



THE QUEEN'S
COMMONWEALTH ESSAY COMPETITION 2020

Actions Speak Louder

by Cassandra Nguyen, Junior Winner, aged 13 from Canada

We all wrote letters,

5 paragraphs

550 words,

our teacher mailed them off,

sent overseas

to people who never read them,

people who would never listen.

We were told these letters would help,= that

animals would return to their homes,= that

trees would flourish,

that water would flow

clear and blue as the morning sky.

But I knew this wouldn't help,

not with our success measured by a grade= a

percentage on a piece of paper,

and not by the impact

and the power our words had.

Our paragraphs filled with pleas for change=

would fall on deaf ears

we are just kids to them,

kids too young and helpless

to make a difference

to do anything but speak

We all wrote letters
that day at school, saying
we wanted change
but really just wanting the mark.

I sat in a car
speeding along the countryside,
heading back home,
gazing listlessly out the window
when I saw something,
a lone deer
standing atop a great pile of rubble
stone, broken concrete, shattered glass,
and whatever else man has left there to replace
looming elms, rustling maples, draping willows.
I called out and pointed at it to my family
who broke out into excited chatter
and amazement
at the sight
of this creature.

I looked into those large eyes
a brilliant auburn
but petrified
looking out
at me
with pain
and confusion.

I felt my heart shatter

I wanted to scream

that it wasn't me
who took their home and their family, who
left him standing on a mound of rubble,
never to be cared for by anyone
but it was
I was silent
I thought of the letter
as just an assignment
and nothing more
nothing that could actually mean something
or change anything

We all wrote letters
They never wrote back
maybe never even read them
maybe tossed them out
like any other useless piece of paper, but
it was time to stop this.

Empty words
would never help,
they made you feel good at the moment
thinking you've done something great
only to realize the impact you've made is
nonexistent.

I may be young
but I can do something,
something beyond just talking because
words without actions

are empty

We all wrote letters
but they didn't help anyone not
the deer by the road
not any animal or forest. Maybe
I couldn't help that deer but I
can change something

We all wrote letters

Most forgot about them afterward

But not me

I smile at a mother with 2 young children

as I hand them a pumpkin

and a bag of beans

fresh,

organic

Grown at the school

In the garden I'd created

Combatting pesticide usage

by supporting organic local food

This isn't protesting or rallying

or even making a public speech

but this is my way to help

my way to fight using my actions

using my actions to influence others to do the same I

know that every bill in my hand

will go to

a better world for all

We all wrote letters
but I didn't stop there
Coming back from school I
noticed a small plot of land
for the first time
I saw the murky waters
with pieces of plastic drifting about
I felt the rough bark of dying trees
beneath my fingers
I heard the silent voices
of all the animals
who used to call this place home So
I started fundraising donation after
donation
slowly building up
to enough to start restoring
this lost paradise
tree by tree
volunteer by volunteer
hour by hour
the land returned

We all wrote letters
but the paper in my hand now
is different
it doesn't feel worthless and superficial it
feels priceless and appreciated

because every dollar goes
to charity
and together we will make
our voices heard
even without saying a word

We all wrote letters
I can almost feel the paper in my hand the
leaf is smooth and waxy
but now it's different
now it means something
I watch as
a chipmunk scurries up the bark
of a huge maple tree
one that I planted there
3 years ago
I glance down at the fallen leaf in my palm
what a beautiful color
auburn

We all wrote letters
but I started growing

We all wrote letters but
I restored the land

The letters did nothing

But our actions did,

and I will keep fighting

because I know

that actions

speak

louder.