

1st Prize / Grand Prize Winner

Two Possibilities of 2050

By Sam India Duijs Walker, aged 15 (South Africa)

The year is 2050. You wake up in a heaving, overpopulated metropolis choked with smog and pollution. You look out your window at the dark clouds that envelope the sky, at the grey buildings that tower above you and the plastic bags that tumble in the breeze. What you know is failure. What you see is the end.

You wonder if things were ever different. You wonder if what your grandparents tell you about how the world used to be is true. You wonder if there was ever an alternative; why nobody tried to stop the rocketing of Earth's temperature or the plummeting of earths species.

You know there's no use brooding over the past. Its already too late. Born in the wrong generation, you silently ask why. Why no one cared enough to change their ways. Why everyone was so selfish. Why they knew exactly what was going on yet still did nothing to stop it. Who decided gaining fragments of miscellaneous zeros in a bank account was worth more than the world they lived in? Who decided their wealth was more important than the very organisms that sustained their being? What use is capital when you are no longer breathing enough oxygen to spend it?

The year is 2050. Nearly half of rainforest species have disappeared in a matter of decades. Bees have gone extinct, leading to the mass extinction of almost all of our food supply. Thousands of species vanish every day, from orangutans to cocoa to coral reefs. Ice caps have melted, sea levels have risen, and cities have been destroyed, all further accelerating the destruction of biodiversity.

Without trees, air pollution has skyrocketed. Respiratory diseases are more common than ever. Though Covid 19 has long since been eradicated, we are forced to wear masks for a different reason now. There is a constant water shortage, a constant fight for nourishment, a constant threat of war in one way or another. Diseases spread quicker, more people are destitute, and there is no way of knowing what disasters await us.

Unless. The year is 2050. You wake up in a bright, colourful city with fresh air blowing through your curtains. You look out your window at the compost heap at the back of your garden, at the flourishing vegetable patch filled with nutrients and the clear blue sky that goes on forever. What you know is progress. What you see is the beginning.

The year is 2050. Subsidised renewable energy has cut carbon emissions by almost 80%. Almost all motivations harmful to biodiversity have been phased out. Farmers no longer use damaging methods to produce food, instead they have chosen techniques like permaculture, biodynamic farming, urban agriculture, and composting. Fishing is no longer an endangered industry due to sustainable and ethical management of the sector. Plastic usage in daily life has decreased dramatically, as new resolutions have been put in place by humankind to protect their environment.

Slowly, biodiversity is returning to the earth. We are making an effort to bring back endangered species through enclosed breeding and seed banks. Every government has passed laws that protect their ecosystem, such as reserves, national parks and the outlawing of environmental destruction. Transport is thoroughly checked for invasive species before being offloaded in a new country. Education on biodiversity is compulsory for every school's curriculum, making it clear that there is no such thing as us being separate from nature. Slowly, Earth is healing. Slowly, we are regaining the world we could have lost. 2050 is our future. We just have to choose the right one.

2nd Prize

People, Plate and Planet - Protecting Biodiversity and Stopping the Sixth Mass Extinction

By Sapna Pramjee, aged 17 (South Africa)

We are the asteroid. Animal and plant species are disappearing at alarming rates. Natural events have triggered the past five extinctions, but this sixth mass extinction is due to human activity and choices. Our animal-based dietary choices are not only killing us through disease and premature death, but also causing the mass extinction of other species. Cattle ranching and soy being grown for animal feed are the main drivers of deforestation which has wiped out two-thirds of wildlife over the last half-century. My vision is that:

- by 2030 everyone has transitioned to a plant-based diet,
- by 2050 the world's forests are restored to the previous centuries biodiversity and
- the sixth mass extinction due to human activity is averted.

My solution to bend the curve upwards is called the '**People, Plate and Planet (3P)**' movement. It is a youth-based partnership with government, business, civil society, philanthropy and indigenous groups to prevent deforestation and restore biodiversity with reforestation.

The 3P movement has two programmes: **1) Halt further deforestation by influencing people towards a planted-based diet.** For far too long, we have been misusing one of our greatest powers - **consumer power** - through choosing food that destroys biodiversity and our health. Now it is the time to reclaim that power through individual choice, advocacy, mass mobilization and lobbying.

Firstly, we need to educate and empower the youth on the benefits of a plant-based diet on biodiversity and one's health through social media, drama productions and festivals featuring vegan influencers like Lewis Hamilton, environmental scientists and health professionals. The transition can start with 'Meat-free Mondays' at educational institutions and pressuring fast food outlets and restaurants to offer plant-based alternatives.

Youth can lobby for subsidies for plant-based food and taxes on animal products. This is to transition the meat industry to manufacture processed vegetable protein, on a journey to a plant-based diet. We need health and biodiversity warnings on all animal food products. The youth can vote for political parties which will act on the science of biodiversity loss. This programme is win-win: as consumers eat fewer animal products, human health improves, deforestation reduces, and the next mass extinction is avoided.

2) Heal from deforestation through ecological reforestation. The reforestation will be supported by youth from gap year volunteers and service participants in the Duke of Edinburgh's Award. Firstly, cattle ranch land and soybean fields that were once forests will be converted to national forest parks. Wild animal and plant species will be reintroduced for biodiversity.

Indigenous people will reforest the land using **rewilding** and **agroforestry** techniques and incorporate crops within the forests such as coffee, cacao, macadamia, medicinal plants like moringa and vegetables for a growing vegan movement. Crops and medicinal plants can be processed to higher-value products. Carbon offset credits, through the planting of trees, can be sold to industries as they transition to a decarbonized economy. Local people can be trained and employed as rangers to guard against illegal logging and poaching. These parks will also provide exciting eco-tourism experiences, whether in-person or virtually. All profits will go towards the indigenous people involved, education, research, infrastructure, conservation and the reforestation programme. This programme is again win-win: as forests are restored, poverty is reduced, many SDG goals are achieved, biodiversity returns, and the sixth mass extinction is averted.

In conclusion, let us achieve the UN's 2050 vision of Living in Harmony with Nature by preventing further deforestation with our plate power and restoring biodiversity through whole ecosystem reforestation. Let's act urgently with **People, Plate and Planet (3P)** to protect biodiversity and stop the sixth mass extinction. We are the solution.

2nd Prize

Growing the Future

By Ysabella Therese Perez, aged 16 (Philippines)

As I stare at the vast mountains in the province, I see a growing share of brown versus green, the same colour as the floodwaters that recently ravaged communities in the Philippines. As I pass by the river near our house, plastic garbage glisten under the sun. We are deemed as the smartest species of all but who are we to take more than we should? We need to re-evaluate the recurring problems and redefine growth in systems to solve and prevent the next mass extinction.

My proposal, GRO, (Guidance, Rational Restoration, Organized Operation) is structured to manage the actions of the asteroids in the 6th Mass extinction, encompassing communities, governments, and economies in growing a better future.

Guidance: This will integrate 10,000 hours of sustainable practices in educational curriculums. A study about psychological habits shows that it takes time and consistency to form a habit (BJGC, 2012). This can be made possible through creating a separate program dedicated to sustainability starting from kindergarten. Educational experts and the scientific community can collaborate to effectively spiral content developmentally in the curriculum. To create competent leaders of the future, education must be redesigned, not just to accommodate biodiversity as a topic in science, but as an overarching theme across levels in education. Guidance will be needed for the partnership of the UN and UNDP to target all schools to facilitate the program with government implementation. With the current population of the youth at 1.2 Billion, the number of people that will imbibe sustainability in their system will increase. This allows children and young adults to immerse themselves in activities involving the creation of ethical materials and practices. Sustainable living is not a one-time thing. It takes constant practice, choosing to do what is ethical every single day to make it a habit, something that will be a part of their system. With this, communities will be built towards sustainability.

Rational Restoration: As a response to Guidance, when people are equipped with the right mindset, knowledge, and skills, they can create more mindful solutions. Representatives chosen by citizens across the globe such as presidents and their respective environmental commissioners with expertise in science and communities must commit to restoring a part of land and water, protecting at least 30% of their area, especially the hotspot zones. This includes the restoration of indigenous lands, as 80% of animal and plant species remain in those areas. This will create a relational balance between humans and nature.

Organized Operation: The third focus demands long-term profiting from manufacturing, production, and distribution of goods. According to the Carbon Majors Report in 2017, more than 70% of greenhouse gases released into the air are attributable to about 100 large companies causing great damage to our planet. Their entire production cycle must be measured in terms of carbon emission and resources used. The economic and ethical values will combine. The first step in identifying what these companies can change occurs through the accurate measuring of their production process. With the identified circumstances they may move forward to redesigning the framework suggested by ISO as most of the companies are members. ISO sets the world standard, meaning they may choose to revise their standardization towards sustainability. This creates sustainability in design and food production, allowing companies to ethically utilize resources and further protect biodiversity.

Our determination for growth must be catered toward the needs of our biodiversity. If we can take more than we should then we can give back more than we could. No one wants to see their only home dying. Together, let us GROw a sustainable future.

3rd Prize

Our Need to Preserve Biodiversity

By Sofija Zoroja, aged 13 (Serbia)

Everyone knows that biodiversity is dramatically decreasing. It is also known that the main culprit for this is Man whose activities endanger flora and fauna and the very survival of the planet. However, *the authorities* still do not take this problem seriously and even ignore it, and the agreed actions often remain just empty words on paper. I want to follow up Greta's 'open your eyes and do something' scream, with a proposal of concrete actions that I can do personally or together with my peers.

My peers and I are growing up in a time of constant advancement in technology and use social networks on a daily basis. My idea is to use the most popular social networks such as YouTube, TikTok, Instagram, Twitter and Facebook and medias in general, to alert the public about the biodiversity problem, and to direct it in the direction of its preservation.

For a start, with the help of teachers, we could organize a school competition for the best video on a particular topic ('how to plant a tree', 'how to reduce harmful gases', 'how to dispose of garbage', 'save an endangered species', or 'let's preserve a certain part of the Planet.')

This has a potential of growing into a municipal, national, and international competition. Competitions would be held periodically, for example at least annually, and as a reward, for the winning video/ a group of winners, school, our sponsors, or the Ministry could provide a trip or excursion to national parks or natural wonders. None of us will forget something like this, and we will gain experience in how to fight new challenges in protecting the Planet.

It is said that pictures speak louder than words. On some social networks, we could create a competition for the best and the worst influence on biodiversity. We can set marks and colours ranging from 1-10 and colour labels green to black (best/worst influence). When our peers and people in general recognize our idea and pass it on, the idea will go viral, and the authorities will be under increased pressure from the media to do something concrete.

If there is a problem with financing, we will propose solutions: money can be collected through increased taxes and fines on the firms and industries that pollute the air, water, or soil. This would instigate those companies to start thinking green and reduce or even stop polluting.

My peers and I can use our hobbies and extracurricular activities to point out the need to preserve biodiversity in various volunteer actions. As a long time dancer, I have had the opportunity to participate in numerous choreographies dedicated to vulnerable social groups such as the deaf-mute, the poor, the disabled and the disabled. My plan is to suggest to the trainer the creation of choreographies that will draw attention to key biodiversity issues, such as the negative human impacts on nature, climate change or global warming. A special choreography would refer to biodiversity, as a wealth of diversity. We would play the premiere on May 22nd, the World Biodiversity Day. Events on this day could become a national practice, which would be broadcast on state television, and money could be collected on them, for example by sending 'environmental' SMS messages to help a particular cause.

Since 'youth will change the World', I feel obligated to take part in creating a future, sustainable World and move from words to deeds. With our avalanche of ideas, enthusiasm, creativity, and energy using different approaches to biodiversity conservation, we will make biodiversity a top priority in our local community.

We can because we must.

4th Prize

Unity is Our New Chapter in Life

By Stephanie Ranee Leano, aged 15 (Philippines)

The world is beautiful until it is empty, alone, and silent? no birds tweeting, no humans chattering, no trees swaying from left to right? just one broken, uninhabited island that we once called home. This is what the world will look like when its children continue to take it for granted.

Division? the dividing of countries? will be our hamartia. We can demand the discontinuation of illegal logging and wildlife trafficking, but how will one succeed when one does not cooperate? How can a surgeon successfully perform surgery without nurses? How will we protect biological diversity and stop the 6th mass extinction without unity? Global solutions are only effective if every person in every country cooperates? if countries are united and strive for the same goal. This is unity.

United, we must shape in our hands a new E.R.A.: Educate, Reflect, Act.

Educate: The right idea but the wrong way. In this age of information revolution, we have multiple ways of reaching an audience, yet these are underutilized in the area of biodiversity conservation. Additionally, most people do not feel compelled to make better choices for the environment. To reach and educate not just students, but ordinary citizens, social media platforms should be used to host content that allows each individual to relate better to nature. An example is Leonardo DiCaprio and his foundation created to support organizations that strive for a sustainable future. He used his platform to spread awareness, which influenced other celebrities and businesses to shift to a more educated system. This would result in a major change in the way citizens think. With the unity that it will bring, actions will occur and differences will be made.

Reflect: To fully understand an issue, we need to reflect? reflect on our actions and how we hurt nature as a country. The government of each country should cooperate to make a Nature Reflection Day that occurs simultaneously wherein government leaders, the scientific community, and environmental advocates from around the world talk about the effects of our actions towards nature. This can be designed like a worldwide conference, where the UN Environmental Programme begins the plenary discussion, and each country would continue afterward with its workshops televised in major news stations and streamed on social media platforms. This way, people see the lack of action we do to alleviate biodiversity loss and the abuse we do towards our planet and its species. Not only will this make our country see how we should start a new era filled with change, but it will also bring our country and its citizens together.

Act: United we stand, divided we fall. Together, we can be successful? just like how Bhutan and its people made their country carbon negative. Every first world and developing country should partner and support third-world countries by providing advanced eco-friendly technology, such as the Greywater Recycling Technology. A great example is how Japan, through transporting goods, is collaborating with the Philippines to make its first smart, green, and disaster-resilient city to be created in 2022 (2018, Eco-Business). Through this, we can protect the homes of other species and preserve the beauty of nature, conjointly creating a stronger and better relationship within countries.

We, the children, are all in this crisis together, so what are we waiting for? This is a call for a new, augmented era, where everyone is educated, countries are reflecting, and actions are being implemented to alleviate biodiversity loss. Through unity, we can reverse our path from extinction to an era of change for the environment.

5th Prize

Teen Ingenuity

By Anastasia Hadnadj, aged 17 (Serbia)

Some students are gathered in a library for their usual reading session. They pick a book, which sounds interesting to them and start reading.

Once upon a time, long ago, there was a planet. This planet was a place which millions, upon millions of species, both plant and animal, called home. It was green, it was blue and it was full of life. This planet was called the Earth. Though it may share the same name, the planet we know today is quite different, thanks to everything that happened over a course of five hundred million years. Tectonic plate movements, sea-level falls, asteroid collision, global cooling. These and many more were the cause of five mass extinctions, and the loss of over 90 per cent of flora and fauna. Today, the ecosystem has an even bigger and meaner enemy than Mother Nature modern man. Over the relatively few years of his existence, man managed to, single handedly, do more damage to the environment than natural disasters could in the hundreds of millions of years before him. He created a home for himself, he created cities and country, and in doing so destroyed many habitats, cut-down many forests, killed many species. As it stands, man and the pollution he brought upon the environment will most certainly be the cause of the 6th mass extinction.

Students finish reading the story, but it seems that its motives sparked a conversation.

Why does it have to be that way? We live in the 21st century, the age of technology, with so many people willing to act, especially our generation. There must be something we could do to protect the life around us. Let's take a look at the Ocean. It needs to be cleaned and restrictions must be put on large scale fishing sites and areas with endangered species. Both problems could be solved with the introduction of an Ocean police! This police force would consist of members from all over the world and would use satellites and sonars to detect where the waste is and where there's illegal fishing in progress.

That's a great idea. We have so many satellites in space nowadays that an execution of such operation should not be even a slightest problem. But what about Global Warming? Reducing carbon emission is not enough and most solutions involve chemicals that would have a devastating effect on our climate and ecosystem.

I think the key to solving that problem also lies in space! I've been thinking about this for quite a while and I've come up with a concept I call Space-based Sunshade. It involves creating silicon discs, each studded with holes close to the size of visible light wavelengths. These discs would produce a slight but imperceptible dimming of sunlight and be sent to space using electromagnetic rail guns which, have been used already to send water and fuel to astronauts. Not only is this method cheaper than most, but once the discs are launched and they arrived to the place between Earth and Sun, where the gravitational fields cancel out, they can stay there for at least 50 years!

Mark, you're a genius!

Thank you, thank you. However, this still leaves us with one problem, trees being cut down.

Do you remember last year when Mr Beast planted 20 million trees? What if more creators and influencers do the same? There are so many good people with a great audience, if even half of them did something similar we would increase the number of trees in the world by at least 20 per cent!

All these ideas are brilliant! Let's get straight to work!

5th Prize

How Can We Protect Biological Diversity and Stop the Sixth Mass Extinction?

By Vanessa Yip, aged 15 (UK)

A trail of blazing fire cuts through the rainforest, trees toppling over each other like dominoes, leaving thick smoke suspended in the air. Among the fiery mess, an orangutan flees in hopes of finding a new habitat, witnessing the destruction of its home right before its eyes.

Biodiversity is the variety of life on earth, and its fluctuation has occurred naturally in the past. However, humans are destroying habitats, poaching animals for trade, and polluting the environment so extensively that species are rapidly lost. This poses an enormous threat to our planet as biodiversity is what maintains our environment. Therefore, this calls for action to be taken immediately to steer away from our eventual fate: a sixth mass extinction, the first ever to be caused by humanity.

Fuelled by agriculture, the accelerating rate of deforestation renders the survival of organisms almost impossible. A large culprit we indirectly support as consumers are palm oil companies who clear out and burn stretches of forests for oil palm plantations. Here, education is essential in increasing individual awareness: we should consciously choose products accredited by RSPO, a certification that verifies palm oil has been sourced sustainably. On a wider level, companies can commit to going greener by implementing a zero-deforestation policy. Although replanting schemes would be beneficial, this cannot be solely relied on given the urgent rate of deforestation. Perhaps the most effective solution would be governmental, such as regulating forests more tightly to mitigate illegal logging and conserving more forested areas through legislation. Protecting the habitats of threatened species is essential to conserving biodiversity.

Reducing pollution is equally as urgent. Particulates and gases released into the atmosphere harm organisms - corals are bleached as an example, depleting many marine species of their home. While individuals change their lifestyle to reduce their carbon footprint by following the 3Rs, switching to a plant-based diet and more, governmental action must also be incorporated to make significant progress. Specifically, effective legislation and enforcement is needed. The loophole created in the Clean Air Strategy (2019) allows the dairy and beef cattle farming sectors to evade the compulsory monitoring of emissions, which should be removed as they are the most polluting sectors. To further encourage effort made to reduce pollution, incentives may be provided such as a carbon tax.

However, I find preventing and deterring people from illegal wildlife trade the most important as less public awareness has been raised about this topic. As a response to increasing demand, this multi-billion-dollar business is always on the hunt for elephant tusks, tiger bones, rhino horns and more, directly decreasing biodiversity. Therefore, the importance of making informed choices must be highlighted to reduce this demand, which can be done through providing education and imposing stricter deterrents. Countries should continually uphold CITES while anti-poaching law enforcements and enforcements to shut down black markets are strengthened.

With up to 1 million animal and plant species threatened with extinction, we must engage in collective effort to protect our earth. To do this, public understanding of the severity of biodiversity loss needs to increase, and this comes with the advancement of monitoring technologies and the removal of fake or misleading information. Countries must be honest about progress while honouring international commitments made in agreements, such as COP21. In the global aim of reaching the Aichi biodiversity targets, a combination of individual, community and governmental action is crucial. We must do everything in our power to preserve our futures, our survival, and our only home. We don't have much time left.