

EXTENSION ACTIVITY:

Create a National Park

SCHOOL SUBJECTS: History, English, Science

GRADE LEVEL: 4th through 8th grade; adaptable for other grades

LESSON OBJECTIVES:

The students will understand the purpose and characteristics of a national park, some of the issues facing the management of parks, and the different ecosystems national parks protect.

MATERIALS:

- large white paper, colored paper, markers and/or crayons, glue, paint and brushes, clay or play dough, tape, scissors, and other art supplies
- recycled materials (egg/milk cartons, cardboard, lids, small boxes, string, rubber bands, foil, magazines, cereal boxes, paper cups, plastic containers, popsicle sticks, etc.)
- small toys such as plastic animals, people, buildings, trees, etc.
natural materials collected outside such as leaves, sticks, rocks, etc.

BACKGROUND: What is a national park?

National parks are places that represent America's beauty, wildlife, history and people. They also represent our heritage. They protect fragile or unique ecosystems, wildlife habitat, human-made or natural structures, waterways, and riparian zones. Each park has one or more of these features, which is why it is protected.

The National Park *System* includes parks, monuments, preserves, reserves, lakeshores, seashores, rivers, wild and scenic rivers, scenic trails, historic sites, military parks, battlefields, memorials, and recreation areas. Congress sets these areas aside so that the best of America's scenery, history, memory, nature, and wilderness is protected for future generations.

As noted in the Lesson, the National Park *Service* is an agency within the Department of the Interior, created by Congress on August 25, 1916, to fulfill the mission of its Organic Act, which states:

The Service thus established shall promote and regulate the use of the Federal areas known as national parks, monuments, and reservations . . . which purpose is to conserve the scenery and the natural 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.

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Why National Parks?



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The National Park Service charges rangers to manage our parks for recreation, education, and preservation. For recreation, parks must offer certain facilities and activities, such as campgrounds, hiking trails, overlooks, tours (boat, horse, walking, etc.), lodges, and restaurants. Educational efforts by the park service include visitor centers, museums, ranger-led programs, outdoor signs and exhibits, and informational pamphlets, maps, and guides. Furthermore, rangers must be able to interpret the park's features and answer questions on a variety of subjects, including problems facing the park and how to enjoy the park without getting hurt or harming resources. Finally, for preservation, rangers must set and enforce rules. These rules have two purposes: to protect the visitor and to protect the park's resources. Rules ensure that everyone has a safe and pleasurable visit, and that resources are protected for future visitors to enjoy.

PROCEDURE



1. Have students bring in brochures, other literature, or photos from national parks they have visited. Students can also write to national parks to request information. To find the names and addresses of national parks, visit the National Park Service Web site at <http://www.nps.gov>. You might also check your school library for books on national parks.
2. Discuss the purpose of parks, their characteristics, and the different features they protect (i.e., the ecosystem, natural landscapes, and/or human-made structures, etc.). Discuss the differences between parks managed by the National Park Service and parks managed by other agencies or organizations. Ask if anyone has been to a national park and, if so, which one? What did they see? What was the park protecting? Discuss the reasons for creating a national park. Who owns them?
3. Explain that the students will create their own national park. Have them think about what they would like to see/protect in their national park. Write the Organic Act (see "Background Information") on the board and have the students decipher its meaning. Is it possible to conserve resources unimpaired while still providing for their enjoyment by the public? Brainstorm how park managers can protect park resources and provide for people to visit parks without damaging those resources.
4. Have students work as individuals or in teams to create their own national parks. Students should carefully study the literature and other material they collected from real national parks. Encourage them to be as creative as school or home resources will allow. They can simply draw their park on butcher paper, create a three-dimensional park on cardboard using natural and recycled materials, or come up with other ideas.



Create a National Park

5. Start by having the students design the natural and/or cultural features of their national park. Remind them that the features in their park must be special enough to the entire nation to justify it becoming a national park. Have them use their imagination when designing their park resources. For instance, sticks can be used for an old-growth forest, blue cellophane can make a river, rocks can become a mountain range or a prehistoric dwelling, and small toys from home can represent wildlife or historic features, such as battlefields or buildings.
6. Have them think about what park visitors will need when they visit their national park and what might be needed to protect the natural and cultural resources of their park. Again, let their imaginations guide them in developing trails, lodges, visitor centers, museums, restaurants, viewpoints, signs, entrance stations, souvenir and book shops, medical facilities, maintenance facilities, staff housing and offices, campgrounds, transportation facilities (roads, parking lots, busses, etc.), and more.
7. Students will need to design a brochure highlighting the features of their national park and what it has to offer. Include a map, safety messages, park rules, fees charged (if any), tours, and ranger programs offered. Draw pictures of the park or use clippings from old magazines.
8. Students can then become the rangers, taking the class on a “national park tour” and explaining the features and services provided. Encourage students to ask the presenters thoughtful questions.
9. After everyone has had a chance to present their park, the class can discuss what they learned. Here are some discussion ideas:
 - What was their favorite resource and/or national park and why?
 - Did all the parks have resources important enough to be protected nationally?
 - Did each national park have enough facilities to accommodate visitors?
 - How were the natural and cultural resources protected?
 - Were educational programs offered? What was their purpose?
 - How much would it cost to manage their national park? Where would this money come from? What would the money be used for? Should an entrance fee be charged? Who should or shouldn't have to pay?
 - What should be done with the trash and sewage generated by people living in, working in, and visiting their national park?
 - Who should manage the lodges, souvenir and book shops, and restaurants? What limitations, if any, should be put on those who provide these types of facilities?