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Mr. Greco

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Greta and Green Team

Dedications

I dedicate this book to Green Team and others who work hard to protect the environment.

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Preface

When this documentary project was first introduced, I felt nervous and overwhelmed because I've never done anything like this before. I was intimidated by having to interview strangers, write a research paper, and create an entire book. When first picking a topic, I knew I wanted to explore something related to preserving the environment because it is something I am passionate about. My original subject was Midpeninsula Regional Open Spaces, but unfortunately they never responded to my email. I struggled with finding a new subject, but with Mr. Greco's help, I decided on documenting the Green Team, a club at Mountain View High School, because it is not only very accessible, but also a group of students my age working to help the environment. I faced many challenges in this project, but one of the biggest ones was definitely acquiring the interviews. In the end, I only managed to get one interview and had to substitute the second one with more research from secondary sources. Learning how to use

InDesign was also a struggle, but I eventually got the hang of it. Overall, I learned a lot of life skills I will continue to use in the future like how to be flexible, adapt quickly to problems, and surprisingly, how to be more confident when talking to people, especially strangers.

Introduction

The sounds of clicking keyboards and conversation fill the air in Room 117, hidden in a corner of the science wing of Mountain View High School. This is where Green Team meets every Tuesday to work on various projects, from setting up compost bins to creating presentations for middle schools. Their work may seem like a drop in the bucket, but every drop still makes a difference towards saving the environment.

Unfortunately, it has become common today to dismiss the impact of youth and not take them seriously. Many believe young people lack the intelligence and seriousness to create meaningful change, as shown by the backlash Greta Thunberg faced while protesting against climate change. She was even criticized and dismissed by Donald Trump while he was president. As climate change and global warming wreck the environment, Green Team and Greta Thunberg are doing their part to show that it is more important than ever for America's youth to step up to protect the world they have inherited.

Chapter 1: The Origins of Youth Environmentalism

During a TEDxStockholm presentation, Greta Thunberg talked about how she first learned about climate change when she was 8 years old. She was shocked and confused that such a large issue was rarely talked about. Thunberg made many lifestyle choices to be more environmentally conscious, such as becoming vegan, avoiding flying, and upcycling. According to an article by Context News, on August 20th, 2018, when she was just 15 years old, Thunberg

started skipping school and protesting outside of Parliament for more action against climate change. As more people began to join her, she began “a regular 'strike' from classes every Friday to protest climate issues” (Elks et al). As the movement grew, she started speaking at events across Europe, and was even nominated for the Nobel Peace Prize in March 2019. On September 23rd, 2019, Thunberg delivered her infamous speech to “leaders at the U.N. summit, accusing them of having ‘stolen my dreams and my childhood with your empty words’” (Elks et al).

A more local group of youth dedicated to fighting climate change is the Green Team club at Mountain View High School. Green Team was restarted last year by then-freshman Adeline Kopp after Mountain View had gone a couple of years without a Green Team when the seniors who were formerly in charge had graduated. She noticed that Mountain View wasn’t “exactly the most sustainable school” and wanted to improve that. Their goal was to “spread environmental consciousness on campus and also make our campus more sustainable” (Kopp). Now a sophomore and president of Green Team, Kopp reflects that she wanted to restart this club because “...I have had a Green Team at my elementary school and my middle school and I've always just been interested in the environment, so I kind of thought it would be a good idea for Mountain View...” In her previous Green Teams, they held different educational activities, with a different theme every month. For instance, one month the club, “...would stand out at ...lunchtime next to the bins, and...tell people how to recycle properly...” with a candy prize. Another month focused on pollution where students could pick up trash and exchange it for a gift card. (Kopp)

Since most students at Mountain View were already well educated on the climate crisis, Kopp focused more on implementing sustainability practices on campus, such as composting and more environmentally friendly transportation methods like biking or walking. She discussed how

“our school is...small on a global scale, but it's like 2000 kids, right? Which is like...that's a lot of people that you can have an impact on. So even just changing the habits of our school is helping the climate crisis in some small way” (Kopp).

Chapter 2: Current Work

One of the most famous ways youth advocates are fighting back against climate change is the movement known as Fridays For Future. Thunberg started this movement in 2018 by protesting outside of Parliament by herself. According to Encyclopedia Britannica, “Although alone for the first day of the strike, she was joined each subsequent day by more and more people, and her story garnered international attention. After the [Swedish] election Thunberg returned to school but continued to skip classes on Fridays to strike, and these days were called Fridays for Future. Her action inspired hundreds of thousands of students around the world to participate in their own Fridays for Future” (“Greta Thunberg: Biography”). The goals of this movement, as stated on the Fridays For Future U.S. website, is to pressure people in power to, “Keep the global temperature rise below 1.5C compared to pre-industrial levels, follow the Paris Agreement and ensure climate justice, [and] listen to the best united science currently available.”

These strikes have not been for nothing though, and they have led to significant change. According to a 2020 study done on company leaders by the World Economic Forum, “Nearly eight out of 10 respondents believe last year’s climate strikes helped raise awareness of sustainability and energy issues within their organization.” Because of this increased awareness, 82% of those surveyed believed their organization would be more committed to improving sustainability in 2020 compared to 2019. (Hutt) Furthermore, an article on Earth.org by Martina Igini states that all the media attention the movement received put pressure on governments to

push for environmentally friendly policies, like the “new net-zero goals and commitments to reducing carbon emissions while investing in renewable energies” which were announced at COP26 in Glasgow in 2021.

In the past couple of years, Green Team has also worked hard on many projects to both spread awareness and fight environmental problems. One example of this is the presentations they create for elementary and middle schools about topics like how to recycle and compost properly. This educates them early on so they are more receptive to the information and so they grow up understanding proper waste management. (Kopp)

Another project they’ve implemented closer to campus are the compost bins across Mountain View High School, with one located in the science quad and the other in the main quad. According to CalRecycle in a chart showing the composition of waste at schools, 50.8% is organic material which could have been composted. In an article in the *Oracle* by Ella Persky, statistics like these “...sparked an idea in Kopp: to expand the usage of the scarcely-touched compost bin. And that’s exactly what the club did. After four months of planning and preparing, Green Team members were finally able to put their ideas into action, starting off with the two widely successful bins.”

One of Kopp’s personal favorite Green Team projects was Walk or Wheel Day, also known as WOW Day. People who used a more sustainable transportation method to get to school received a treat as a thank you. The audit revealed that “over half the school bikes or walks or carpools.” She remembered how “it was just really fun for people to get to see that biking or walking or carpooling was appreciated because a lot of people do that every single day. And it’s probably a lot more difficult than taking a car, but it has a huge impact.” (Kopp)

Chapter 3: Why young people?

Many youth activists face backlash because they are believed to not have the maturity or intelligence to create significant change. For instance, in Christopher Caldwell's criticism of Greta Thunberg in the *New York Times*, he says, "Normally Ms. Thunberg would be unqualified to debate in a democratic forum...Kids her age have not seen much of life. Her worldview might be unrealistic, her priorities out of balance."

However, younger generations are the ones who are inheriting the planet, so the current environmental crisis directly affects them and their future the most. As stated by Thunberg in an interview for Democracy Now, "...what we do now, future generations can't undo in the future. We are deciding right now how we want our future to look like." Through the efforts of youth activists, "Despite their young age, they are able to inspire older generations through their anger, frustration as well as their curiosity to learn about modern issues and to play an active part in the society to make the world a better place" (Igini). Because younger people tend to notice more of the injustices of the world, they are more motivated to bring change compared to older generations who have perhaps grown used to these problems. As shown by the success of various global and local projects, from Fridays For Future to implementing compost bins on campus, youth are more than capable of creating meaningful change, regardless of their lack of experience in the world.

It is especially important that youth are the ones taking the lead in combating climate change because there is more possibility for change with them compared to older generations. Historically, it has always been younger generations who have recognized problems and brought a fresh perspective to the issue. According to Pew Research Center, 71% of Millennials and 67% of Generation Z believe that the climate should be the top priority to ensure a sustainable planet

for future generations. Additionally, “Younger Americans – Millennials and adults in Generation Z – stand out...particularly for their high levels of engagement with the issue of climate change. Compared with older adults, Gen Zers and Millennials are talking more about the need for action on climate change; among social media users, they are seeing more climate change content online; and they are doing more to get involved with the issue through activities such as volunteering and attending rallies and protests” (Funk et al).

Conclusion

Seeing statistics and facts about climate change can often feel disheartening, especially for youth who may feel like they're too young to make a difference. However, Kopp believes that “the small choices we make every day, whether we realize it or not, have a big impact. So just processing when we're making a decision that negatively impacts the environment, like choosing plastic over paper or accepting a plastic straw, bringing a reusable water bottle instead of grabbing one at the store, even buying a canned soda is better than buying, you know, a plastic one because aluminum is so much better to recycle. So I think just like thinking more consciously about our consumption could really help on the individual basis.”

Parents and older generations also have a large role to play in combating the climate crisis. Children are highly impressionable so they often look up to their parents and imitate their actions. If they are raised by parents who encourage eco-friendly actions from an early age, they are more likely to grow up into teenagers and adults who are more environmentally responsible.

Kopp also encourages other youth who want to be more involved to “look into local action groups that do protesting around local advocacy for laws and policies that will actually make an impact on the global scale.” Laughing slightly, she adds, “And if you want help out in

our community, you can join Green Team because we're really working hard to try to improve the sustainability of our school.” (Kopp)

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