



Curriculum Units by Fellows of the Yale-New Haven Teachers Institute
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Introducing Children To National Parks

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All children love parks—They love playing in them—the park connotes an enjoyable experience to them. I'd like to take this natural love for the outdoors and use it to foster an interest and concern for *all* national parks, in a unit that would introduce children to the history and location of America's National Parks.

This unit will explain what a National Park is—how did it get to be one—and just where are they located, so that the children will have an historical starting point.

Many facets of education can be interwoven into a study of National Parks. The skills of inferencing, sequencing and fact-finding would be utilized in the reading of the historical accounts of the first man to explore the parks. Map skills would definitely be an outcome of the unit. Children could do location lessons—plotting the locales of various park sites, using Latitude and Longitude. Math skills also could be incorporated in the unit with lessons on mileage, sizes of park areas, and a Time Line of historical happenings. This unit would be an on-going one through the school year as each different area of the United States is introduced and studied.

There are not many books written about National Parks for children, so a great asset to teaching this unit will be Visual Aids. The beauty of the Parks needs to be seen. As Steward Udall, the former Secretary of Interior of the United States has written, "Yellowstone and Grand Teton National Park are in a special sense American Heartlands. They reveal the full majesty and beauty of our country, the scope and reach of it, the awesome forces that have shaped it . . . Amid these splendid park scapes we can fill our Lungs and our Eyes and our Hearts."

Inner city children need to see and learn about this beautiful aspect of our country, and what better way than through videos and picture books? Reader's Digest has made a set of 3 videos, *Yellowstone*, *Yosemite*, and *The Grand Canyon*, which would be a wonderful way to introduce children to the vastness and beauty of these three historical areas.

The National Park Service itself prints handbooks about the natural and historical places which they administer. This series would be a useful teaching tool, as each one has an historical perspective and is filled with drawings and photographs.

An important concept to be included in these lessons is the "idea" behind the formation of national parks—that these areas are set aside for the benefit and enjoyment of "all" people.

Reading the accounts of the beginnings of the national parks includes a wealth of reading skills, such as cause and effect, gleaning main ideas, and using deductive skills such as inferencing. Learning the past history will give the children an idea of how important the present and future of national parks is to be maintained. The knowledge that those first trappers who set eyes on the wonders of the geysers and the vastness of the wilderness could have chosen to go the “expansion and development” route of the west traveling pioneers of 1800’s is a lesson children must learn. They will see that these men devised the creative idea of “no private ownership”—that these beautiful places should be protected in their natural states for the use and enjoyment of all people and generations to come.

The Historical Record will show that later this idea was introduced by William Clagett, Congressman from Montana, in a bill which passed January 30, 1872; and on March 1st, 1872, President Ulysses S. Grant signed it, so Yellowstone National Park became the first National Park in our Nation—and first in the world!

Although there are not many books for children to read about the history of National Parks, one very good one has been published by the National Historical Society—the American History—Illustrated Series, which children would enjoy. In June, 1976, an article titled *The Country Just Above Hell* was written by Peggy Robbins in which she relates the history of Yellowstone from the Indians and the first writer, a fur trader and clerk for The American Fur Company, named Warren Angus Ferris, to President Theodore Roosevelt who toured Yellowstone on horseback in 1903. Her article chronicles the “life of Yellowstone” from the Indian tribes who, she informs, gave this name to Yellowstone after they heard of the white man’s religion; they surmised this must be “just above Hell”. She traces the exploration of the park through the Lewis and Clark expedition of 1806 when they first heard of “a great lake and other wonders”.

Children would be enthralled by the adventures of John Colter, the first known white man to have entered Yellowstone. A very stimulating creative writing lesson could be gleaned from this story. The children could be asked to write about the feelings they might have had if they had accompanied Colter on his expedition.

Another visitor and great yarn spinner about Yellowstone was Jim Bridger, who between 1822 and the 1840’s became the best known hunter and guide in the West. Children would enjoy reading about his travels and the fact that he was only 18 when he first began hunting and trapping. He learned to speak 11 Indian languages and traveled for 3 years in Yellowstone country before returning to St. Louis to relate his adventures. His tales about these marvelous wonders were called “too absurd to print”. An editorial branded his stories as “lies”. In 1859, he returned to guide a small military expedition, under the command of Captain William Reynolds, to explore Yellowstone but was held back by an extremely heavy early snow.

Finally, in 1869, three Montana men—David Folsom, Charles Cook, and William Peterson—decided to explore Yellowstone themselves. This 3-man exploring party made the first successful exploration of the area. They returned safely to Montana with accounts of the beautiful places they had been. Because of these written accounts, Jim Badger’s stories were listened to a little more.

Another group explored the area in 1870—a military expedition of Washburn, Langford and Doane. They first charted and named Old Faithful. It so fascinated the members of the expedition that they camped nearby and marveled at it for an entire day. It was in this party that a Judge, Cornelius Hedges, first insisted that the Yellowstone region should not be opened to private ownership but should be “protected” in its natural state by the government so that all people could enjoy its wonders. The accounts and sketches of the members of this expedition brought forth the first known authentic map of Yellowstone Lake. These accounts stirred great interest in this unique part of America.

After learning these facts, another useful teaching device is the use of a Time Line. Children can get an idea of the time it had taken for the exploration and establishment of the parks through to the laws enacted to protect them. Because this idea of a national preserve was totally new—no one had any experience in the administration and development of such a property, in August of 1886 it came under the care of the U.S. Army and was there for 30 years.

The National Park Service was created in 1916, and then profession is took over the maintenance and care of the Parks. Before this, no real system existed for the governance of these areas; now this agency became the primary Federal entity whose aim would be to preserve these significant natural and cultural resources. Because each of the national parks has its own history, many social studies lessons could include their study.

The Yellowstone Act (1872), which had set aside two million (2,000,000) acres of public land in Wyoming and Montana from settlement, occupancy, or sale and declared them as public grounds for the benefit and enjoyment of the people, would be a good starting point for children. They could then trace the expansion of this idea that land in its “natural condition” was worth preserving and follow the growth of the National Parks system in the U.S.

Another aspect to be shown is that, along with the idea of “preserving” naturally followed the concern for “conserving”. This conservation attitude is also an important one for children to realize and to be made aware of its continuing growth as people changed their attitudes toward nature. Roderick Nash, author of *Wilderness and the American Mind*, points out “that wilderness was the basic ingredient of American civilization.” He adds that a large portion of the energies of early civilizations was directed at defeating the wilderness in nature and controlling it in human nature. But he contends that, as America matured, thoughts about the environment changed. Americans began to see wilderness as an asset rather than a liability. He surmised “Civilization created wilderness.” Nash reminds us that to the Indian nomadic hunter-gatherers like the Sioux, “it made no sense to distinguish wilderness from civilization.” The Pioneers obsession was to clear the land and bring light into darkness—the early pioneer did not feel at home in the wilderness. Their attitudes were represented by the many military terms they used in describing their condition of “conquering”, vanquishing, or “struggling” with Nature to convert it into a prosperous civilization.

Along with the lessons taught about the Pilgrims and the settling of America, it could be shown that the Pilgrims perceived the idea of wilderness as evil and fearsome. Yet they celebrated westward expansion as one of their great achievements and an evidence of God’s blessing that wild country should become fruitful and civilized.

The old colonial and pioneering emphasis on exploitation of the resources was giving way to an awareness of the beauty and wonder of Nature. Roderick Nash wrote in *The American Invention of National Parks* of four principal factors that helped bring about these changing viewpoints: “our unique experience with nature on the American continent, our democratic ideals, our vast public domain, and our affluent society.”

Fortunately, the ideas and Opinions of the Washburn-Langford-Doane Expedition of 1870, advocating that there be no private ownership of that region, won political support and were written into law. These ideals helped to support the establishment of the National Park Service which today includes the consolidation of national parks, national monuments, historical sites, national military parks, eleven national cemeteries and thirty “affiliated areas”— properties that receive technical or financial assistance according to the legislative or cooperative agreements defining their relationship with the Service. These “affiliated areas” include such places as the Boston African American National Historical Site, Massachusetts; The Mormon Pioneer Historical Trail, Illinois to Utah; and the Ice Age National Scientific Reserve in Wisconsin.

The next great scenic national parks after Yellowstone—Sequoia, General Grant and Yosemite, all in California, were not established until 1890. Then in the Forest Reserve Act of 1891, Congress separated the idea of forest conservation from the national park idea. By 1916, the National Park Service had fourteen national parks comprising 4,750,000 acres, and 159 national forests containing more than 150,000,000 acres.

As the unit progresses to the study of Yosemite, it will expose children to the man who has been called the “father” of National Parks, John Muir. He believed from his first sight of it that Yosemite was one of the most important places on Earth. This fact becomes evident while reading the book he wrote about it, *The Yosemite*, published by the Sierra Club, which he founded in 1892 to begin his legislative activities to save the lands with which he had fallen in love. This book, I feel, could be used with fifth graders along with teacher guidance and insights.

A Reading Social Studies lesson could instigate discussions and inferences by posing questions to the students such as: “What do you think John Muir felt when he first came to Yosemite?”; “How did these feelings help him to rise to preservative actions?”; and/or “What did you feel as you read a specific section?”. Muir’s descriptions of his adventures in the years he spent traveling the Yosemite Valley would be an exciting introduction to use with children. The essays of the *Approach To The Valley* are so clearly and graphically written that you feel you are entering it with him. His adventures in the snow and the earthquakes would be most interesting to young readers. Some of the essays could be excerpted and discussed with the class and used as a writing lesson to stimulate thoughts about national parks and the ideas of preservation and conservation.

Along with John Muir, an important man to consider in the history of parks is Frederick Law Olmsted, who, as David Brower contends, in the forward to *The Yosemite*, should be called “Grandfather of National Parks.” Olmsted had worked to establish New York’s Central Park and was named Superintendent of Sierra mining estates a year after Yosemite was set aside. He proposed the rights for landscape in the National Park idea. He felt the first requirement is to preserve the natural scenery and restrict within the narrowest limits the necessary accommodation of visitors. Olmsted’s son, Frederick Law Jr., also a noted landscape architect, agreed with his father’s visions and later helped to see them embodied in the writing of the National Park Act of 1916. This Act provided “that the national beauty and wildlife in the national parks were to be used and enjoyed by the public by such means as would leave the landscape unimpaired.” Well into the 20th century, national parks emphasized only the high, rugged, spectacular landforms of the West, and the prevailing feeling was that national parks must begin with worthless land and remain worthless to survive.

According to Barry Macintosh Bureau Historian of the N.P.S., over the years guidelines have been set and refined for the evaluation of national parks. Currently the Park Service maintains Historical Parks should be associated with persons, events or themes of national importance; should encompass structures or features of great intrinsic or representational value; or should contain archeological resources of major scientific consequence. A natural park might be an outstanding or rare example of geologic landform or biotic area, a place of exceptional ecological or geological diversity; a site with a concentrated population of rare plant or animal species or unusually abundant fossil deposits, or an outstandingly scenic area.

Mackintosh asserts that a few places of questionable national significance have been admitted over the years, but as Congress makes the final decisions after hearing recommendations, the wonder is not that the System has fallen short of its ideals, but that it has come so close! In it are a remarkable representation of the nation’s greatest natural and historic places and recreational areas of outstanding attraction.

The reorganization of the National Park System in 1933 began with the Act of Congress, approved by

President Herbert Hoover and used later by President Franklin D. Roosevelt to consolidate all national parks, monuments, cemeteries, and murials under the National Park Service administration. This had major consequences as it charted the assumption of what the National Park System should contain by adding new kinds of areas not previously considered parks or monuments. It increased the System's holdings by adding a dozen natural areas in 10 western states and nearly 50 historical areas in 7 eastern states and the District of Columbia. These new historical areas introduced a degree of diversity that had not existed before and brought out the point that now with parks in all sections of the country, the System was truly "national".

An important component of this unit would be field trips. Children need to visit and see first hand some of the aspects of a National Park area. One area trip could be to the New Haven Green, which has always been the center of the city. Photographs of earlier days could be shown to introduce the pupils to the early uses of the Green and to the reasons why the city fathers in the early part of the 20th century wanted to include it in their Civic Improvement Plan. A plan was commissioned by the committee from Frederick Law Olmsted, the noted Landscape Architect, who recommended that the Green be restored to its former simple rows of trees and that new walkways be formed. He also suggested adopting the policy of excluding forever all structures from the Green except a well-designed monument or music stand. This, he noted, would keep the Green a park to be enjoyed by all people in the city and would ensure that the city's historic center would not be defaced.

A field trip that would delight children and show them the difference between a National Park site and an Historical Site would be to the Salem Maritime National Site. Here students would see the remnants of a seaport which was important during the colonial era. They could visit the Customs House and realize the importance of trade and the taxes to the settlers of the town. They could visit the bonded warehouse and learn how weights and measures were used by the sea captains, and see the way cargoes were measured and stored.

If time allowed, another Massachusetts Historical Site, the Saugus Iron Works, could also be visited. This site consists of buildings and land of the Saugus Iron Works founded in 1647. The industrial buildings are historically accurate reproductions and Rangers are there to conduct a tour. The children would enjoy the workings of the water wheels and the Blacksmith's demonstration of nail making. A filmstrip is shown which would be very informative to young children about the early history of the Iron Works. Both these trips would make history come alive for students.

Although the National Park System is famous for its large natural resource-based places such as the Grand Canyon, there are national park areas in almost every part of the country. These include historical sites and parks dedicated to Native American Indian culture, and military history.

These parks of wonder, beauty and historical significance certainly belong in our school systems as part of the curriculum. They should be reminders to future generations of the importance of the ideals behind their beginnings and the need for concern about their future. Children need to know somewhere wherever you travel in the United States there is a park to offer the chance to experience America's history and the wonders of nature—and, as Robin Winks, Professor of History at Yale University, has stated, "The National Park can aptly be called 'the World's Greatest University' ".

National Parks Time Line

- 1806—Lewis & Clark Expedition
- 1807—John Colter, earliest known white trapper
 - Epic Journey
- 1808—Winter—called “Colter’s Hell”
- 1822—Jim Badger (3 years trapper)
- 1834—Warren Angus Ferris (American Fur Co.)
 - wrote about Firehold Geysers Basin
- 1849—Parks placed under authority of Department of the Interior
- 1859—Capt. William Reynolds
 - Military Expedition
- 1860’s—Folsom, Cook, and Peterson
 - Famous Expedition
- 1864—Yosemite Valley explored
 - U.S. Senator John Conness
- 1864—June 30, President Lincoln signed Bill
- 1870—Washburn, Langford—Doane—expedition
 - First charted and named “Old Faithful”
 - Judge Cornelius Hedges —“idea” of ‘a place set apart for all’
- 1871—Congressmen William Claiborne from Montana introduced National Park Act
- 1872—Passed Senate
 - March 1, President U. S. Grant signed Yellowstone National Park Bill
- 1890—Sequoia National Park, Yosemite, and General Grant
 - Rock Creek Park authorized (D.C.)
- 1916—August 25, President Woodrow Wilson created National Park Service in Dept. of Interior

Sample Lesson

Reading a Time Line

Objectives

1. A Time Line can be helpful in understanding *when* important things happened;
2. A Time Line shows how one happening may lead to another;
3. A Time Line gives a sense of the order in which things took place.

Procedures Distribute mimeoed Time Line and mimeoed questions:
Use Time Line to answer these questions.

1. What does this Time Line show?
2. What happened in 1806?
3. In what year was Capt. Reynolds Expedition?
4. What was important in 1872?
5. How many years before parks came under authority of Dept. of Interior?
6. What year was important for *Yosemite* ?

Materials Mimeoed Time Line and Questions

Sample Lesson

Yosemite National Park

Objectives

1. To acquaint student with location and beauty of Yosemite;
2. To foster discussion of what is a national park;
3. To introduce students to John Muir's book, *The Yosemite* .

Procedures Introduce book to students. Have them read chapter excerpts. Discuss children's reactions to his writings.

Have students write observations gained from readings. Show video of Yosemite.

Questions for Discussion

1. Who was John Muir?
2. Why did he go to California?
3. What were some of his feelings about Yosemite Valley?
4. Do you think having national parks is a good idea? Why?

Materials Needed

1. Book *The Yosemite* —John Muir
2. Video of Yosemite National Park
3. Map of United States

Sample Lesson

Map Lesson on National Park Sites

Objectives Students will be able to:

1. Identify sites of National Parks in contiguous 48 states;
2. Locate Yellowstone, Grand Canyon, and Yosemite by states;
3. Observe numbers of parks in National Park System;
4. Map an imaginary trip to a park site from home in Connecticut.

Procedures Pass out mimeoed map of National Park System.

A. Ask pupils to observe locations of various parks by name and to identify the states in which

they are found.

B. Questions to be asked:

1. Can you estimate number of sites?
2. Locate *Petrified Forest* .
(Why is this included in Park System?)
3. Locate Yellowstone, Grand Canyon, and Yosemite.
Name the states in which they are found.
4. Map out your own trip to a National Park.

Materials Mimeographed maps of National Park Service

The National Park System

(figure available in print form)

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Nash, Roderick. *Wilderness and the American Mind* . 3rd Edition, Yale University Press, New Haven, 1973.

Runte, Alfred. *National Parks, The American Experience* . 2nd Edition, Univ. of Nebraska Press, Lincoln, 1979.

Shullery, Paul. *Mountain Time* . S & S Books, Yellowstone, 1984.

Tejada-Flores. *Yellowstone To Yosemite* . Western Eye Press, Colorado, 1988.

Resources

Booklets : KC Publications Picture Booklets

American History Illustrated Series

June, 1976

The National Park Service

Interpretive Handbooks:

1. *Shaping The System*

Barry Mackintosh-U.S. Dept. of Interior 1985

2. *The Place Where Hell Bubbled Up A History of the First National Park* U.S. Dept. of Interior

3. *History and Prehistory in National Park System* History Division N.P.S. Washington, D. C. 1987

4. *The National Parks Index: 1989* U.S. Dept. of Interior Washington, D. C. 1989

Adventures in Your National Parks

Books For World Explorers

National Geographic Society

Videos : Readers Digest Series:

Grand Canyon —55 min.

Yellowstone —55 min.

Yosemite —55 min.

National Park Service Films and Videos

1. *National Parks: Our Treasured Lands* (1983) 28 min.
2. *Giant Sequoia* (1979) 17 min.
(Sequoia-King Canyon National Park)
3. STONE FOREST (1974) 17 min.
(Petrified Forest National Park)
4. *Shenandoah: The Gift* (1982) 17 min.
(Shenandoah National Park)
5. *Great Sand Dunes* (1980) 15 min.
(Great Sand Dunes National Monument)

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