THE NATIONAL PARKS: AMERICA’S BEST IDEA
LESSON PLANS

A CAMPFIRE CONVERSATION

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www.pbs.org/nationalparks/for-educators/
A CAMPFIRE CONVERSATION

Overview
During a private, three-day camping trip in the Yosemite Valley in 1903, President Theodore Roosevelt and preservationist John Muir shared their views on wilderness use while “talking freely around the campfire.” Both men shared a life-long appreciation for the wilderness and its natural inhabitants. But each brought different views on how, why, and to what extent that environment should be protected. Their exchange of those views eventually led to the expansion of Yosemite National Park under the federal government.

Students will use online tools – as well as information contained in this episode – to research the backgrounds, experiences, and points of view of both men. They will then share that information in a recreation of one of the pair’s “campfire conversations.”

Objectives
The student will:
• understand the concept of “point of view” in both personal and collective senses,
• research the backgrounds and experiences of President Theodore Roosevelt and naturalist John Muir,
• work together to create statements that show how those backgrounds and experiences informed each man’s opinions on wilderness use,
• share their statements in a recreation of one of the pair’s conversations around the campfire, and
• extend their understanding of “point of view” by communicating those of other stakeholders in the debate.

Estimated Time
• Approximately three class periods

Materials Needed
• A large stuffed animal, such as a squirrel, rabbit or bear; individual or group access to the Internet; attached graphic organizer; and optional classroom “campfire” for which instructions are included.

Activity/Procedure
1. Your students may already understand the concept of “point of view” from their studies of literature. Build on that to expand their understanding into a public-policy context. Without telling students why, place a large stuffed animal in the middle of the room. The animal should be one found in a naturally wooded place, such as a squirrel, raccoon, or bear. Allow students to circle it before choosing a spot to stand, sit, or lie down. Ask them to draw the animal.

2. Post their drawings around the room and ask for student responses to the following questions:
   a. What different physical points of view do the drawings represent? (Students may have shown the animal from the front, back, in profile, from below, or above.)
b. What points of view are represented that students may have brought to the experience? (Students may have depicted the same animal as cute or fierce, moving or static.)

c. Do any of the drawings represent the animal’s point of view? What do they imagine it would be?

Discuss the fact that each student brought a different perspective – or point of view – to the exercise. Guide them in understanding that individual points of view are made up of their unique backgrounds, previous experiences, and the influence of others. Tell them that those points of view may often change throughout their lives as new experiences and influences are added. Prepare them for watching a clip from Episode 2 by telling them that President Theodore Roosevelt and naturalist John Muir also brought different points of view to the issue of how our nation’s wilderness lands should be used.

3. As a class, watch the clip “A Campfire Conversation” (http://www.pbs.org/nationalparks/for-educators/lesson-plans/#campfire) that explains and depicts the unusual meeting between Roosevelt and Muir in California’s Yosemite Valley. In pairs, have students consider the following questions based on what they’ve seen:

   a. What personal and professional experiences did Roosevelt bring to the meeting?

   b. What personal and professional experiences did Muir bring to the discussion?

   c. What was the point of view expressed by each man?

   d. What did each man take away from the experience?

Ask selected student pairs to share and compare their answers.

4. Divide the class into two large groups – one for Roosevelt and the other for Muir. Assign each group the task of finding out more about the earlier experiences and influences that resulted in the pair’s individual points of view. Tell them they will have access to information about the men from Episode 2 and a group of selected websites. Each individual in the group will be responsible for gathering information. Some recommended resources:

   **Theodore Roosevelt**
   pbs.org/nationalparks/people/historical/roosevelt/

   **About the Presidents: Theodore Roosevelt**
   www.whitehouse.gov/about/presidents/TheodoreRoosevelt

   **The Theodore Roosevelt Association**
   www.theodoreroosevelt.org

   **John Muir**
   pbs.org/nationalparks/people/historical/muir/

   **A John Muir Biography**
Tell each group they will use the Forming a Point of View graphic organizer to put their research into the following categories: Early Experiences, Political Experience, Wilderness Experience, and Constituents. Explain that constituents are those people to whom each man has a duty or obligation. Give each group a class period or more to gather information from the balance of Episode 2 and Internet sources. Tell the groups that they will use that information to prepare a set of statements. Those statements should communicate each man’s specific philosophies on land use and wilderness protections. Also, ask each group to choose a student who will represent their subject in a recreated campfire scene.

5. Give students one class period to dramatize one of the campfire conversations held by Roosevelt and Muir. One student from each group will represent the men and recreate what they imagine one of their conversations may have been. Those students will use the list of statements from their graphic organizers to offer their points of view during the conversation. All other students will take notes on the conversation in preparation for a post-campfire discussion. Students who worked in the Roosevelt group will take notes on Muir’s views; those who worked in the Muir group will take notes on the philosophy of Roosevelt.

Tips for the Campfire Conversation

- For the two students portraying Roosevelt and Muir, the specific goal is to articulate each man’s point of view on wilderness use. You might provide extra time for the two students to work together to craft their “conversation,” alternately using and explaining the statements that they’ve made from their groups’ research.

- The conversation should last no longer than 15 minutes. That will give the two students time to communicate their points of view and for the rest of the class to note them for discussion.

- For added fun, the two students may want to dress in wilderness gear. Instructions for building a classroom “campfire” are attached.

6. After the conversation is completed, allow all students to discuss the event. Ask for their responses to the following questions:

   a. What was Muir’s point of view on wilderness use? What was Roosevelt’s view?

   b. In what ways were their points of view similar? In what ways were they different?

   c. For each man, what was the value in hearing the other’s point of view?

   d. In what ways was the campfire setting an appropriate one for the conversation?
e. What other things may have contributed to their mutual respect and understanding? (The men were alone, unaccompanied by other influences; they also acknowledged and accepted their differences.)

f. If you were in attendance at that campfire, what would you have liked to say to either man?

7. As a culminating activity, challenge each student to write a letter to either Roosevelt or Muir about the issue of Yosemite National Park expansion under federal control. The letter should be from the point of view of another citizen in the debate. Before they write their letters, allow students additional time to research these “stakeholders” so that they understand their individual points of view on the issue. Some suggestions follow below:

   a. Gifford Pinchot, head of the U.S. Forest Service
   b. A sheep rancher in the Yosemite Valley
   c. A member of Roosevelt’s Cabinet, left behind at the park hotel
   d. A member of Congress from California, which controlled the existing park
   e. The head of a logging company in the state
   f. Yourself, as a future user of the national parks

Assessment
Students should be assessed on their individual contributions to the information in their group’s graphic organizer and campfire presentation, their note-taking during the presentation, and their individual letters to other stakeholders on the issue of Yosemite expansion. Successful students will have understood the concept of “point of view” from a public-policy standpoint and used various forms of technology to communicate curriculum goals.

Related Academic Standards
This lesson meets the following curriculum standards set by the National Council for the Social Studies for grades 5-8:

- Describe how people create places that reflect cultural values and ideals (Time, Continuity, and Change);
- describe personal connections to place (Individual Development and Identity);
- identify and describe examples of tensions between belief systems and government policies and laws (Individuals, Groups, and Institutions);
- apply knowledge of how groups and institutions work to meet individual needs and promote the common good (Individuals, Groups, and Institutions);
• analyze and explain ideas and governmental mechanisms to meet needs and wants of citizens, regulate territory, manage conflict, and establish order and security (Power, Authority, and Governance);

• explain and illustrate how values and beliefs influence different economic decisions (Production, Distribution, and Consumption);

• identify and explain the roles of formal and informal political actors in influencing and shaping public policy and decision-making (Civic Ideals and Practices); and

• analyze the influence of diverse forms of public opinion on the development of public policy and decision-making (Civic Ideals and Practices).

This unit also meets the following Standards for the English Language Arts, set by the International Reading Association and the National Council of Teachers of English:

• Students adjust their use of spoken, written, and visual language to communicate effectively with a variety of audiences and for different purposes.

• Students employ a wide range of strategies as they write and use different writing process elements appropriately to communicate with different audiences for a variety of purposes.

• Students apply knowledge of language structure, language conventions, media techniques, figurative language, and genre to create, critique, and discuss print and non-print texts.

• Students use a variety of technological and informational sources to gather and synthesize information and to create and communicate knowledge.

• Students use spoken, written, and visual language to accomplish their own purposes.

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FORMING A POINT OF VIEW

Your point of view on an issue comes from many different things. It comes from your early experiences. It is formed partly by the people who influence you the most, such as your family. It can also change as you gather information from others who don’t think the same way.

President Theodore Roosevelt and naturalist John Muir brought different points of view to their unusual trip through the Yosemite Valley. Each of them saw the wilderness in a unique way and for different purposes. After you watch the clip, A Campfire Conversation, work together in your groups to explore Internet sites devoted to the experiences of Roosevelt and Muir. Use those sites, as well as the episode, to find the following information. Together, turn that information into a series of statements that specifically communicates the man’s point of view on land use and wilderness protection.

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STATEMENTS ON ________________________________ POINT OF VIEW:
BUILDING A CLASSROOM ‘CAMPFIRE’

For generations, the outdoor campfire has been a place where people gathered to tell stories, exchange information, and pass along cultural histories. For President Theodore Roosevelt and naturalist John Muir, nighttime campfires in the Yosemite Valley were places to share their unique visions for America’s wild lands.

For this unit on “A Campfire Conversation,” you can build your own classroom “campfire” to recreate those important events in the history of our national parks’ creation. Here’s how:

• Gather several thick branches or small logs about 8 to 12 inches long. The logs should be no thicker than your arm. You will also need two large pieces of orange, yellow, or red tissue paper and a string of low-heat, miniature holiday lights. You can use electrical lights or those operated with a small battery pack. Lights with flickering bulbs will best mimic the action of a real campfire.
• Position the branches or small logs into a “teepee” shape. Where the branches cross, wrap them together with a few thick rubber bands. Leave enough room between the branches to insert the tissue paper.
• Arrange the miniature holiday lights into a loose coil, and place the coil underneath the teepee.
• Tear the tissue paper into thick strips and stuff it into the space formed by the teepee. Arrange it into “flames” toward the top of the fire.
• Turn on the lights to test the campfire. Be sure that the lights do not heat the tissue paper.

For this activity, arrange students in a large circle around your campfire. They are now ready to recreate the campfire conversations that resulted in the expansion of Yosemite National Park under the federal government.