



The People and Philosophy behind our National Parks: A Biographical Curriculum Unit

Guide for Curriculum Unit 90.03.03

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My curriculum unit discusses the contributions of some of the people whose philosophies helped shape the National Park Service. I have incorporated the “people” element into the realm of environmental science. This humanizes the subject, and as an English teacher I have found this an effective way to reach my students. This unit also shows the respect and admiration for our earth that led to the development of the National Park Service. I focus on the following individuals: Ralph Waldo Emerson, Henry David Thoreau, John Muir, Theodore Roosevelt, Gifford Pinchot, Aldo Leopold, and Edward Abbey. In addition to shaping our thoughts on wilderness and land preservation, these people shaped American politics and literature, thereby fitting into any high school History and American Literature curriculum. This unit discusses the interaction between American literature, politics, and the environmental movement. It also explores the changing concept of wilderness and the development of the National Park Service. It tries to define the terms “utilitarianism,” “conservation,” and “preservation,” and it gives a biographical sketch of the key people who helped shape these terms. This unit could also be team taught with a Science and English teacher, and could then include the geology and plant life of the areas. It is my hope that students will develop an interest in local parks and landmarks by “discovering” their connection to the National Park System.

(Recommended for American Literature, grades 10-12, National Parks, Ecology, and Environmental Science, grades 9-12)

Key Words

Ecology Environmental Science General Parks U.S. National

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