

**Grand Prize Winner Grades 9-12:**

**Student:** Sura Anna Enkin Lewis

**Prize:** \$3,000 for student and \$1,000 for Department/Classroom of Teacher

**City:** Winnipeg, MB

A lack of clean water has been an issue that many Indigenous communities have suffered from for years but this issue finally became more recognized when Autumn Peltier's activism was internationally acknowledged. At only 13 years old, the Indigenous water protector from Wikwemikong First Nation in Northern Ontario spoke to the United Nations, calling them to action to protect the water of the Earth. Aligned with her traditions, she spoke of water as a living being deserving of human rights. The impact of her powerful words was multifaceted. She brought to light the struggles of numerous First Nations in Canada with water. Despite the many communities that are forced to boil water to drink it, people still look at Canada as flawless in terms of human rights. Peltier raised awareness for this issue in 2018 sparking many more Canadians to care about it. She was also a key player in the activism against the Trans Mountain Pipeline expansion and spoke to Prime Minister Trudeau at the end of 2017 thus impacting the way the situation was dealt with this year.

Peltier holds her Anishinabe identity close to her heart and her culture is the foundation of her activism. Through her speech to the United Nations, she has helped pave the path for the validation of Indigenous perspectives in Canada. For years, Indigenous voices have been suppressed and ignored. Peltier fearlessly pleaded her case using her worldview despite contradictions with western views such as considering water as a living person. She is opening the minds of Canadians to learn from Indigenous world views and respect them.

Autumn Peltier is an inspiring young woman whose activism sparked discussion for solutions to the water crisis in Canada through an Indigenous perspective.