



Shelby O'Neil
Founder, Jr. Ocean Guardians

Guest author Shelby O'Neil is a 16 year old high school junior in a small agricultural community in California, about 40 minutes from the ocean. She founded Jr. Ocean Guardians to help educate lower grade level children on plastic pollution and recycling and started the “No Straw November” movement, which has gained a worldwide following. Visit jroceanguardians.org to learn more about Shelby and to take the “No Straw November” pledge.

I am often asked why I “give up” my precious teenage weekends and swap them out for picking up trash on random beaches. I am also posed with the question of why I spend weekday afternoons talking to young school children about plastic pollution. The answer is simple: change will not happen unless we light a spark within as many people as possible, and every beach clean-up that removes plastic pollution from the shore, and every school presentation educating students that plastics are polluting our oceans, brings us one step closer to long-lasting change. This is why I decided to start the *No Straw November* campaign - to give not only future generations, but people all over the world, an opportunity to make a change.

No Straw November is a pledge to refuse single-use plastic straws during the entire month. In addition to the pledge, participants also record how many times they were offered, and refused, a single-use plastic straw. By recording the number of single-use plastic straws offered and refused, they will learn first-hand just how prevalent the issue is and the impact one person can have. Recent studies estimate that by 2050, there will be more plastic in the ocean than fish. Although this is a scary thought, what’s scarier is the massive lack of education behind the impacts of plastic pollution. *No Straw November* is not only interactive, but it also provides an opportunity to help people start understanding the need to eliminate single-use straws and how they can make one small change that will have a large positive impact on our oceans and planet.

Educating children on the problem of plastic pollution and inspiring the next eco-friendly generation, who will bring much-needed political and social change in the future, is a key mission of Jr. Ocean Guardians. Through *No Straw November*, we hope to inspire them and instill a desire to help better this earth. To teach them, children are provided with an activity book that helps make the topic of plastic pollution relatable and easy to understand. Fellow teenage ambassadors and I also spread the word from classroom to classroom and troop to troop.



Jr. Ocean Guardians believes that the golden trait younger school children possess is their voice. They have the confidence to ask a waiter for “no straw”. They grasp the idea that if they walk or ride their bike they can help give earth a well-deserved break. They understand that their actions could potentially help and or hurt our planet. And when the younger generation grows up understanding and embracing this change, the world will be left better than how they found it.

We need role models who embrace these problems and openly talk about the issues – role models who have the power to not only bring social change, but political change as well. I want the generation behind me to grow up with knowledge of why the environment is important so that when it comes time for them to vote, they understand to put our planet first. Role models may come in all shapes and sizes, but the one thing they all have in common is the opportunity to empower the future generation. My hope is that we can rally together and all become role models for the next generation and fight plastic pollution together.

Last updated July 2, 2018



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