



National Parks: *Discussion Guide*

Overview

On August 25, 1916, President Woodrow Wilson signed the “Organic Act,” which created a new federal bureau within the Department of the Interior. The National Park Service has grown from 40 parks and monuments at the time of its establishment to more than 380 sites today, covering nearly 84 million acres. Yet, the bureau’s mission remains unchanged:

...to promote and regulate the use of the...national parks...which purpose is to conserve the scenery and the natural and historic objects and the wild life therein and to provide for the enjoyment of the same in such manner and by such means as will leave them unimpaired for the enjoyment of future generations.

Use this discussion guide and related videos in your classroom to help students explore the diverse natural resources housed and protected in national parks.

Classroom Activities

1. Show the segments “Welcome to Alaska’s National Parks” and “Denali National Park” from the *National Parks: Alaska’s National Parks* video.
 - **Pre-Viewing Discussion:** Tell students that Alaska’s parks total 54 million acres, or two-thirds of all the national parklands in the United States. Ask: Why is Alaska home to so many national parks? Do you think it is a function of the state’s tremendous size or some other factor? Why?
 - **History Investigation:** In the video, students learn that when Secretary of State William H. Seward negotiated the purchase of Alaska from Russia in 1867, the deal was known as “Seward’s Folly.” Have them research the details of the debated transaction, including the Senate’s ratification of the treaty by a single vote. Challenge them to summarize their findings in a newspaper article in which they imagine they are an on-scene Congressional reporter.
 - **Ecology Investigation**—Denali National Park & Preserve is one of the world’s greatest wildlife sanctuaries. It is also home to Mt. McKinley, and in 1974, the park became an International Biosphere Reserve. Working in small groups, have students research this United Nations designation to learn why it was given and what it signifies about Denali’s ecological

importance. Then have the groups summarize their findings by creating an educational campaign that includes a magazine ad, fund-raising letter, and the script for a television commercial.

2. Show the segment “Urbanization and the Rise of Public Parks” from the *National Parks: The National Parks of Massachusetts* video. (Access to *unitedstreaming* is required.)
 - **Vocabulary:** In the video, students hear that “the concept of green space was never an easy sell, but [Frederick Law] Olmsted helped convince lawmakers and others that the creation of parks was a valuable social investment.” As a group, develop a definition for the term “public green space.” Then identify local areas that fit the definition.
 - **Discussion:** Public parks were created to “counteract the ill effects of the Industrial Revolution.” Ask students: Do public parks and other green spaces still contribute to the overall quality of life for Americans? Why or why not? How has the growth of the suburbs—where each family tends to have its own personal green space—changed lifestyles and public needs? Do suburban and rural areas need public green spaces? Why or why not?
 - **Writing Activity:** Have students learn more about the parks in Olmsted’s Emerald Necklace and plan a tour through the 1,000 acres of parkland. They should select and research at least one key destination for each of the six parks—Back Bay Fens, Riverway, Olmsted Park, Jamaica Park, Arnold Arboretum, and Franklin Park. Have students create a brochure for their tour that includes detailed information about each of the destinations they’ve selected. The following Web sites are good starting points.
 - <http://www.emeraldnecklace.org>
 - <http://data2.itc.nps.gov/state/ma/>
 - <http://memory.loc.gov/ammem/award97/mhsdhtml/olmsted.html>
3. Show the segments “Welcome to the Florida Everglades” and “The Florida Everglades: A Tour Down of the River of Life” from the *National Parks: The Florida Everglades* video. (Access to *unitedstreaming* is required.)
 - **Pre-Viewing Discussion:** What do students know about the Florida Everglades? Have any students ever visited this national park?
 - **Post-Viewing Discussion:** Were students surprised to hear that the Everglades is a river? Did they expect to hear about a swamp? What else did they learn that was unexpected?
 - **Graphic Organizer:** The Everglades is the only place in the world where alligators and crocodiles live side by side. Have students research both species and create a chart that compares their features, nesting behavior, diet, climate and habitat needs, and other distinguishing criteria.

4. Show the segments “Santa Monica: Where the Mountains Meet the Ocean” and “The Santa Monica Ecosystem” from the *National Parks: Santa Monica Mountains Recreation Area*. (Access to *unitedstreaming* is required.)
- **Research Activity:** In the video, students hear that “the Santa Monica Mountains boast a rare Mediterranean ecosystem that is only found in four other places in the world.” Have them learn more about the ecosystem at <http://www.nps.gov/samo/pphtml/nature.html> and then select an animal species that thrives there. After researching their animal species, direct students to create a poster about the animal and the role it plays in the ecosystem.
 - **Cultural Exploration:** In the video, students meet members of the Chumash tribe, which has lived in the Santa Monica Mountains for more than 15,000 years. Send students to the National Park Service site below, where they can explore the life of the Chumash and Tongva tribes. The site includes a time machine and an online version of a dice game that the Chumash believed demonstrated a person’s skill, power, and knowledge: <http://www.nps.gov/samo/educate/OneLand/VILLAGE/Village.htm>
 - **Science Investigation:** Like many other national parks, the Santa Monica Mountains Recreation Area has adopted the practice of prescribed, or controlled, burns. These intentional fires are used to destroy non-native, invasive plant species and as a fire-prevention technique. Most of the time, they go according to plan—but not always. Have students explore the guidelines for prescribed fires and troubleshoot one that went wrong with the following National Park Service handout and worksheet:
 - <http://www.nps.gov/samo/educate/Fire%20Website/pdf/11hand.pdf>
 - <http://www.nps.gov/samo/educate/Fire%20Website/pdf/11work.pdf>

Academic Standards

This discussion guide addresses the following national standards.

National Council for the Social Studies

<http://www.socialstudies.org/standards/strands/>.

- Culture
- Time, Continuity, and Change
- Power, Governance, and Authority
- Civic Ideals and Practices

National Academy of Sciences

<http://books.nap.edu/html/nses/html/overview.html#content>.

- Life Science: Populations and ecosystems; Diversity and adaptation of organisms; Interdependence of organisms
- Science in Personal and Social Perspectives: Natural and human-induced hazards

Mid-continent Research for Education and Learning (McREL)

<http://www.mcrel.org/compendium/browse.asp>.

- Science
 - Life Sciences: Understands relationships among organisms and their physical environment; Understands biological evolution and the diversity of life
 - Nature of Science: Understands the nature of scientific knowledge; Understands the scientific enterprise
- Language Arts
 - Writing: Uses grammatical and mechanical conventions in written compositions; Gathers and uses information for research purposes
 - Viewing: Uses viewing skills and strategies to understand and interpret visual media

