

2018 International Essay Contest for Young People

[Children's Category – Honorable Mention]

The Change I Want to Make

(Original)

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According to the Royal Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals, over ten million land animals die each year due to litter. These animals look for food but see trash instead. Thinking they've found food, they will stick their heads in the pile and suffocate or get trash stuck around their leg, cutting off the blood flow. Animals also die from toxic waste from garbage that reaches ground or surface water, poisoning animals that drink from it. Leftover food thrown away attracts flies that carry diseases, and animals that later find our leftovers will eat and then contract the fly's disease.

Most people have heard of how sea turtles see plastic bags in water and mistake them for jellyfish, eating the bag and then choking. By discarding a bag (or anything!) into the ocean, we are putting multiple species at risk. Another dangerous situation for animals is that if we toss the lid of a plastic water bottle over into the ocean or a lake, it will float up to the surface, and seagulls, or another type of bird, can mistake it for fish and will make a dive for it. The cap gets lodged in the bird's throat or beak. Many animals are killed through littering, but because people only know of a few situations of animals being injured by litter, they might say that one plastic bag that blows into the ocean won't hurt. But what if everyone said one plastic bag wouldn't hurt?

As more and more people litter, they destroy more animal's habitats, forcing them to move out and find somewhere new to call home. Think of what would happen if everyone began to litter on our property and we couldn't do anything about it. People choose to litter, even when there's a trash or recycling can in front of them. Many don't realize how drastic the effects they inflict on the environment are. In St. Louis, I have seen too many parks and playgrounds littered with plastic bottles or grocery bags that no one thought to pick up and put in the garbage bin next to it.

If I were fix one thing about my community to make it a better place, I would clean up all the cans and bottles that have gathered in our playgrounds. I would start a volunteer group (or join one) that met up in different parks in the area, to pick up the trash left

behind and put up posters that would warn people of the negative effects and the fines the government impose upon people who litter. According to the National Conference of State Legislatures, in Missouri, the littering fine is a Class A \$1,000 misdemeanor fine and imprisonment up to one year. We could even initiate fundraisers to purchase more trash and recycling bins to place in common grounds, so not having a trash can around becomes an improbable reason to litter.

Littering causes so much damage and not one single benefit for anyone. Littering not only affects wildlife and is an eyesore for people who want to enjoy the park, but it also costs the government lots of money. According to LitterBug, a littering statistic website, it costs the government over \$11.5 million dollars each year to clean up trash. They need to pay sanitation workers and buy the tools and uniforms that they need. If we spent some time to walk over to a trash can or hold our trash until we see one, our money could go to something that would benefit us more. We can save so much by cleaning parks that should be clean already. Nature has given us plenty and taken care of us, the least we can do is cherish and take care of the gifts for future generations. We could use the money we save to give impoverished students better lunches so that they can focus in school and have successful careers, or give money to animal shelters to give the animals a more plentiful life. Just think of how we can grow as a community and the powerful things we can do together with our money if we learned how to use it smartly.