

**Middle School Writing:**  
***Dr. Hisham Ahmed First Prize Award***  
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We all share this planet together. We breathe the same air and drink the same water. As such, we are all responsible for the well being of this planet and everything that lives on it. Today, many corporations and people in high-powered positions do not prioritize this, opting instead to maximize their own bank accounts. They take away the planet's resources and displace countless creatures, humans and animals alike, as they seek to expand their own power and profit. They don't care that we do not own this land but borrow it from future generations. I believe, in a perfect utopia, the maximization of profit would also result in the protection of the environment.

In the summer of 2019, smog from factories damaged the ozone layer so severely that it dramatically increased global warming. Due to the new, hot, dry air, there were many fires that devastated California homes and ecosystems. They destroyed the lives of not only people who lost their homes, but also the lives of the many animals who made their homes in the forests and plains that burned. Global warming is even destroying our ice caps, melting beautiful glaciers that future generations will never be able to experience. In the name of progress, large companies bankrupt small businesses, throwing hundreds of people onto the streets. Last year, there were 8,011 homeless individuals in San Francisco. These successful business owners have robbed over eight thousand men and women of shelter and food during a time of their highest need: the CoVid-19 outbreak.

In fact, those same business owners may have inadvertently *caused* the CoVid-19 outbreak. By building more factories, they have clogged the air, tainted the water, and deforested large amounts of land. The animals from these areas have had their home taken from them by larger, more powerful beasts than they could ever rival. These wild animals are forced to interact with humans more until the worst-case scenario occurred, and a virus jumped from animals to humans. If we had not destroyed these animals' environments, and if we had not caged in crowded markets, perhaps we wouldn't have these novel diseases.

Some years past, I volunteered at multiple community gardens. The work was hard, but I was always congratulated with a sense of peace and serenity. As I watered tomatoes and planted potatoes, I was surrounded by ladybugs and butterflies. Their beauty and the closeness to so many life-giving plants made me feel a sense of oneness with nature. Knowing that I was volunteering in a local garden also made me feel part of the community, as we looked out for each other and made

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sure that each family has access to fresh vegetables and fruit, despite their finances. The work I put into helping the plants grow would be given to a person who was in need. I was joyful and thought that the world would always be this way: people giving to other people in need, helping those who had fallen down.

Now I have seen how corporations exploit land, just as they exploit people. They take and take until there is nothing left, using the money to line their own pockets. It creates an inequality and an imbalance between not only the rich and the poor but between humankind and nature. Humankind is trying to fight nature and subdue it, but that isn't the course we must take. It is a force greater than we can ever imagine, and we need to learn to live together equally. Even now, animals have begun to return. Deer roam the streets of Japan. Goats have overtaken a city in Wales. Bears and coyotes wander freely in California. This seems temporary, as they will be driven back out when the disease subsides, but many countries have decided to legalize the hunt, trade, and consumption of animals. These laws are especially prevalent in China and Vietnam, two countries with animal products in very high demand. This disease may be the push we need to begin working *with* nature, instead of against it.

The new laws in China and Vietnam show that if we work together, we can accomplish something greater. In fact, some people have already begun acting out. We can't simply stop factories and deforestation, because the economy would collapse. What we *can* do is create new technology that maximizes both profit and preservation of the Earth. For example, renewable energy from solar panels and windmills both make money and create energy, while stopping the use of harmful fossil fuels. We don't need to do something as enormous as starting a renewable energy company, though. One of the biggest things we can do is simply to raise awareness of the true dangers that our planet is in. I hope that after you read this, you are inspired to take part in our connected planet.