who have made laws against littering. We should also take care of the world because God made it and He wants us to care for it. That is why we should take care of the world by not littering.

I think it is important not to litter. This is because not littering keeps the community nice, you could recycle things instead of littering them and we should take care of the world. Next time you have some garbage, I hope that you can find a trash can for it and don't litter.

# Saving the Planet

By Aaliyah Bauer, Grade 6  
*Blue Earth Area Middle School*

Have you ever thought about what the planet would look like 20 years from now? Whether you have or not, it takes a bunch of people to do something about it. In 20 years, the world could run out of clean water and air, then what would you do? With all of this pollution there might not be an Earth for us to live on! That's why we have to take care of the planet. If we don't, there might not be any more animals in the sea or on land. Then where would we live? There are simple things that you could do to help our planet. You could do these things every day and that would help the planet.

When you help the planet, you inspire other people to help clean our planet. That's when we have two people helping instead of one. Did you know there is something called noise pollution and it hurts your ears and that is what damages your ears and it makes your ears get worse and worse? You know how you turn on your vacuum and then your children turn on the TV and turn up the volume and then your dog starts barking at your cat and then a glass vase breaks? That is too much for your ears to handle when you have all of that noise. It is just too much. To avoid this, you should vacuum when your kids are outside. And, when your dog is barking at something and you think it is getting loud, tell your dog to go outside and then you will see how much quieter it is than it was just a few seconds ago.

Think before you throw something in the ocean or anywhere. A lot of things get into the ocean and if it is something shiny, birds can think that it is a fish and feed it to their young and they can't digest it, so they die. Sometimes, they eat it and die because they are eating plastic. Fish eat Styrofoam, so if you eat fish or seafood, you could be eating trash. Every time you throw something, it gives the chance that something could die. Think about that the next time you throw something away because you could use it again.

The air you breathe was fresh at one time. It got dirty because of all the pollution in the air and if we try to make less pollution, the air would get better than it is. Less pollution means clean air to me. Less trash means more clean water, which means less fish will be infected.

If all of us work together, we will have a clean world in no time. Maybe animals will stop going extinct if we clean the planet. Then there will be cleaner air so maybe people might live longer. To me, the possibilities are endless. There are simple things you can do to help out. Make sure to put trash in the trash can. Even if you don't see one nearby, wait until you see one and then less trash gets in the ocean. So, the next time you throw something on the ground, make sure you know what you are doing, and also think about what happens when you throw your trash on the ground. Or, when you make a bunch of noise, know that is what damages your hearing.

# An Easy Way to Preserve Nature

By Grace MacPherson, Grade 6  
*Home School, Mankato*

There are many ways a person can preserve nature, including recycling, planting gardens and donating money to help endangered animals. I think a very important (and easy!) way to preserve nature is by picking up trash. I have picked up trash many times as an American Heritage Girl (Christian Girl Scouts), as a Junior Ranger and as a Christian.

First, I have picked up trash with American Heritage Girls. The first time I remember doing this was after a Fourth of July with my sister wearing our red, white, and blue uniforms. After the parade, we picked up a lot of candy wrappers. I have also picked up trash as a formal group activity with AHG. My AHG friends and I went hiking with our leaders. We first got a quick tour of Minneopa State Park, and then we got to work. We had two very large garbage bags, and we found A LOT of garbage! It's hard to believe how much people throw into the

state park! Our group even found two unopened beer cans! Why would someone throw those into the forest? We left the park in a much better condition than when we had come. This is how I have helped pick up trash through American Heritage Girls.

I also help pick up trash as a Junior Ranger. This summer, I had the opportunity to travel, so I got multiple Junior Ranger badges. To be able to earn one of them, I had to promise to pick up trash I see. When I walk in my neighborhood, my hands sometimes become full of all the plastic cups, straws, and wrappers I find. Why do people litter? It doesn't make sense to throw your trash everywhere, plus it's illegal! This is why I help pick up trash as a Junior Ranger.

Finally, I help pick up trash as a Christian. In Genesis 1:28, God blesses Adam and Eve and says to them, "Be fruitful and multiply; fill the earth and subdue it; have dominion over the fish of the sea and the birds of the air and over every living thing that moves on the earth." This is known as the Dominion Mandate, because here, God gives people authority over the rest of creation. But although people have authority over nature, God still has authority over us. We need to be responsible and wisely use what we have been given so that it can still be enjoyed by our children and grandchildren. We cannot control others, but we can control ourselves. We can fix the mistakes others make, such as littering, by picking up their trash. We must be like a good king who helps his subjects, not like a bad king who hurts them. This is what God wants us to do. I think that this is how being a Christian helps me see the importance of picking up garbage.

I think it is definitely a good idea to pick up trash. I am glad I am able to help both the community and the environment by doing so. I know that being an American Heritage Girl, a Junior Ranger and a Christian has helped me see how important it is to do so.

## Different Types of Pollution

By Eric Sheppard, Grade 6

*Blue Earth Area Middle School, Blue Earth*

Pollution is a big problem for the planet because of many dangerous things. These dangerous pollutants can start some major problems not only to us, but creatures around us. Let me fill you in on how these things start, and what they do to the ecosystem.

One of these dangerous things is air pollution. There are many types of air pollution. Two of them are noise air pollution and chemical air pollution. Noise air pollution is caused by noise created by humans with the use of tools, cars and yelling. Chemical air pollution is caused by chemicals rising into the air by factories, cars and gasoline.

Another dangerous type of pollution is water pollution. Here are the different types of water pollution: oil water pollution, plastic water pollution, and Styrofoam water pollution. Oil water pollution is caused when a ship carrying oil crashes and releases the oil into the water. It can be also caused by factories putting oil in the water. BP had this happen. Plastic water pollution is caused by people dropping plastic into the water or plastic falling into the water. Styrofoam water pollution is caused when factories and businesses drop Styrofoam into the water or it falls into the water when people use Styrofoam to eat at the beach.

Another type of pollution is animal pollution. The different types of animal pollution are: fish pollution, mammal pollution, avian pollution and plastic pollution. Fish pollution is when fish get polluted. We eat fish and the pollution passes to us. Mammal pollution is pollution that spreads to us and other mammals, such as monkeys, rabbits and any other mammal. Avian pollution is when pollution infects birds and other avian creatures, such as seagulls, albatrosses, and pelicans. Their chicks can also get this by the parents eating trash and feeding it to their chicks. Plastic pollution is caused when plastic is contaminating the wild. When pollution happens, it is dangerous to everything on Earth.

Air pollution happens when things are sent into the air and pollutes it. This has happened for countless years and is one of the most common ways to pollute the Earth. Water pollution happens when things get caught

in the ocean currents and pollute the water in the ocean. This type of pollution has happened for years and years and is the second most common way to pollute the earth. Animal pollution happens when pollution reaches animals and infects them. This has happened ever since gas, technology, and other things that start pollution, came in contact with the animals on the Earth. It is another common way to pollute the earth. These are the ways I have found that people pollute the Earth.

If you want to know how to prevent pollution, follow these tips: Try not to cut down trees, try to make less factories, try not to use so much plastic and Styrofoam, try not to dump all your garbage into the ocean, try not to throw your garbage everywhere, use less paper products, recycle more and clean up your mess!

I hope you, your friends and your family take these tips into consideration to help the earth and humanity survive. I hope you liked this topic on stopping pollution and helping humanity survive by helping the Earth survive.

## Pollution and How It Affects Us

By Noah Spear, Grade 6

*Blue Earth Area Middle School, Blue Earth*

I was on a field trip to the Great Barrier Reef with my friends and classmates. We noticed something washed up on shore, it was a seal with a pop wrapper stuck around its neck. We helped the seal get the wrapper off. It felt like the seal was out of the water for a day or two. Now we have a problem; the ocean is being destroyed. Boats come and go and spill oil. Other bad things like chemical spills happen too. Plastic bottles get thrown to the ground or dropped into the water. We might go extinct because of this. All the littering we do and the chemicals spilled into the water.

The fish that eat this plastic get eaten by bigger animals or us. The more animals that die, the more it will affect us. Sharks, birds and other animals that eat fish will start to die off because of the plastic. Lots of people could die by eating these fish too. The way we will go extinct will be by ourselves. This is just the sea, the air, our cities, all of the Earth could become a huge trash can. But we can stop that. We can clean parks and ride bikes. Cars release pollution into the air and birds have to fly in the pollution we make. The more we do, the more animals we can save. The more we do the more we can help ourselves.

Continents like Asia have so much air pollution that they have a much shorter lifespan. Some animals live in our garbage. The more we help the longer we survive. Then there are the trees. We cut them down, but we don't replant them. The more that we cut down the trees the less oxygen is produced.

How can we save ourselves from our own extinction? This is up to you to decide. The choice is yours. Will you choose to help? I hope you do, for the fate of the world is in your hands. You can do it. We all can. The pollution will still be here, but we can lower the amount of it and we can save ourselves. Until then we all are in trouble but let's see if we can make a difference.

Do little things: plant a tree, pick up litter, tell people to throw their things away properly. Just little things can help and eventually do the world a big favor. We can save the world. Will you?



# To Live in the Wild: A guide to Living Self-Sustainably in Minnesota, Ontario, Manitoba, Wisconsin, South Dakota, North Dakota and Michigan

By Sean Zika, Grade 6

*Dakota Meadows Middle School, North Mankato*

Have you ever thought to yourself that maybe it would just be easier to live in the wild? To get away from the rat race and live self-sustainably? This is a guide to living in the wild, self-sustainably, and to show how to use important outdoor skills such as hunting, trapping, fishing, growing plants, and harvesting wild plants.

Fishing is a very common outdoor activity and is critical to survival during the summer. Trout, salmon, walleye, panfish, bass and pike are just a few common species present in this area. There are many ways to fish, but the most effective is usually using live bait. Good live baits include nightcrawlers, frogs, leeches, grubs, minnows, crayfish, and hellgrammites. Nightcrawlers can be caught after dark on a rainy day in the summer. It is best to use a red light which the worms cannot see. You slowly walk in muddy areas to find these large worms. Frogs can be caught in many ways, but the most effective is to take a wooden plank or a mat and place it in sand or mud near a lake or pond. Wait a day or so and lift the plank off the ground. There should be plenty of frogs underneath. Crayfish and hellgrammites can be found in streams under rocks or in crevices. Minnows and leeches, if caught in a lake or stream, can only be used to fish within that same lake or stream. It is illegal to transfer bait to a new body of water because of invasive species laws. These can also be purchased at a bait store. Grubs can be found in moist, dark areas of the woods or in old rotten logs.

## Fishing Tips:

1. To attract fish that have been staring at your bait for hours, place finely crushed eggshells in the water where you are fishing to encourage the fish to bite.
2. Make artificial bait for panfish by boiling elbow macaroni in water for 10 minutes, then place the macaroni in cold water. Next, stuff orange cotton or wool inside the macaroni. Finally, put a drop of anise oil on the macaroni. Keep it in a moist cloth until ready to use.
3. To attract bass, place a piece of foil dangling over the water. Return in a couple of hours for all the bass you could want.
4. To find worms, find a lily pad with a hole in it. Break open the stem and you may find a worm good for all fishing purposes.

Hunting and trapping are some of the most important outdoor skills. They are extremely important to survival during the fall and winter seasons. Unless you have stored fruits and vegetables, meat is your only source of food. All animal hunting has a season, limit and require a certain license.

When in a survival situation or when living in the wilderness, you may not have time to sit in the woods every day to hunt, so it may be easier to trap. You can make your own homemade traps, but the most effective way to trap is to use steel footholds or conibears. Footholds are used to catch the leg of an animal. When using these traps, you may still have to kill the animal. The conibear however, kills the animal on the spot. Good trap brands to use are Victor and Duke. If you plan to trap for money instead of for food, great furbearers are muskrat, beaver, fox, marten, fisher, bobcat and wolverine. Traps should be checked daily, unless in water in which they should be checked every three days. This is because animals not in water may not be killed by the trap, therefore they may be suffering, so checking traps each day is necessary. However, if a trap is in the water, the animal will drown, and it will not suffer.

All animal hunting does have a season, limit and requires some sort of license unless you are trapping or hunting unwanted species like coyotes or skunks.

Another great source of white meat is frogs. The two back legs on a frog are usually all you would eat. They are incredibly easy to clean, usually taking only 30 seconds. Refer to the fishing section above for tips on catching frogs in bulk.

Shelter is an important part to surviving in the wilderness. You can build quick, simple shelters like lean-to forts, and teepees (covered in leaves, not an animal hide). Or, you could build something more elaborate like a cabin or wigwam. Big or small, it needs a spot comfortable enough for sleeping. Simple beds can be made of moss and leaves. It must also include some sort of roof to protect you from weather. Either inside or right next to your shelter, you must have a spot for a fire. Fires are needed for warmth and to cook food.

When wild game is scarce, wild fruits and vegetables are key to survival. Edible plants that are commonly found in the wild include: asparagus, clover, burdock, amaranth, cattail, chicory, chickweed, curled dock, dandelion, fireweed, green seaweed, and kelp.

If you are living in the wild, then you most likely have a garden. After all, fruits and vegetables are needed for a healthy diet. Unless you are farming, an acre garden is about the maximum size. It is a good idea to store fruits and vegetables for the winter to maintain a healthy diet. There are many ways to store or preserve food, one being pickling. It is common to pickle beans and cucumbers. Canning is another common way to store fruits and vegetables. Common foods to grow would be corn, beans, potatoes, cucumbers, peas, tomatoes, zucchini, peppers, chives, and asparagus, just to name a few.

Although you may not use these skills every day, you may find yourself one day needing them. Self-sustainability is an important skill that is needed if you plan to live in the wild. These skills may also help if you are an avid outdoorsman. This is just a quick guide, there is much more information on this topic that I did not include. For more information, go to your local library. I hope you found this guide useful and enjoyable.

#### Sources

*Professional Guides Manual* by George Herter

Brett & Kate McKay, <https://www.artofmanliness.com/2010/10/06/surviving-in-the-wild-19-common-edible-plants/>

### *Bonus: Homemade Cornmeal and Cornbread*

To make cornmeal:

1. Leave the corn up until the first heavy frost. Then gather all the corn.
2. Pull back the husk and let it sit for a few weeks.
3. Pull off all kernels.
4. Grind the corn (you can buy hand grinders for anywhere between \$30–\$500).

#### Cornbread Ingredients:

½ stick butter  
1 ¼ cup homemade cornmeal  
2 tsp. baking powder  
½ tsp. salt  
2 eggs  
1 ½ cup milk  
1 Tbs. sugar

#### Instructions:

1. In a bowl, mix the cornmeal, sugar, baking powder and salt
2. Mix the rest of the ingredients in a separate bowl
3. Combine, stir and place in a pan
4. Cook at 375° F until the top is golden brown

# The Boundary Waters Through the Eyes of a Newcomer

By Aaron Baxa, Grade 8

Minnesota New Country School, Henderson

The Boundary Waters Canoe Area Wilderness is a large wilderness area in northern Minnesota. The largest one east of the Mississippi, in fact. It is full of outstanding rock outcrops and white pines and dotted with comparatively few man-made structures. I have visited it two times now, the first on a school trip and the second independently. It was horrible and exhausting, in an awesome way, though. I would say it was the hardest thing that I've ever done, but also by far the most rewarding. Compare it to running a marathon where most people feel horrible midway through, but at the end, you feel great and happy.

Each year, my school takes a trip to the Boundary Waters. I signed up for it. It was scheduled for September, at the tail end of the paddling season. We went out on area lakes and planned possible routes. We practiced setting up tents, too. I learned how to paddle a canoe. We took inventory of supplies. I also learned how to carry, or portage, a canoe. You just put it up onto your shoulders, usually with the help of a friend. Then it just rests there because it is perfectly balanced. Packing took a long time, because you could only bring polypropylene or wool clothes. No cotton clothes, because it doesn't keep you warm when it gets wet. And if you get wet you could get hypothermia and that would be bad. It was a lot harder than I thought. (The trip and the packing, with the packing coming in first.)

The bus ride up was as interesting as one could imagine. Boring and quiet. I read for the entire time or looked out the window. There were a lot of trees. From here in southern Minnesota, it was about six hours to Ely. I thought about what the Boundary Waters would be like. I thought it would be warm and sunny. I thought that it would be easy to travel and that it would be all R&R. I would maybe catch some fish or sit by the fire. Would I be right? We will see. When we finally arrived at the lodge where we were going to stay, it was about three in the afternoon. It was an old place with wood paneling and lots of detailed maps, my favorite kind. All were framed and hanging on the walls and depicting the local canoeing area. The whole lodge was right by the point where we would enter the wilderness. We had dinner, talked a little and went to sleep. The rain was annoying and loud throughout the night. Like a demonic cacophony, it drove many of the campers halfway to insanity. By the time it finally ended, they were sweating and unconscious in their bunks. There was a tin roof, so it was even louder.

When we woke up the next morning it was foggy and peaceful. Carrying the packs to the put-in point woke me up from the dream-like environment outside. It masked the rugged but beautiful land that was northern Minnesota. The packs were big and green, made to fit well in a canoe, not to be carried. About the size of a suitcase, they were full of all our food and gear, and the straps are just thin strips of nylon. The horrid straps would pull and pinch at your flesh until they succeeded in making painful blisters that lingered for days, leaving only scars and hatred of canoe packs in their wake.

Loading a canoe is a curious thing to someone who is not familiar with it. The pack is usually placed in the middle of the canoe, then you have to make sure it is balanced and clip the packs in to make sure they do not fall out of the canoe, in the event of a capsizing. My canoe partner and I put the canoe in and floated down the Moose River. It was really quiet, so you could hear every tiny sound, like a pebble dropping into the water, or a twig snapping. It was much different than I thought it would be. It was cloudier and quieter. The huge trees that loomed above us were commanding but gave a sense of peace. The trees were either short and scruffy deciduous ones or huge pines. I liked the pines better, but they blocked out what limited light there was. The portages were short and fast. A portage is just a trail through the woods that bypasses a dangerous stretch of river or the area between lakes. If it is clear, there are no roots and little mud. If it is not, it is horrible and muddy with lots of roots and all the nasty things you could think of. My favorite part of the Boundary Waters is sitting on rocks in between paddling and having a snack or jotting something down. Then we continued slogging through the woods for hours, thinking only of the brief respite from the horror that was portaging as sitting in an uncomfortable canoe seat, before repeating it all again. We passed by a waterfall, a small one. Its sound could be heard for a long way, it sounded huge in the immense quiet. But aside from all that, paddling the canoe was strenuous and repetitive.

Being outside is comforting to me. I can be away from other people, because a lot of people are really annoying to me. Unless I'm traveling with other people, then I have to be with them, but they are tolerable.

There were few animals, and I mean few, like no squirrels, rabbits, deer, or moose. It was not exactly what we expected. We did see a bird though. Soon the forest opened out into a vast grassy plain with lots of dead trees. This was prime moose spotting country, though not this time of year, typical of rivers in the BWCA. We had to ram over a few half-hearted beaver dams to get to our destination, but otherwise it was uninterrupted travel. They were probably just small trees and shrubs, because the river was very high when we traveled on it.

Finally, at about noon, we got to our destination of Nina Moose Lake. It was choppy compared to the sluggish river. Paddling on a lake is like driving on a gravel road, but three times harder and more strenuous too. We stroked and stroked until our muscles snapped from their unseen bindings, and our hands bled with blisters. The wind was a cruel god laughing at our futile effort to cross this great sea. If only we could be like Moses and part it. Our progress was slow, we felt as if we moved as fast as bamboo grows. The frustration, overwhelming, melted our stamina until we were hanging on by a thread. But we would endure!

I was numb and stiff when we got to the desired campsite. It was an interesting place. It had a good sitting boulder in front. Luckily for us, the latrine was in good condition and free of filth. A brief snack of delicious granola rejuvenated us. The water felt warmer than a bathtub when I went swimming, but when I got out it was very cold! I had been clutching a canoe paddle, and my fingers kept bending back into the shape of it when I let them go limp, as if some forest spirit was toying with my body. Luckily, I was so foul from my excessive consumption of garlic that they all ran away back to their cozy homes. I helped set up a tent and gathered firewood near the campsite. It was mostly standing deadwood. The whole time it had been raining lightly, but the dense canopy protected the wood beneath from the rain. Sitting by the fire was cozy. We had pork chops for dinner, right out of the refrigerated pack. They were delicious after a long and hard day of travel. I slept like a rock that night, looking forward to the next day.

When you get out of the Boundary Waters, you think, man, that was tough, but you want to go again after you rest up. How did it make me feel? Tired. Definitely tired. It was a whole lot different than what I imagined and from what I had seen in pictures. It was cold and hard and almost all work. But it was extraordinary, being outside for four days. You realize how much you don't require the comforts of the modern world, like TVs, microwaves, cell phones and blenders. And you feel clean, even though you haven't showered in a week. I also recognized what a pristine and perfect area it is. I love being outside by water because it is calming and inspiring. You can feel the breeze on your face and it just feels nicer being outside. I like being alone, too. No one can bother me when I'm in the woods like that, and then I can think longer without distractions. The BWCA seems untouched since ancient times, since the natives lived on the land there.

Recently, several corporations have proposed large copper-nickel mines in the immediate area around the Boundary Waters. The only way to extract the metals would be through sulfide mining, a process in which the ores are tediously extracted from sulfur-rich rock. But when the tailings of this process are exposed to air and water, they will produce sulfuric acid, the same stuff in car batteries. We must conserve and protect our forests from this threat. Sulfide pollution has a bad track record at nearly all of the sites where it is used. One of the worst is in the Rio Tinto in Spain, which has a pH level of 2, and can dissolve iron. It is completely devoid of all aquatic life, and it is directly downstream of a large sulfide mine, so there are some possible effects of sulfide mining.

I am worried that the animals in the Boundary Waters could be hurt by this pollution and that the whole area could never be the same as it is now. Several groups have filed lawsuits against the Polymet Mining Group, the force behind the mining. Currently, Polymet has yet to gain permission from the state to mine on the proposed sites. There have been many meetings and town halls about the subject and it appears the residents of the area are in favor of it. My opinion on the topic? Mining is a boom and bust industry, with unpredictable outcomes. Take what happened when the rich iron ran out in the Mesabi Range: a general decrease in population, less jobs and higher unemployment. So, in conclusion, the land around the Boundary Waters is still in limbo. It is unclear whether they will obtain a permit to mine in the area but for the time being, I can still visit the Boundary Waters and appreciate the nature as it is, and I hope it remains that way forever.

# Mountaintop Removal Mining: The Harmful Effects on Appalachian Communities, the Environment, and Peoples Health

By Mattilyn Brown, Grade 10

Minnesota New Country School, Henderson

Throughout human history, our need for fuel has created numerous ways in which to attain it. The most common source of energy that we have found are fossil fuels, ([www.instituteforenergyresearch.org](http://www.instituteforenergyresearch.org)) which include crude oil, natural gas, and coal. One of the ways that we've found to harvest coal is mountaintop removal. The practice is very controversial, yet it's used because it is said to be safer and more efficient than conventional methods (Almasy). The process of mountaintop removal mining, while providing coal, is ultimately harmful to Appalachian communities, the environment, and their health.

Mountaintop removal mining is a form of coal mining common in the Appalachian Mountain region. It differs from traditional strip mining in that it removes the tops of mountains in order to expose the seams of coal that are underneath. There are six main steps in the removal process (<http://ilovemountains.org>). Before the actual mining can begin, the area has to be cleared of topsoil, trees, and other things that the coal industry refers to as, "overburden" (<http://grist.org/>). They then blow up the mountain, using millions of pounds of explosives (<http://ilovemountains.org>) and dig up the coal.

The overburden is dumped into valleys that are nearby and the coal is taken to get processed. The land is then supposed to go through the reclamation process, which is where they return the land to what it was before they started mining (<http://www.miningfacts.org>). Often, the mining industry gets away with not restoring the area by using a federal statutory provision that allows them to skirt their responsibilities if they have plans to develop the area for economic use. In reality, a study done by the Natural Resource Defense Council and Appalachian Voices found that 6–11 percent of the 410 sites they surveyed were actually used for economic activity or the production of goods and services ([www.nrdc.org](http://www.nrdc.org)).

One of the reasons why people object to it is because of its effects on the environment. One of the ecological effects is on trees in the area. A study done by the Environmental Protection Agency found that around 1.4 million acres had been demolished (Purdy). That's almost the size of Delaware, which is 1.5 million acres (<http://beef2live.com>). It was also found that the soil that was left after the topsoil was taken out was unable to sustain a new forest (<http://appvoices.org>).

Mountaintop Removal Mining also affects streams. It's argued that the most amount of damage caused by this method of mining is "valley fill" (McQuaid, *Mountaintop Mining Legacy: Destroying Appalachia's Streams*), which is another name for the waste that is dumped into the valleys after mining (<http://www.yourdictionary.com>). Its main effect is on the streams in the area (McQuaid, *Mountaintop Mining Legacy: Destroying Appalachia's Streams*). Head-water streams are buried by the waste, which decreases the water quality, messes up aquatic ecosystems and creates more runoff, which in turn increases the amount of flooding (Palmer et al. 148). Around 2,000 miles of streams have been buried in areas with this type of mining (Jones). That's almost the length of the Mississippi River, which is 2,350 miles (<https://www.nps.gov>).

There are also many effects on the wildlife that live there. The destruction of habitat creates ripple effects throughout the ecosystem. Selenium, which is found at mining sites, can harm fish when the element is found in high amounts (Joyce) and deformities in wildlife (McQuaid, *Mining the Mountains*). Mayfly populations have also decreased in areas where there has been mountaintop removal mining versus areas that have been unaffected (Voss and Bernhardt 1754). Mayflies are important to the ecosystem because not only are they a source of food for predators but their grazing helps prevent buildup of algae (<http://science.jrank.org>).

Mountaintop removal mining also affects Appalachian communities. Profits from the mining go to coal companies, leaving the communities poor ([www.kftc.org](http://www.kftc.org)). It was also found that areas with mountaintop removal mining also have higher rates of child poverty (Hendryx) and high unemployment rates (Randolph).

In a study done on coal's impact of the Kentucky state budget, it was found that the government actually spent more on coal than it got in return (Konty, Bailey 2). A study done on the West Virginia state budget found

the same thing (McIlmoil, et al. x). It's also been found that with the increase in mountaintop removal mining, jobs in the coal mining industry have decreased (<http://vault.sierraclub.org/>). This is because mountaintop removal mining is less labor intensive and has more mechanization than traditional types of mining (Plumer).

Coal sources also don't last forever. A study done by the U.S Geologic Survey found that there are only 10–20 years of high-quality coal beds left in Appalachia (Perks).

Not only is mountaintop removal damaging to the environment and Appalachian communities, it is also harmful to people's physical and mental health. The public health costs of mountaintop removal mining are around \$74.6 billion a year (Rudolf). In a study done by Keith J. Zullig and Michael Hendryx, it was found that people in areas with mountaintop removal mining had a lower health-related quality of life (Zullig, Hendryx). In areas with mountaintop removal, there are higher rates of cancer. These areas have a cancer rate of 14.4 percent compared to the rest of Appalachia, which has 9.4 percent ([www.kftc.org](http://www.kftc.org)). There are many chemicals in coal that are known to be carcinogens (Hendryx, et al.).

There are also impacts on lung and cardiovascular health. People in areas with mountaintop removal mining had higher rates of death from chronic cardiovascular disease (Esch, Hendryx). It's estimated that mountaintop removal mining contributes to 1,072 deaths a year from cardiovascular disease ([appvoices.org](http://appvoices.org)). It is hypothesized that the dust and pollution created by this type of mining leads to inflammation and increases many risks associated with cardiovascular disease, such as high blood pressure ([appvoices.org](http://appvoices.org)). There is also an increase in the prevalence of lung cancer and respiratory diseases in areas with mountaintop removal mining (Hendryx, et al.) There are also higher rates of asthma in these areas ([www.kftc.org](http://www.kftc.org)).

In a study done by Melissa Ahern and others, it was found that there are higher rates of birth defects in areas with mountaintop removal mining. The most common kind of birth defect in these areas are heart defects (Schiffman). There were 235 birth defects per 10,000 births in areas with this type of mining compared to the 144 per 10,000 in non-mining areas (Ahern, et al.).

There are also impacts on people's mental health. People in mountaintop removal communities are more likely to exhibit symptoms of depression than people in on-mountaintop removal areas. In mountaintop removal areas, an average of 17 out of 100 people have moderate to severe depression, compared to non-mining areas which has an average of 10 out of 100 (Aldern). It's hypothesized that there is a link between depression and the environment that mountaintop-removal communities live in. Because of their destroyed environment, disenfranchisement, and almost no hope for advancing economically, they have higher depression rates (Hendryx, Innes-Wimsatt 185).

There is evidence that mountaintop removal mining is harmful to the environment, communities, and people's health. Information on this topic is not readily available to the public. There are many resources that cannot be accessed from important websites that should share this information freely, such as the EPA, a government agency. There are also resources on websites that require a payment for access. This makes me wonder why this kind of information isn't easily accessible to the general public.

Hopefully, we will someday be able to take Appalachian communities back from greedy, corporate interests that don't value the environment or the people that live there.





South Central Service Cooperative  
2075 Lookout Drive  
North Mankato, MN 56003  
[www.mnscsc.org](http://www.mnscsc.org)