

## An 8-year-old's Pledge of Allegiance to the Earth By: Ari Nessel



Last school year, my wife Rebecca received an email from my 8-year-old son, Jonah's, teacher that he wasn't doing the pledge of allegiance. Jonah, it seems, asked his teacher if he could speak with him about it. Jonah told him he preferred pledging his allegiance to the earth (note: he did all of this without our knowledge). So, he and his teacher came up with a different pledge that would honor his values and beliefs. The conversation was brought up in the class to discuss the next day. The class then had a vote as to which pledge resonated with them most. Two thirds of the class preferred to also change their morning recitation to this more all-encompassing new pledge.

As many people now know, 49ers quarterback Colin Kaepernick is similarly being true to himself by sitting down while the United States national anthem is played, a ritual he doesn't believe honors his values. I told Jonah about what was going on and all of the negative publicity and threats Colin is receiving. In response, he wrote [this letter](#) to Mr. Kaeperick and included an earth flag to go along with it (thank you Pancho!). In case you cannot read what he wrote (his handwriting takes after mine):

*"Dear Colin Kaepernick, you are my idol. I love that you are vegan. My name is Jonah and I am 9 years old. In my letter is a world flag. I hope you like it. P.S. Can I have an autograph? Your biggest fan, Jonah Nessel. P.S. I sat down in my class and now we have a world flag we pledge allegiance to instead."*

What is right frequently isn't popular and what is popular frequently isn't right. Seeking to follow what is just, moral or righteous, rather than follow the status quo, is a prerequisite for societal and moral progress. Both Jonah and Colin chose to question the rituals that have been unquestioningly passed on to them and instead speak truth to power. Maybe we can replace our preoccupation with patriotism with a broader loyalty.

With that, I look to Jonah's class pledge of allegiance as guidance:

***"I pledge allegiance to the Earth and all the life which it supports.  
One planet, in our care, irreplaceable, with sustenance and respect for all."***

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*Ari Nessel is a father of two young boys and a member of the [Cubs Community](#). We would love to feature similar inspirational stories of parents and/or children from this community who are living their values, whether it's a story of kindness, gratitude, generosity, service, compassion, empathy, etc. If you have any recent experiences from your family life that you feel moved to share, please [contact the editors team](#) -- we'd love to hear from you!*