

## THE BIRTH OF AMERICAN CONSERVATION

### SUBJECT/RECOMMENDED GRADE LEVEL:

Geography (middle school)

U.S. History (high school)

### OVERVIEW

The early work of conservationists, such as John Muir and Theodore Roosevelt, is examined through the use of primary sources, imagery, and consideration of the role ethical principles, personal character and values play in preserving the natural features of the American West.



### LEARNING OBJECTIVES

- Students will analyze perspectives of historical figures toward nature and calls to preserve it.
- Students will evaluate the lasting impact of Roosevelt and Muir on American environmental policy and public consciousness.
- Students will describe how Theodore Roosevelt and John Muir exemplified leadership and character traits, particularly in their commitment to environmental stewardship for the common good.

### INSTRUCTIONAL RESOURCES

- Yosemite Photograph Analysis (one per student group)
- Colored markers (one per student)
- Inquiry Round Up Strategy Guide (for teacher reference)
- National Parks WPA Poster set (one per group)
- Sticky notes (one pad per group)
- Look, Sort, Label, Connect Strategy Guide (for teacher reference)
- "Stewards of the West" Powerpoint presentation
- Primary Source Excerpts (one copy per student)
- "Man in the Arena" Epitaph Assessment Task (one per student)

### ESSENTIAL QUESTION

What makes something valuable?



## SUPPORTING QUESTIONS

- How do individuals make a difference in their communities?
- To what extent do citizens have a duty to protect their environment?
- In what ways do individuals inspire ethical principles in others?

## THE 5-E LESSON FORMAT

The steps of a "5E lesson" are: Engage, Explore, Explain, Elaborate, and Evaluate. This model encourages active student learning by first sparking interest, then allowing student-centered exploration, followed by teacher-led explanation, further application of new understandings by students, and finally assessment of understanding.

## ENGAGEMENT

*The "Engagement" phase is designed to capture students' attention with relevant questions, real-world scenarios, or brief interactive experiences to activate prior knowledge and elicit curiosity about the topic.*

1. Introduce the lesson by providing each group of 3-4 students with a photograph of Muir and Theodore Roosevelt in Yosemite.
2. Without identifying the individuals, location or time period, ask groups to take five minutes to brainstorm all questions that come to mind when examining this photograph, with each student jotting down as many questions as possible in the space surrounding the photograph. Tips: Large poster paper is helpful for this brainstorming engagement phase, if available. Instructions for this "Inquiry Round Up" strategy is included for teacher reference.
3. After five minutes, ask students to discuss their questions and highlight the ones they believe to be most important to pursue.
4. Conduct a brief discussion to preview the topic of the lesson:  
"What do you see in this picture?"  
"Why do places like this exist? Who decided they should be protected?"  
"Imagine a world without such places. How would that be different?"
6. Introduce the lesson's topic by explaining that students will be exploring the character and leadership of two pivotal figures in American history who profoundly shaped our understanding of nature and conservation- Theodore Roosevelt and John Muir.

## EXPLORATION

*The "Exploration" phase provides students with opportunities to work collaboratively through hands-on investigations actively exploring a concept, gathering information data, and making observations from evidence.*

1. Provide student groups with a set of posters created by the National Parks Service. Ask groups to take 3 minutes to discuss common features among the posters, using the "Look, Sort, Label, Connect" strategy (guide for teacher included).
2. Invite groups to share the titles of categories they developed during the exercise. What new questions arise from the set of images?

# STEWARDS OF THE WEST



3. Challenge groups to re-classify the same set of posters, identifying new ways to compare similarities and differences.
4. After this deeper dive into the posters' imagery and intended messages, ask students to generate a list of purposes for national parks and natural public places. Pose the essential and supporting questions to guide student thinking through the remainder of the lesson.

## EXPLANATION

*During this phase, the teacher provides in-depth explanations and clarifies key concepts related to the topic, often incorporating student-generated observations from the exploration phase.*

1. Using the "Stewards of the West" presentation, guide students through an overview of the backgrounds and goals of both Muir and Roosevelt as they relate to conserving America's natural environments.
2. Pause frequently to engage students in brief discussions as they learn more about each man's interests, concerns, and accomplishments.
3. Challenge students to occasionally address the supporting questions and explain how their own opinions and understandings might be developing.

## EXPAND

*Students during the "Expand" phase are expected to return to partnerships or group collaborations, as they apply their deeper understanding of the topic, making connections and formulating answers to essential and supporting questions.*

1. Distribute excerpts from the writings and speeches of John Muir and Theodore Roosevelt. Provide time for groups to read and share their thoughts on the four excerpts.
2. Circulate among groups, providing assistance and prompting deeper analysis. What seems to be each man's attitude toward nature? What are similarities and differences in their perspectives?
3. Ask groups to create a graphic organizer of character traits they would attribute to Muir and Roosevelt. A basic Venn diagram is one possible graphic organizer; however, encourage groups to use other formats, such as a "spider" map or develop their own original structure.
4. Engage students in a brief discussion, using the following suggestions:
  - How did each man demonstrate leadership through their words and actions regarding the environment?
  - What does "stewardship of the natural environment for the common good" mean to you based on these readings? How did Roosevelt and Muir embody this idea?
  - How might their personal experiences have shaped their views and values?

## EVALUATION

*The "Evaluation" phase assesses individual student learning, which can be achieved through multiple formats beyond traditional tests or quizzes. For example, questioning, discussion, creative products, etc. can be effectively used to gauge comprehension.*

1. Inform students that they will be working independently to demonstrate their understanding of how an individual's ethics and values can serve as a powerful role models to bring meaningful change in society.
2. Read together the "Man in the Arena" speech and ensure that students understand the basic gist of Roosevelt's message. How might each man's work meet the description of the "man in the arena?"
3. Provide time for students to compose a short epitaph to either John Muir or Theodore Roosevelt, following the directions on the assessment task.
4. If time permits, invite volunteers to share their epitaphs with the class.

## OPTIONAL: EXTENSIONS

1. Future podcasters or filmmakers? Check out the podcast about Theodore Roosevelt, produced by the National Cowboy and Western Heritage Museum (<https://nationalcowboymuseum.org/blog/this-week-in-the-west-episode-10-theodore-roosevelt/>). Invite students to imagine themselves as a podcaster and create a set of interview questions OR create a storyboard of key events representing the values and endeavors of Muir's commitment to conservationism.
2. Encourage interested students to research recent efforts by different conservatist groups in the West, such as the Sierra Club. What are contemporary concerns and how are they being addressed by communities or government policies?
2. Conduct an interview with an adult, inquiring about their perceptions of environmental issues and what they believe should be the responsibility of individuals or government to the environment.

## OKLAHOMA STATE ACADEMIC STANDARDS FOR SOCIAL STUDIES

- 6.2.3. A. Answer geographic questions and conduct investigations by acquiring, organizing, and interpreting information about the modern world and historical events.
- 6.3.1. A. Paraphrase the main idea and cite evidence from primary and secondary sources; provide an accurate summary of a source distinct from prior knowledge or opinion.
- 6.4.4 Identify environmental challenges and explain how they can impact a region.
- 6.4.5 Evaluate the need to preserve resources, climate, and wildlife by creating public awareness, including the efforts of eco-tourism.
- 6.4.6 Describe the role of citizens as responsible stewards of natural resources and the environment (e.g., recycling campaigns, water conservation, national parks, protection of wildlife preserves).
- USH.2.3 Demonstrate a mastery of geographic concepts and the use of geographic tools to understand the impact of geography on the past and present.
- C. Evaluate the extent to which political and economic decisions have had significant impact on human and physical environments of various places and regions.
- USH 2.1 A. Explain how the United States was transformed from an agrarian to an increasingly industrial, urbanized society and how this transformation created both new economic opportunities, as well as societal problems.

## NATIONAL STANDARDS FOR SOCIAL STUDIES

D2.Civ.10.6-8. Explain the relevance of personal interests and perspectives, civic virtues, and democratic principles when people address issues and problems in government and civil society.

D2.Civ.11.9-12. Evaluate multiple procedures for making governmental decisions at the local, state, national, and international levels in terms of the civic purposes achieved.

D2.Civ.14.6-8. Compare historical and contemporary means of changing societies, and promoting the common good.

D2.Geo.5.9-12. Evaluate how political and economic decisions throughout time have influenced cultural and environmental characteristics of various places and regions.

D2.Geo.6.6-8. Explain how the physical and human characteristics of places and regions are connected to human identities and cultures.

D2.Geo.9.6-8. Evaluate the influences of long-term human- induced environmental change on spatial patterns of conflict and cooperation.

D2.His.3.6-8. Use questions generated about individuals and groups to analyze why they, and the developments they shaped, are seen as historically significant.

D2.His.4.9-12. Analyze complex and interacting factors that influenced the perspectives of people during different historical eras.

D2.His.5.9-12. Analyze how historical contexts shaped and continue to shape people's perspectives.

D2.His.12.6-8. Use questions generated about multiple historical sources to identify further areas of inquiry and additional sources.

## TALKING POINTS FOR THE TEACHER

*John Muir and Theodore Roosevelt were both instrumental figures in the American conservation movement, though they approached it from different philosophies. A discussion of their character traits, ethical principles and values related to their conservation efforts might include:*

John Muir	Theodore Roosevelt
Character Traits	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Dedicated:</b> Muir had a profound respect for nature and committed his life to its preservation.</li> <li>• <b>Integrity:</b> He was true to his beliefs, acting consistently with his conviction that wilderness should be protected.</li> <li>• <b>Civic Minded:</b> He was a tireless writer and campaigner, influencing public policy.</li> <li>• <b>Observant:</b> Muir also possessed a keen eye for scientific detail, studying botany and geology.</li> <li>• <b>Resilient:</b> He endured challenging conditions in harsh natural environments.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Decisive:</b> Roosevelt was known for his "bullishness" and willingness to take significant action to protect natural resources.</li> <li>• <b>Practical:</b> His conservation efforts were also motivated by practical concerns about resource management and the well-being of the nation.</li> <li>• <b>Farsighted:</b> He understood the long-term implications of resource depletion and the need for sustainable practices.</li> <li>• <b>Leadership:</b> He used his position to establish numerous national parks, forests, and wildlife refuges, significantly expanding protected lands.</li> </ul>
Ethical Principles	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Ecocentrism:</b> Muir believed that nature had intrinsic value, meaning it was valuable for its own sake, not just for human use.</li> <li>• <b>Preservationism:</b> His core principle was to protect wilderness, aiming to keep it in its pristine, original state.</li> <li>• <b>Moral Duty:</b> Muir viewed the natural world as sacred, making its protection a moral imperative, almost a "war" between right and wrong.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Conservationism:</b> Roosevelt believed in the management of natural resources to ensure their sustainable use for the benefit of present and future generations.</li> <li>• <b>Stewardship:</b> He saw it as a patriotic duty to manage and protect natural resources, considering them as assets to be passed on.</li> <li>• <b>Responsibility:</b> He believed that the current generation must ensure that future generations will have access to abundant natural resources.</li> </ul>
Values	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Wilderness:</b> Muir deeply valued untouched places as essential for human well-being and rejuvenation.</li> <li>• <b>Natural Beauty:</b> He found beauty in nature and believed in preserving it for its aesthetic powers.</li> <li>• <b>Education:</b> Muir valued the power of the public to not merely understand the importance of but capable of protecting it.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Strength/Prosperity:</b> Roosevelt linked conservation directly to the strength and continuance of the nation, seeing it as fundamental to the country's economic growth.</li> <li>• <b>Public Good:</b> He believed that natural resources should be preserved "for the use and benefit of our people as a whole," emphasizing broad access.</li> <li>• <b>Efficiency:</b> Roosevelt valued the application of scientific principles to manage forests, water, and other resources effectively.</li> </ul>