

Here, two high school students worked on the VOICE trait as they wrote these *this I believe...* essays, which were inspired by research on the ocean and NPR's *This I Believe...* podcasts.

Read each essay, then with a partner discuss where each writer showed strength with the voice trait. Ask, "Where might the writers still improve their voice, if they were to revise their essays further?"

What is VOICE in writing?

- The writer shows *emotion* and *passion* about the topic
- The writer sets a *mood* for the reader
- The writer's *tone* demonstrates his/her attitude towards the topic
- Different *perspectives* are considered and/or explored
- The writing sounds *conversational*

Dolphin Slaughter

by Cody, tenth grade writer

I believe that the dolphin slaughter in Japan goes far beyond animal cruelty. In Taiji, Japan, the emperor allows a small group of fisherman to butcher 20,000 dolphins between the months of September and April each year. Some even do this illegally. This slaughter is called *Dolphin Drive Hunts*. The fisherman panic and confuse dolphins by loud banging, then herd them by the hundreds into shallow coves, and butcher them one by one.

You can hear the dolphins shriek and call out for one another while being dragged in the rusty boats by chains and spears. After capture, the dolphins are dragged to cement slabs, where their throats get sliced, and are left there to suffocate. School children walk by as all of this is going on as if nothing was happening at all. They stand and watch as the dolphins fight for air and try to call but can't because their vocals have been cut in two. They watch them as they curl up and do everything in their power to survive, yet the men show no mercy for them whatsoever.

Dolphins are highly intelligent, aware, sentient, and emotional mammals with closely bonded social lives. Sounds a lot like humans, doesn't it? They aren't too much different than us. So what gives us the right to do this to them? We aren't in need of meat from dolphins, and even if that was the case, why kill them in such a cruel manner?

Japan states that the *Dolphin Drive Hunts* are positive because it is "pest control." They also state that dolphin is the main ingredient in pet food. Many Japanese are unaware of this because the government tries to hide it; therefore, they know they are guilty of something.

These hunts have been universally condemned by marine experts around the world as brutal, inhumane, and unsustainable, but pleas to stop them have fallen on deaf ears. Together we can do something to stop this. Together we MUST do something to stop this, because this, I believe, is far beyond animal cruelty.

A Blue Wasteland

by Sara, eleventh grade writer

As you look onto the horizon and see a brilliant sunset reflecting off and endless sea, it can be breathtaking. But look underneath the surface and you may find that "breathtaking" doesn't even begin to describe the tragedies occurring below. This, I believe, is a world crisis, since our oceans cover 75% of our earth.

Every year tons upon tons of garbage is dumped into our oceans, much of it containing poisonous metals and chemicals, plastics, non-biodegradable products, hazardous materials such as medical waste and sewage.

Most of these plastics get caught in the blow holes and gills of whales, dolphins, and fish, potentially suffocating them to death. Birds also end up choking when they accidentally ingest small plastic parts.

The medical wastes that are tossed into the seas can carry traces of diseases such as Hepatitis and AIDS, which swimmers and surfers can catch. When the sea life ingests hazardous materials and chemicals, they either a) die off immediately, or b) carry it in their systems where other sea life or humans can die from eating the contaminated seafood. The pollution of the ocean directly affects the sea life and indirectly affects humans. At the rate it's going, I wouldn't be surprised if the pollution started directly affecting us now.

It pains me to know how careless people are towards our oceans, sea life, and Mother Earth in general. There are simple ways to solve this problem, like swapping out plastic bags for biodegradable bags made out of recycled paper products. We also need to do our own individual part in solving this ocean crisis. Recycle every bit of trash that is recyclable (this reduces the possibility of it ending up in the ocean). Recycling also takes less energy, thus less carbon emissions are released into the air. Pick up any trash you find on the shores, even if it's not yours, and do your part to make sure it doesn't get in the water.

These little actions make such a big difference if we're all in this together. And that's one step ahead to saving our oceans. This is our planet, our home, and all of nature depends on us to take care of it.