

Seventh Through Ninth Grade

John Muir in Yosemite

Unit Concept: *John Muir's vision led to the establishment of the National Park System.*

Objective: In at least two class sessions, students will explore different ways to value the environment and will participate in a simulation of a historical debate to protect Yosemite as a National Park.

Preparation: 1. Make copies of the Background Information and the Debate Cards. Make an overhead transparency of page 25, Ways to Value the Environment.

Procedure:

2. Assess the students' prior understanding: What are some ways to value the environment and what issues were addressed in creating Yosemite National Park? Use the Ways to Value the Environment overhead transparency to discuss different perspectives.
3. Divide up the roles on the Debate Cards among groups of students to research the various roles for the debate and read the Background Information. Give the teams at least one 40- to 50-minute session to research their position in the debate and become familiar with their characters' positions. Students should synthesize their information with their teammates in preparation for the debate.
4. Set up chairs in a circle with each group seated together with name cards for identification.
5. Invite the Facilitator to read the Background Information sheet again to the class prior to beginning the debate. Ask the Timer to read his or her instructions.
6. The Facilitator may introduce each group to Congress. Each group is allowed four minutes to convince Congress to vote in support of their position.
7. After Congress has heard all the represented sides on the issue, the Facilitator will ask them to vote and announce their decision.

Extensions:

8. The battle for the protection of Yosemite was largely one over economics. One of the points of the debate was that the land needed to be proven "useless" economically before Congress would declare it a national park. Similar issues concerning economics and the environment face today's citizens. Further discussion might include current topics such as:
 - a. Oil exploration in the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge;
 - b. Varying restrictions on land use by different agencies, such as Bureau of Land Management, National Parks, California State Forests, and National Forests;
 - c. Habitat loss and endangered species, such as cutting the spotted owl's old growth forests in the Pacific Northwest and the development of land for housing in California.

Background Information

1890 Yosemite National Park Debate

Yosemite is one of our nation's most valued national parks. However, Yosemite's significance has not always been appreciated. Prior to 1890, only a small segment of today's 1,200-square-mile park was protected by government and, prior to 1864, none of it was protected by law. The dominant mind-set of the time was utilitarian: if it's there, use it. In other words, land served an economic purpose and was meant to be used for mining, agriculture, logging, or grazing livestock. Economic limitations often prevented the preservation of beautiful places.

Fortunately, there were people who sought to improve America's cultural recognition in the world through enjoying its natural wonders. There was also a vocal group of conservationists and thinkers such as John Muir who passionately believed in the importance of protecting natural areas. Through Muir's writing and lectures, many Americans became aware of the grandeur of Yosemite. By camping with President Theodore Roosevelt in Yosemite, Muir persuaded the

president to create the national park system and preserve America's natural treasures.

This debate allows you to enter John Muir's world of 1890. Through researching and role-playing the battle to protect Yosemite as a national park, you may gain an understanding of our nation's early voices debating the value of setting aside vast tracts of land as parks. Furthermore, you may gain insight into many of today's environmental arguments and understand the many factors affecting any land use decision.

Use the space below (or a separate piece of paper) to write your initial ideas for the debate. Develop each statement more clearly as you do your research. As you prepare for and simulate the debate, keep in mind the different ways of valuing the environment. Ask yourself which ways your character values the environment and how those values affect the course of the debate.

1. *My Role:*
2. *My Beliefs in this Role:*
3. *Ways I Value the Environment in this Role:*
4. *My Argument in this Role:*
5. *My Own Beliefs on the Debate:*
6. *The Ways I Value the Environment in My Own Life:*
7. *How Do I Agree or Disagree with the Beliefs and Views of the Role I Played in the Debate?*

1890 Yosemite Debate Cards—#1

Facilitator

Your role is to read the Yosemite National Park Debate Background Information to the class and to introduce each group before its members present their views.

Timer

You will allow each group four minutes to present its argument in the debate. You will call “Time” if a group’s presentation goes to four minutes.

Frederick Law Olmstead

You are a landscape architect and conservationist. You are active in California’s environmental issues. You have designed Central Park in New York. You feel strongly about protecting the scenic beauty of Yosemite.

John Muir

Your goal is to protect the entire ecosystems of Yosemite and to include two complete river systems in the boundaries of Yosemite. You have rallied a great deal of support for your vision to preserve Yosemite and other natural places.

Israel Raymond Ward

You are the state representative of Central American Steamship Transit Company of New York. You helped write the letter for the Yosemite land grant of 1864 and believe in the protection of areas of scenic beauty. You not only believe in the preservation of Yosemite, but you insist “the wonders be inalienable forever.”

Josiah Whitney

You are the state geologist for California and are a professor of geology from Harvard University. You have spent years exploring and surveying the state and preparing records for the federal government. You have labelled John Muir an “ignoramus” who disagrees with your geological theories.

1890 Yosemite Debate Cards—#2

Private Landholders

You own a small piece of land in Yosemite and believe in the right to private property. If Yosemite is declared a national park, you will have to move to a new place or pay to live where you do.

Shepherders

You graze sheep in the high Sierra meadows. You have been doing this for many years. If Yosemite is declared a national park, you will have to sell your sheep or find a new area for them to graze.

Citizens

As a citizen, your tax dollars will pay for land with which you will not be directly involved. You don't believe you should have to pay to support public land.

Senator from California

You will not support land being protected as a park until the land has been proven economically useless, with no possibilities of grazing, agriculture, mining, or logging.

Railroad Company Owner

You think that protecting Yosemite as a national park will bring tourism into the area and this will bring money to your company.

Congress

Your job is to listen to all sides of the debate and then vote to decide whether Yosemite should be protected as a national park.



Ways To Value the Environment*

1. Aesthetic Value

Appreciating beauty through the senses

2. Cultural Value

Maintaining the attitudes and practices of a specific group of people

3. Ecological Value

Maintaining the integrity of natural systems

4. Economic Value

Exchanging goods and services for money

5. Educational Value

Benefitting from learning and instruction

6. Egocentric Value

Focusing on self-satisfaction and personal fulfillment

7. Legal Value

Referring to the law and its enforcement

8. Recreational Value

Using leisure time

9. Social Value

Sharing human empathy, feelings, and status

*Adapted from *A Child's Place in the Environment*, sponsored by the California Department of Education in cooperation with Konocti Unified School District.

Resources for Seventh to Twelfth Grade Projects

Brower, Kenneth, *Yosemite: An American Treasure* (National Geographic Society, 1990)

Everhart, William C., *The National Park Service* (New York: Praeger Publishers, 1972)

Frome, Michael, *Regreening the National Parks* (Tucson: The University of Arizona Press, 1992)

Huth, Hans, *Yosemite: The Story of an Idea*

National Parks and Conservation Association, *Our Endangered Parks: What You Can Do to Protect Our National Parks* (San Francisco: Foghorn Press, 1994)

Runte, Al, *Yosemite: The Embattled Wilderness* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1990)

Sax, Joseph, *Mountains Without Handrails: Reflections on the National Parks* (Ann Arbor: Univ. of Michigan Press, 1980)

Yosemite: The Fate of Heaven (video, narrated by Robert Redford)

