

Student: Asher Dean  
Teacher: Jennifer Martinez, 4<sup>th</sup> Grade  
Principal: Deborah Branchell  
School: Arroyos del Norte Elementary  
405 Hondo Seco Road  
Arroyo Seco, NM 87514

I heard a story once about “horny toads” from my mother. How she used to catch so many they filled a shoebox. And my grandfather told me about the Lobo’s howl. Both of these animals are rare or endangered now and I have not found one myself. I hope one day to tell my own children about the animals I experience in the forests of New Mexico. Tadpoles, horned owls, fence-tail lizards, trout, coyotes and bats. We hike through the forest into the Rio Grande gorge and I know it is magic. The beauty of it all is more than enchanting, it takes my breath away, or brings me back to it in a way. I feel like Brian from my book, Hatchet, when I spend time in the wilderness and I return to a place of quietness and respect for nature.

Sometimes when I go fishing I catch rainbow trout in the glimmering Red River. I see Rio Grande Chirping Frogs hopping along the riverbank. When I hike in the Taos Ski Valley I see marmots by Williams Lake, 11,000 feet into the deep blue sky. I am stunned when I explore Fossil Hill and discover the fossils of the sea creatures that used to live in New Mexico. It is amazing how a million years ago the New Mexico forests used to be seaweed under the ocean. I see Red Tailed Hawks near the Carson National Forest swooping down to catch little creatures to bring home for their babies. I see Stink Beetles burying their head in the trail near my home in Llano Quemado. I watch lizards climb the trees and scurry off into the wilderness. In Bandalier, I explore the cave the Native Americans used to live in. I can see where the fire burnt the top of the cave and there is a kiva hole to stick my head out of. Going down the 10-foot ladder it scares me and I respect the rich culture that came before me, their fearlessness.

We must keep this beautiful forest natural and unharmed because the animals deserve a home, deserve not to be hurt. The people of this Land of Enchantment deserve the clean air the aspen, ponderosa pine and pinon trees help make. My friends deserve the chance to swim in clear rivers and discover the secrets of our wilderness. When I lie in my bed and dream about my future, I see myself as an entomologist. I want to discover all the insects, arthropods and arachnids in New Mexico. If we protect our open spaces and wild areas then these creatures will still be there for discovery, for hope and for awesomeness.