

# Conservation in America: TR, the National Park Service, and the Birth of a Movement

How did the development of the  
National Parks System shape the  
American landscape?

**An Inquiry Design Model for Grade 4**



641 Delaware Avenue, Buffalo, NY 14202 • [www.trsite.org](http://www.trsite.org) • 716-884-0095

By Buffalo City School District teachers Mary Jane Hannon, Lorrie Archdeacon,  
and Matthew Duffy

# How did the development of the National Parks System shape the American landscape?

## **An Inquiry Design Model for Grade 4**

### **Compelling Question**

**How did the development of the National Parks System shape the American landscape?**

### **Supporting Questions**

- 1. What inspired Theodore Roosevelt to promote the protection of natural resources?**
- 2. How were the natural resources/environment being threatened?**
- 3. Is protecting the National Parks System still relevant?**

**Note: Theodore Roosevelt did NOT create the first national park. (The first national park, Yellowstone, was established in 1872, during the Grant administration.) Nor did he establish the National Park Service, which had to wait until 1916, during the Wilson administration. However, he was a devoted advocate of conservation at a time when conservation remained a fairly novel and foreign concept to most. He preserved over 200 million acres of federally-protected land during his presidency, and doubled the number of national parks from five to ten. He strongly advocated for the concept of preserving natural resources for future generations, and this philosophy would inspire others in ongoing conservation efforts, including the creation of the National Park Service in 1916. TR's presidency marked a key moment in the development of conservationism in the United States, and is an indispensable part of a discussion of the history of conservation in the United States.**

Inquiry Design Model (IDM) Blueprint™

<b>Compelling Question</b>	How did the development of the National Parks System shape the American landscape?		
<b>Standards and Practices</b>	<p>8.2: A Change in Society</p> <p>Industrialization and immigration contributed to the urbanization of America. Problems resulting from these changes sparked the Progressive movement and increased calls for reform.</p> <p>8.2 a:</p> <p>Technological developments changed the modes of production, and access to natural resources facilitated increased industrialization.</p>		
<b>Staging the Question</b>	<p>Question: What are some the economic advantages of using natural resources, versus the disadvantages of destroying the natural landscape?</p> <p>Supporting Activity: Taking a portion of the reading from <i>The Lorax</i> and relating it to environmental conservation/destruction of natural resources.</p>		
<b>Supporting Question 1</b>	<b>Supporting Question 2</b>	<b>Supporting Question 3</b>	
What inspired Theodore Roosevelt to promote the protection of natural resources?	How were the natural resources/environment being threatened?	Is protecting the National Parks System still relevant?	
<b>Formative Performance Task</b>	<b>Formative Performance Task</b>	<b>Formative Performance Task</b>	
Construct a timeline of events that inspired Theodore Roosevelt's interest in environmental conservation.	Research a natural resource that was being used by a big business from the time period.	Find and analyze a current political cartoon that depicts the controversy over whether the national resources from our parks should be allowed for economic growth. The students can also create their own political cartoon and explain it	

	<p>Create a mock newspaper article discussing this natural resource. -OR- Create a cause &amp; effect poster using the research gathered.</p>	
Featured Sources	Featured Sources	Featured Sources
<p><b>Source A:</b> Quote from Theodore Roosevelt on environmental history. (Appendix 1)</p> <p><b>Source B:</b> Picture of Theodore Roosevelt at Pelican Island. (Appendix 2)</p> <p><b>Source C:</b> Picture of Theodore Roosevelt with John Muir. (Appendix 3)</p> <p><b>Source D:</b> John Muir Quote 1901 (Appendix 4)</p> <p><b>Source E:</b> National Parks Service Theodore Roosevelt Timeline  <a href="https://www.nps.gov/thro/learn/historyculture/theodore-roosevelt-timeline.htm">https://www.nps.gov/thro/learn/historyculture/theodore-roosevelt-timeline.htm</a></p> <p><b>Source F:</b> (Alternative Resource to support differentiation)  <i>The Camping Trip That Changed America</i> by Barb Rosenstock, Dial Books for Young Readers, New York, 2012.</p>	<p><b>Source A:</b> John Muir Quote 1901 (Appendix 4)</p> <p><b>Source B:</b> Destroying the National Forests Samuel E. Moffett for Collier’s Magazine, 1908 (Appendix 5)</p>	<p><b>Source A:</b> Chronology of Selected Events in the Development of the American Conservation Movement, 1847-1920  <a href="http://lcweb2.loc.gov/ammem/amrvhtml/cnchron1.html">http://lcweb2.loc.gov/ammem/amrvhtml/cnchron1.html</a></p> <p><b>Source B:</b> Midnight Forests Political Cartoon (Appendix 6).</p> <p><b>Source C:</b> National Parks Conservation Association  <a href="http://www.npca.org/issues/protecting-landscapes#sm.000jc6x1q11zid4jz2t22hevuywri">www.npca.org/issues/protecting-landscapes#sm.000jc6x1q11zid4jz2t22hevuywri</a></p>
Summative Performance	<b>Argument</b>	Did the National Parks System help or hinder the shaping of the American landscape? Construct a written argument supported with evidence that addresses the compelling question.

Task	Extension	Students will debate how the development of the National Parks System continues to shape the American landscape. Using the resources they have, the students will present valid arguments as to how the National Parks helped or hindered in shaping the American landscape.
Taking Informed Action	<p><b>Understand:</b> Identify an ongoing issue concerning the National Parks System.</p> <p><b>Assess:</b> Research both sides of the issue.</p> <p><b>Act:</b> Write a persuasive letter to your local congressmen expressing your concerns on the matter.</p>	

## **Overview**

This inquiry leads students through an investigation of how Theodore Roosevelt’s interest in and commitment to the conservation and preservation of our nation’s resources contributed to the cause of conservation of natural resources, and to the later development of our National Parks System. Students will develop an understanding of the opposing arguments that were made at that time as to the obligation of one generation to preserve resources for future generations versus the right to unlimited access to those resources for the pursuit of economic growth and development. Students will be expected to develop an argument with evidence to answer the compelling question “How did the development of the National Park System shape the American landscape?”

This inquiry highlights the following conceptual understanding:

- [8.2a] Technological developments changed the modes of production, and access to natural resources facilitated increased industrialization.

NOTE: This inquiry is expected to take four to six 45 minute class periods. The inquiry time frame might expand if teachers think their students need additional instructional experiences (i.e., supporting questions, formative performance tasks, and featured sources). Teachers are encouraged to adapt the inquiries to meet the requirements and interests of their particular students. Resources can be modified as necessary to meet individualized education programs [IEPs] or Section 504 Plans for students with disabilities.

### **Structure of the Inquiry**

In addressing the compelling question “How did the development of the National Parks System shape the American landscape?” students work through a series of supporting questions, formative performance tasks, and featured sources in order to construct an argument with evidence and counterevidence from a variety of sources.

### **Staging the Compelling Question**

In staging the compelling question “How did the development of the National Parks System shape the American landscape?” teachers might begin by reading aloud *The Lorax* by Dr. Seuss and asking students to make connections to current conservation and environmental issues of which they have knowledge.

### **Supporting Question 1**

The first supporting question-“What inspired Theodore Roosevelt to promote the protection of natural resources?” helps students explore Theodore Roosevelt’s personal interest in the natural world and the influences that other prominent conservationists had in shaping his resolve to preserve our nation’s natural resources for future generations. The formative performance task asks students to construct a timeline of events that inspired Roosevelt’s interest in environmental conservation to contextualize the events within that historical period. The featured sources-as previously listed support this task by presenting examples of important influences in Theodore Roosevelt’s life. Students will also be expected to supplement these resources with additional independent research.

## **Supporting Question 2**

The second supporting question- “How were the natural resources/environment being threatened?” introduces the students to the issue that was concerning to Theodore Roosevelt, how to protect the natural resources from further destruction by the emerging industry of the time period. The formative performance task allows for the student to have a couple choices for the assignment to pick to help effectively answer the previous question. The assignment choices are to research a natural resource that was being used by a big business from the time period. Create a mock newspaper article discussing this natural resource or to create a cause & effect poster using the research gathered.

## **Supporting Question 3**

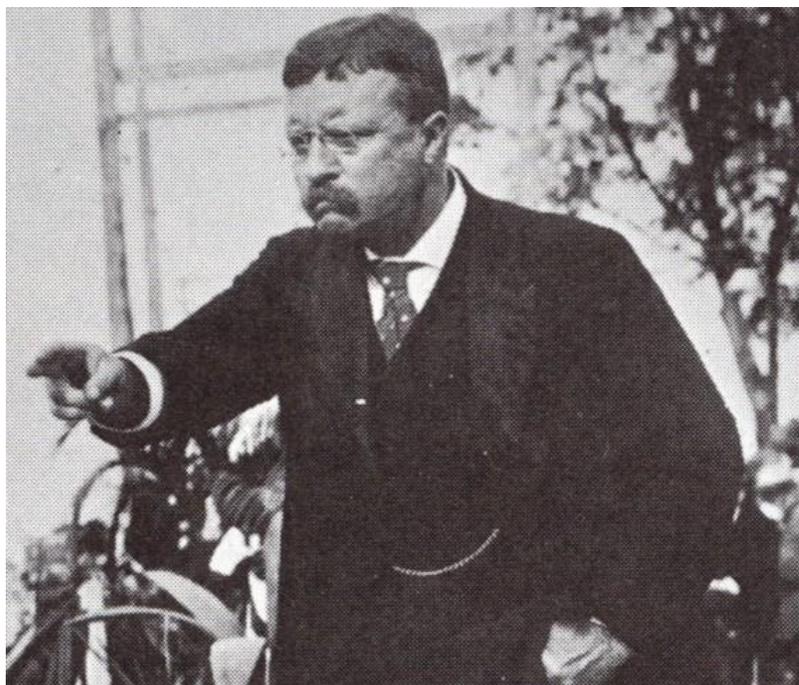
In addressing the third supporting question, “Is protecting the National Parks System still relevant?”, the students can connect the events that led to the formation of the National Parks System to current events that fuel the ongoing controversy of economic growth vs. conservation of our natural resources. The Formative Performance Task asks students to research a current political cartoon that depicts the aforementioned controversy and then analyze the meaning of that cartoon or create their own political cartoon and explain it. The Featured Source is a Chronology of Selected Events in the Development of the American Conservation Movement, 1847-1920. This source will give them a perspective of the events in the past that led to the development of the National Parks System. The combination of researching the political cartoon and the Featured Resource should lead them to an informed opinion on the Compelling Question, which will in turn allow them to construct an argument for the Summative Performance Task.

## **Summative Performance Task**

After exploring the issues and events that led to the development of the National Parks System, and researching the current controversy facing the National Park System today, the students should be prepared for the Summative Performance Task. They will construct written arguments defending their position on whether the National Park System helped or hindered the shaping of the American landscape. For an extension, the students will have an opportunity to debate their peers on how the development of the National Park System continues to shape the American landscape, using the researched gathered to construct their written task.

## **Taking Informed Action**

The students have the opportunity to take informed action by writing to their local Congressional Representative to express their concerns on the issue of conserving our natural resources vs. economic growth. They can use the arguments developed in their Summative Performance Task to try to persuade their representative to write/pass legislation in favor of their opinion. This not only reinforces their understanding of the events that led to development of the National Park System but also builds the understanding of the relevancy of those same concerns today. An added benefit to this activity is enabling the students to become informed citizens and encouraging them to have a voice in the process of legislation at the National Level of Government.



"While my interest in natural history has added very little to my sum of achievement, it has added immeasurably to my sum of enjoyment in life."

-Theodore Roosevelt

**Appendix 2**



**Theodore Roosevelt at Pelican Island, FL, est. 1903**



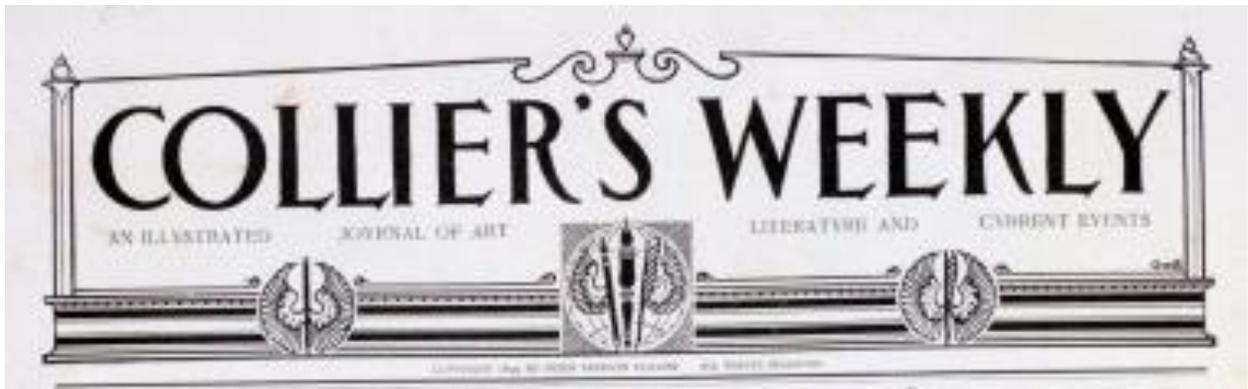
**Theodore Roosevelt and John Muir in Yosemite, 1903**



**Any fool can destroy trees. They cannot run away; ... hunted down as long as fun or a dollar could be got out of their bark hides...Few that fell trees plant them; nor would planting avail much towards getting back anything like the noble primeval forests... God has cared for these trees, saved them from drought, disease, avalanches, and a thousand straining, leveling tempests and floods; but he cannot save them from fools.**

**-John Muir**

Appendix 4



**We are destroying our forests three times as fast as they are reproduced.**

**We mined as much coal in the ten years from 1896 to 1906 as in the preceding seventy-five years, and we are now taking out of the ground considerably over a third of the entire product of the world.**

**All the high-grade iron ore in large deposits now in sight would be used up in the next forty years even at the current rate of consumption.**

**-Samuel E. Moffett  
for Collier's Magazine, 1908**

# “Midnight Forests”

