

## Earth Day

As many people are aware, Earth Day is rapidly approaching. Seeing as I take out my grandparents' garbage weekly, I understand the significance of proper waste management. As human beings that inhabit this Earth, we should discover new and innovative ways to care for it. In 2019, approximately 70 million tons of pollution were emitted into the atmosphere in the United States and the ocean contained 5.25 trillion pieces of plastic waste. This is unacceptable and we should do our part to change this for the greater good. If you would like to think of what not to do, think of Homer Simpson in *The Simpsons Movie*. He dumped an entire silo of pig droppings in a lake, causing the EPA to isolate his hometown of Springfield and his family to go on the lam. While this is unlikely to happen in real life, the moral of caring for the environment still applies.

Even though you were likely taught this in kindergarten, it is important to remember the three R's: reduce, reuse, and recycle! The first **r** refers to reduction. When we reduce, we live more carefully so there is less garbage and waste to dispose of. We can reduce certain resources by shopping wisely. We should supply our own bags and always buy items in bulk whenever possible, which is an option so luxuriously provided by stores such as the iconic franchise Costco. This can also be done by typing a history paper as opposed to wasting multiple sheets of paper. In this modern age of technology, paper should only be utilized when necessary.

The next **r** refers to reusing. This is likely the most difficult **r**. We can apply this in our life by repurposing items such as old mobile phones by returning them to your respective network or giving it to a relative. We can reuse grocery bags for our next trip to the store (as mentioned in the previous paragraph) or any other purpose that may potentially require them. The concept of reusing reminds of a favorite pastime as a young child, which was returning glass bottles at the

local Foodtown in exchange for 15 cents per bottle. I would usually aid my mother in this event, either by putting the bottles in the machine or by collecting the stubs we were rewarded with. My local church collects used “Little Bites Muffins” bags in exchange for funds needed to help the less fortunate.

The last **r** refers to recycling. I think that it can be universally agreed upon that this is the easiest **r** to follow, despite the fact that many people forgot to. Remember to place plastic or glass bottles as well as paper in the proper bins. One should also remember to take these bins to the curb on the correct night and children or teens should help their parents do so.

There are many icons of environmental preservations that modern day teens can aspire to. James Cameron, the famous film director, who directed the *Terminator* and *Alien* franchises, respectively, as well as the highest grossing film, *Avatar*; is an executive fellow at the Yale School of Environment. Cameron happens to be a senior advisor at Systemiq and was the former founder and Climate Change Capital. Wangari Maathai was a social, environmental, and political activist from Kenya as well as the first African American woman to win the Nobel Peace Prize.

Likely the most famous environmental activist is Erin Brockovich, who inspired a movie starring actress Julia Roberts, based on the following events. Brockovich sued Pacific Gas & Electric for litigation, accusing them of contaminating drinking water with hexavalent chromium in the southern town of Hinkley, California. In 1996, the case finally reached a settlement of \$333 million, which was easily the largest settlement ever paid in a direct-action lawsuit in US history. Mary & Vititoe, the law firm that employed Brockovich as a legal clerk, received \$133.6 million of that settlement and Brockovich received a personal settlement of \$2 million. It's people like Erin Brockovich that make a difference and we can follow in her footsteps. I am not saying that we should consider suing an entire company, but that we should do something that shows we care.

Many US presidents have embraced the concept of environmental stability. Theodore “Teddy” Roosevelt was deemed the father of our National Park system and the Father of Conservation. In 1904, Roosevelt created the US Forestry Service to battle deforestation, even going as far as to refuse to have a Christmas tree cut for the White House. The very first Earth Day was celebrated during Richard Nixon’s second term in office, just days prior to his signing of the National Environmental Policy Act, which demanded federal agencies to regularly report statements regarding environmental impact. Nixon’s executive orders established the EPA and NOAA. Nixon also signed the Clean Air Act of 1970, which regulated emissions from industrial and mobile sources. His successor, Gerald Ford was definitely inspired by these policies. President Jimmy Carter had solar panels installed atop the White House in 1979.

President Ronald Reagan set aside nearly 13 million acres of public land during the course of his presidency. President George H.W. Bush protected more public land than any president in recent history (despite only serving one term) and arguably paved the way for the next presidents that will be listed. Bush decreed that every acre of wildlife habitat infringed by development would be compensated for via the restoration of at least one acre of wetlands somewhere else. Bush also signed “The Clear Air Act Amendments” in 1990.

President Bill Clinton preserved various land and ocean areas. President George W. Bush (AKA “W” or “Dubya ”), son of President George H.W. Bush, designated close to 140,000 square miles of the Northwestern Hawaiian Islands as a Marine National Monument. President Barack Obama was known by many as the “Climate Change President.” These aforementioned presidents are all influences on what leaders should do to better the environment, which should be a priority.