

Caring for Our Future

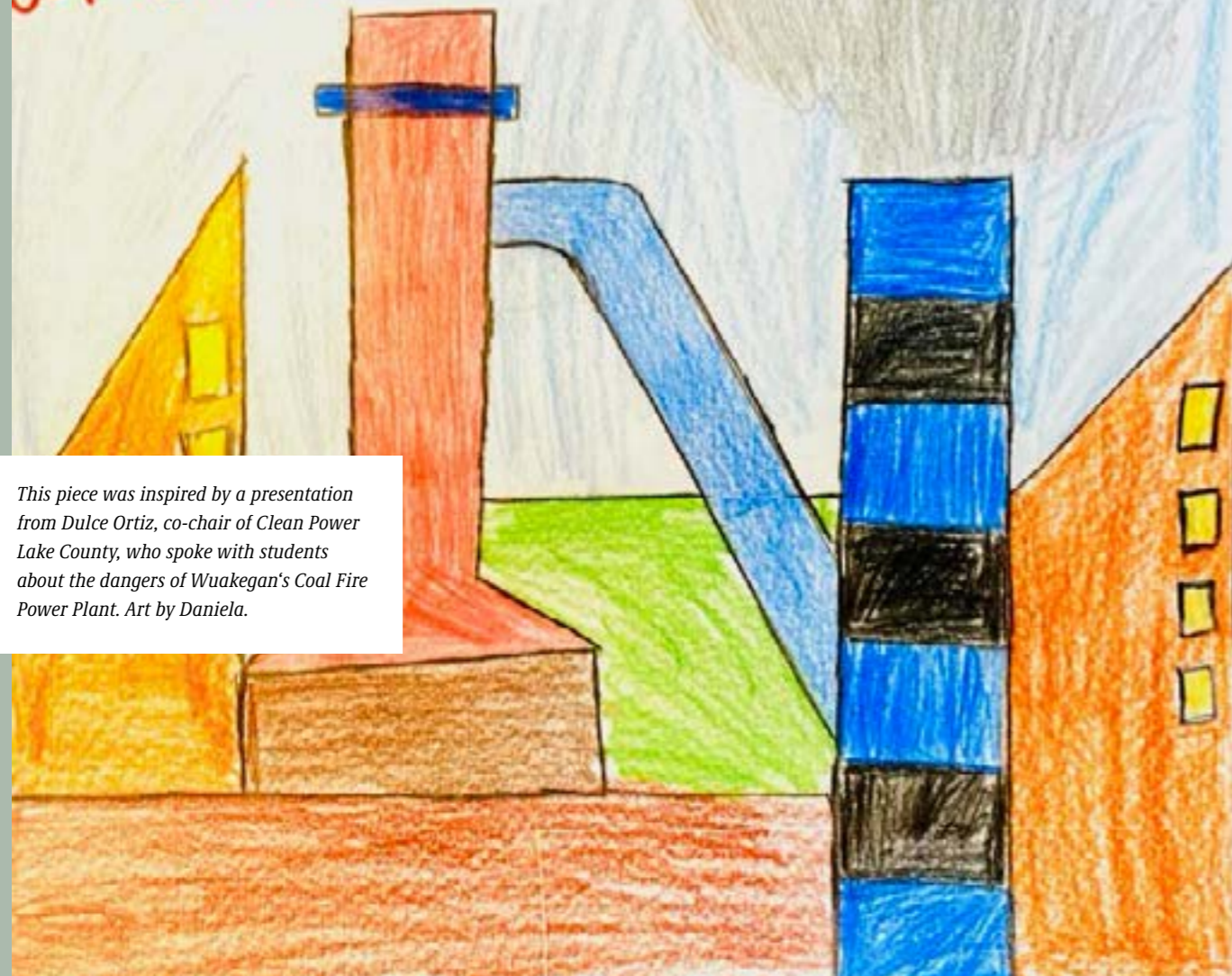
Artwork and Advice from Middle School Students



*A collaboration between Family Services of Lake County &
Brushwood Center at Ryerson Woods*



I would like if people who live in Waukegan knew that there is a coal fired power plant. This is very important to know because I found out that some people who lived close to the coal fired power plant actually got asma because of it.



This piece was inspired by a presentation from Dulce Ortiz, co-chair of Clean Power Lake County, who spoke with students about the dangers of Waukegan's Coal Fire Power Plant. Art by Daniela.

George Michael, Eduardo, America, Alexandra M., Jessenia, Brayan, Bryan, Jonathan Fernando, Fernando, Vanessa, Melany, Daniela L., Angel, Odalis, Kevin, David, Oscar, Brandon, Alejandra L., Daniel, Kate, Daniel, Alejandro, Luis, Ashley, Zuleika, Keily, Diego, Juan, Giovanni, Kenny, Jesus, Naidelin

the Students

This collection of art and poetry was created during youth programming in the fall and winter of 2020. These programs were a collaboration between Family Services of Lake County's Youth Educational Support and Success (Y.E.S.S) Program and Brushwood Center at Ryerson Woods' It's A W.I.N. (Art & Wellness in Nature) Program. 30 Middle School students met with Brushwood Center's staff, teaching artists, and guest speakers twice a month to explore the topics of self-care, community-care, and environmental justice through art and nature lessons.

All of the visual artwork featured represents information that the students felt was important, and that they wanted to share with the broader community. Some of the pieces are inspired by activities and speakers from our programs together, while others are inspired by students' personal experiences. All of the pieces were photographed by the students and submitted to us for compilation. All of the artwork featured here was made by bright, compassionate, intelligent, silly, and resilient young leaders. We cannot wait to see what their futures hold.

- Dani Abboud, Manager of Community Programs & Partnerships,
Brushwood Center at Ryerson Woods



A common topic of discussion was students' frustration with people not following COVID-19 guidelines. Art by Angel.

Pandemic Poetry

Over the course of the fall, students worked with several teaching artists and explored self-expression through poetry, illustration, and digital media.

There were several common themes throughout our students' artwork, including their feelings on President Trump, their frustration with the pandemic, their favorite video games, and how much they loved their pets.

With artist Emilia Vidal-Hallett, students worked on a "fill-in-the-blank" style poem in English, Spanish, and Spanglish, inspired by the idea of creating a virtual alter.

Students used a website Vidal-Hallett created and were prompted to input three positive qualities of their community, three things that make them stressed out, and three things that make them feel happy. The words they entered were randomly shuffled

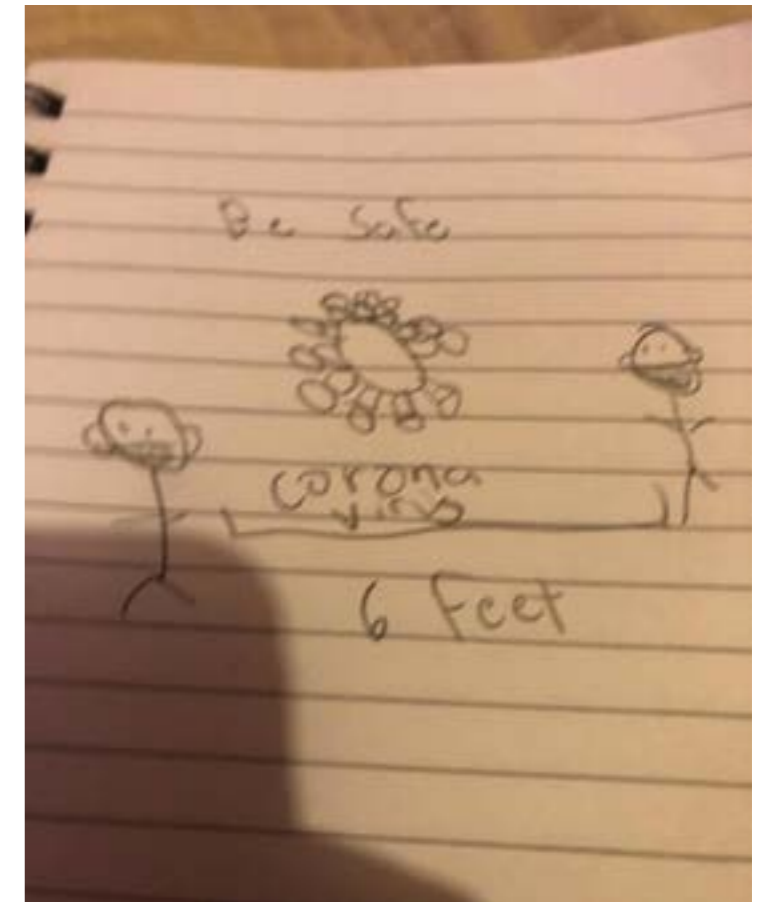
This box of _____
declines _____
and accepts _____

Esta caja de _____
elimina _____
y confirma _____

This caja of _____
declines _____
y confirma _____

into the stanza format above, and created the short poems you see below.

The "box" represents community, and the poems speak to things we want to let go of, while inviting in the things that make us calm and happy. Through these poems, we acknowledged our anxieties in order to process them and make more space for the things we love.



Esta caja de safety
elimina hate
y confirma birds

This box of responsibility
declines COVID
and accepts sharing

This box of kindness
declines racism
and accepts love

Esta caja de gracia
elimina crueldad
y confirma ustedes

This box of fun
declines homework
and accepts winning in Among Us

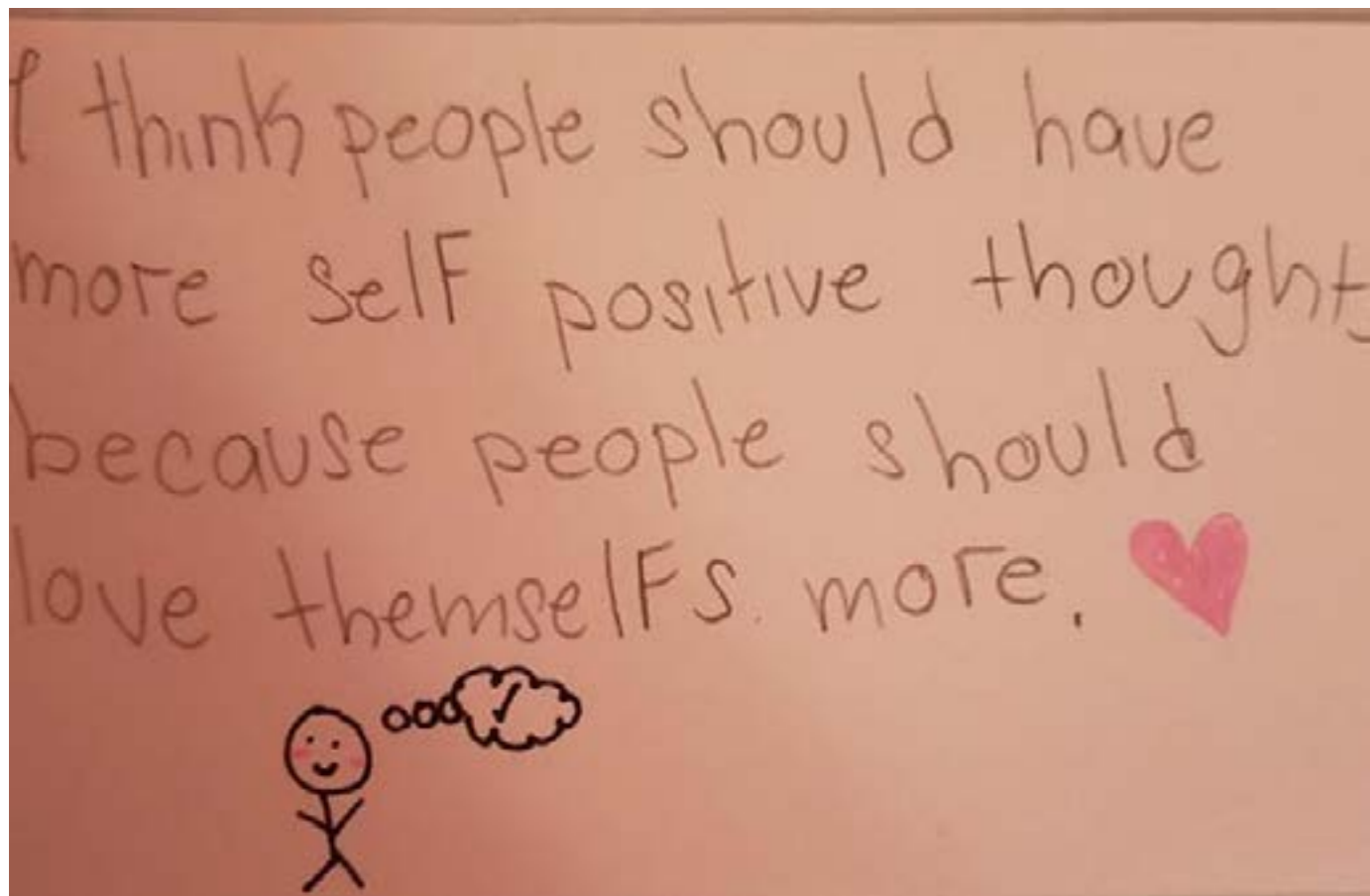
This box of real nice people
declines getting mad
and accepts eating XD

This box of kind
declines too many things at once
and accepts my family

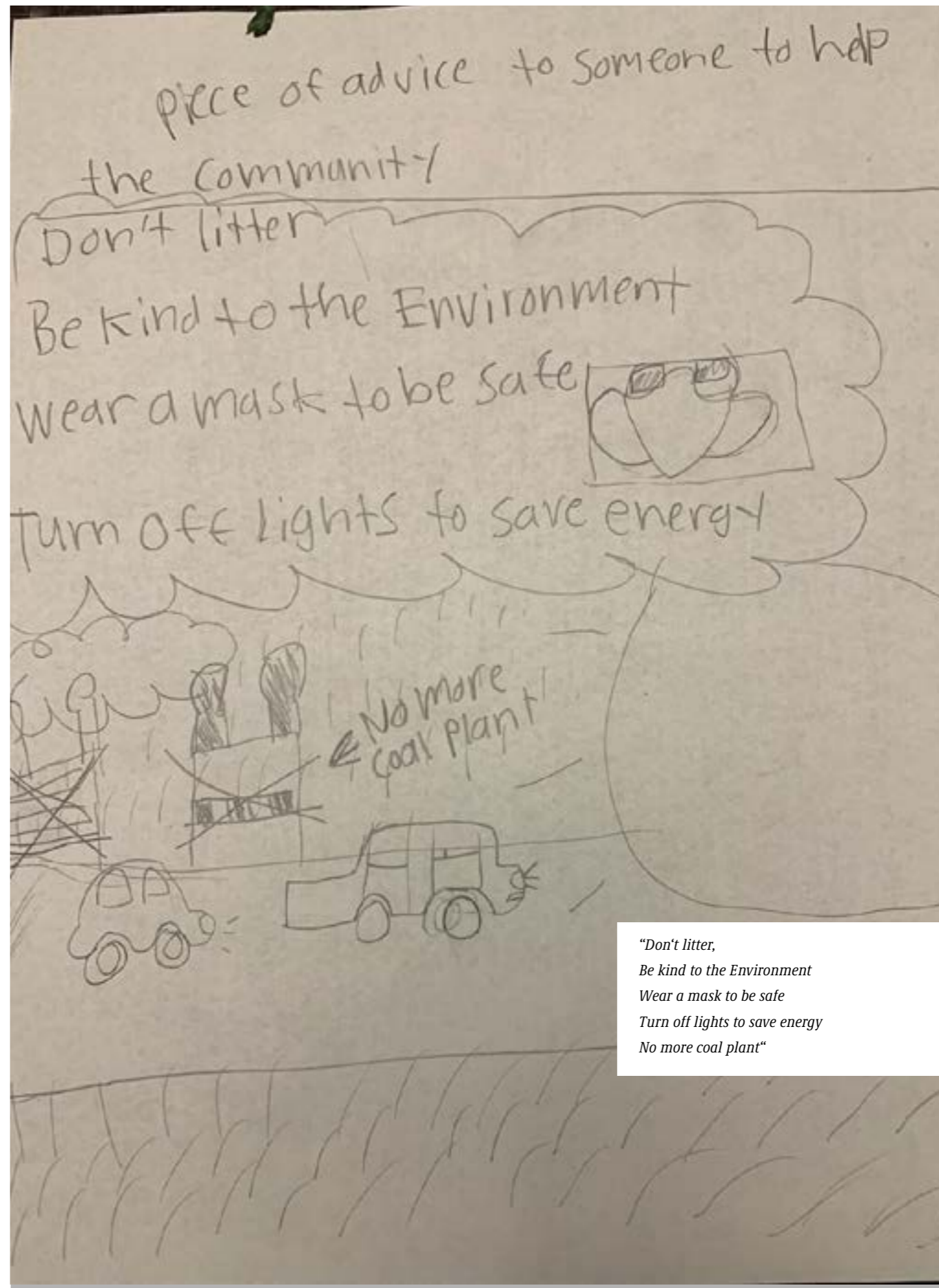
This box of respect
declines Donald Trump
and accepts relaxing

This box of vibes
declines Trump
and accepts Minecraft

This caja of care
declines odio
y confirma la new generacion



Nature is so beautiful it blows our minds, you can lose urself in it, or find urself at the same time.
- Brayan

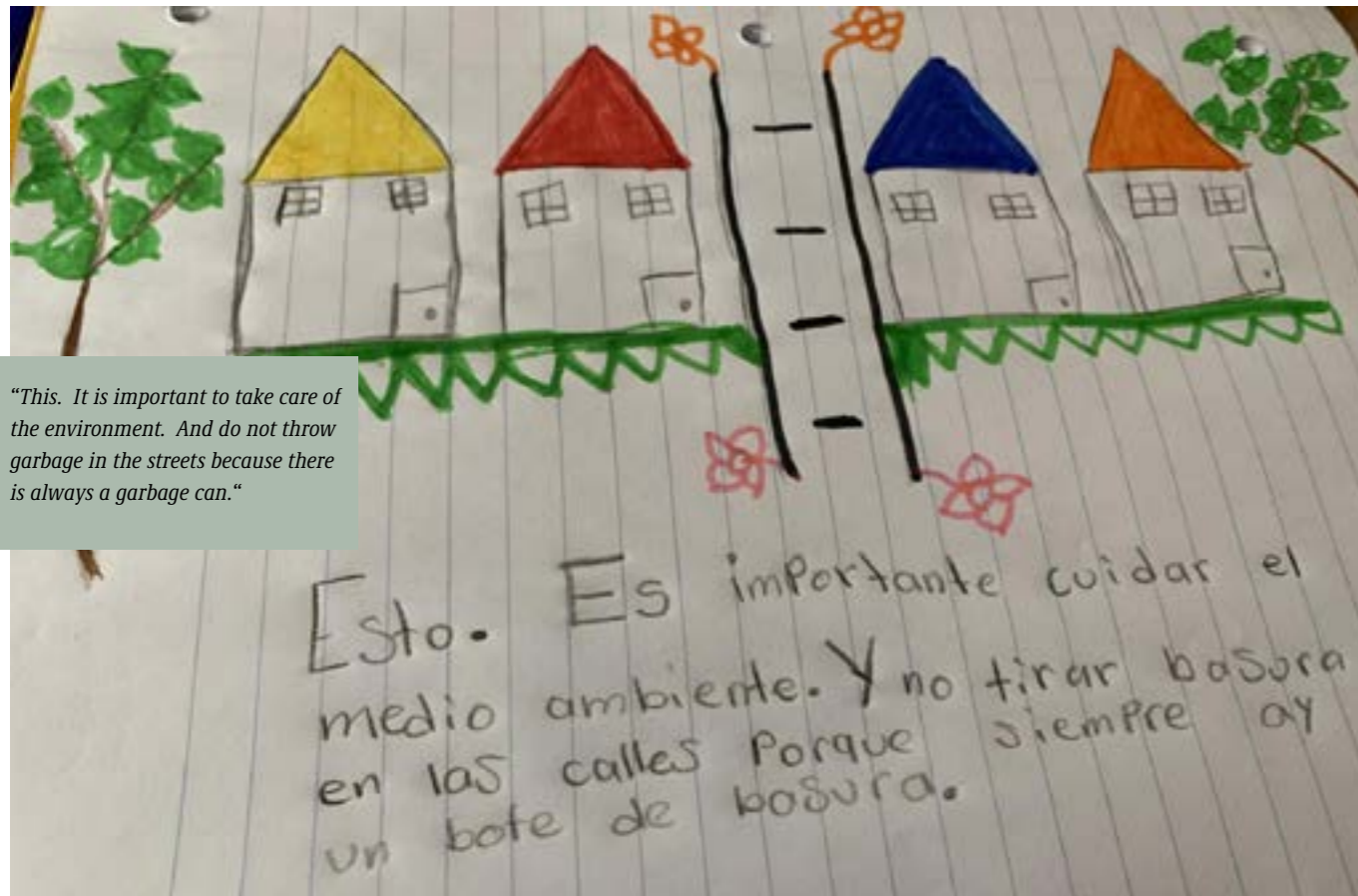


*"Don't litter,
Be kind to the Environment
Wear a mask to be safe
Turn off lights to save energy
No more coal plant"*

“What can we do to take better care of ourselves?”

During our last session of 2020, we asked our middle schoolers to suggest some self-care activities they would recommend other people try. Here are some of their suggestions:

- Listen to music
- Journal
- Do yoga
- Have a dance party by yourself
- Eat healthy
- Read a book to help you spend less time on the internet
- Spend time with your family
- Eat tacos!
- Spend time with a dog or even read to them



“This. It is important to take care of the environment. And do not throw garbage in the streets because there is always a garbage can.”

- Exercise!
- Draw something you like
- Make an art project
- Take a walk
- Bake a cake
- Play Uno online with friends
- Play video games and watch anime (or spend time watching your favorite show)
- Cook something!

We also asked students to suggest some ways that people could take better care of their communities. Here's what they came up with:

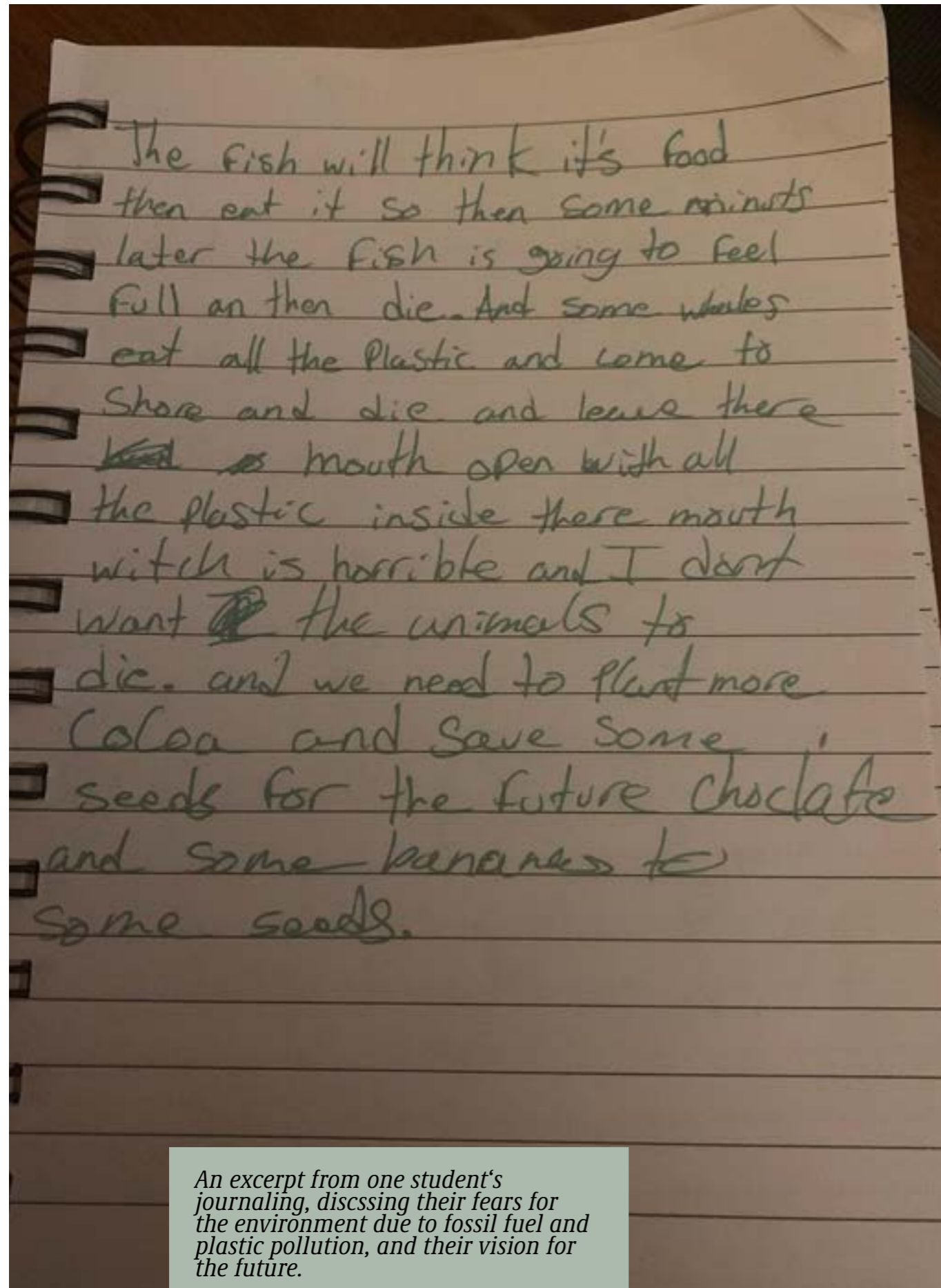
- Wear a mask!
- Be nice to each other
- If you see someone who needs help, help them!
- Help older people get groceries
- Make a group to take care of the earth
- Volunteer in the community
- Check in with your neighbors
- Help people by sharing stuff you don't need (like in my family we donate a lot of things like clothes that don't fit us anymore)
- Clean up after yourself
- Help people in need instead of ignoring them or walking away
- Be respectful
- Don't litter
- Spread love!
- Advocate for each other
- Mutual aid



Above: A reminder to wear a mask and love your community.

Below: A reminder to help the earth, social distance, and wear a mask.





An excerpt from one student's journaling, discussing their fears for the environment due to fossil fuel and plastic pollution, and their vision for the future.

The kids are alright

This year was incredibly difficult for our students. Their community was hit hard by the COVID-19 pandemic. Some had lost loved ones, they were separated from friends and extended family, had to deal with e-learning through spotty wifi, bad electronics, and a loss of hands-on activities. Our students had every reason to be angry, disinterested, and disengaged from our program. And yet, they were the total opposite.

The students in the Y.E.S.S. program gave us their all. They asked questions, participated in discussions, were willing to try new things like poetry or meditation, and did not shy away from difficult conversations.

They voiced their concerns about our country's leadership, about their frustration with adults who refused to follow COVID guidelines, about being tired from computers and missing their friends. Their compassion showed in spades when they learned about environmental justice issues in Lake County, many creating artwork trying to educate others about dangerous coal ash pollution.

In planning this program, we hoped to provide a space for students to build socio-emotional skills and have casual interaction. We explored what it means to take care of ourselves, what it means to take care of others, and what it means to take care of the earth. But mostly, we were reminded of what we already knew: this next generation is the best one yet. Their compassion, sense of justice, goofiness, ingenuity, and creativity will build something greater than we could ever imagine. We just have to give them the floor.



To learn more about Brushwood Center's It's
A W.I.N. Program, visit brushwoodcenter.org

To learn more about Family Service of Lake
County's programs, visit famservice.org

