



2023 History Essay Contest

School 4th Grade Winner

The Prophet of Nature

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From the paradise of Yosemite to the dawn-colored rocks of Pinnacles, the national parks of California are one of her main attractions. One person preserved this beauty for future generations. This person was John Muir, an environmentalist who demonstrated California's beauty to its people. He preached about how important God's creation is, created national parks, and taught people to experience nature in a good way.

John Muir was born in Dunbar, United Kingdom in 1838. His last name means "wild land," and he lived on the edge of the moors of Scotland. He learned to love God's creation because he grew up in it. John's family did not have enough money to send him to school, but he wanted to gain knowledge, so he taught himself algebra and geometry. However, he later said that his best lessons were learned outdoors. For example, John caught a lark, but then he felt cruel for keeping the lark in a cage, so he let the bird go. From this experience, John learned that it is better to leave nature wild.

When John was eleven years old, he sailed across the Atlantic Ocean to Ellis Island. From there, he and his family moved to Wisconsin. When he grew up, Muir got a job at a factory. One day, when Muir was working hard, a machine malfunctioned. It almost blinded him! From that day forward, Muir was determined to focus on nature rather than to depend on machines. He decided to study natural sciences at the University of Wisconsin. Then, he chose to attend what he called the “University of Wilderness”¹ - hiking through the wildest land in the country, observing, and writing in his journal.

John Muir came to California in 1868. Three days after arriving in San Francisco, he set out for the Sierra Nevada mountains with only his journal, a blanket, and some flour and tea. He arrived at Yosemite Valley and was entranced by the colossal mountains “radiant with their bands of colors of rose and blue and gold,”² as he wrote. He came back the next year and got a job there herding sheep. Muir wrote about everything he saw and heard in his journal. Then, in 1871, he decided to publish articles in order to protect the wilderness, especially Yosemite Valley. His writings touched many people and opened their eyes to the beauty of God’s creation.

When Muir was fifty-two years old, his dream of preserving Yosemite came true. In 1890, President Harrison signed a bill making Yosemite the second national park in the United States. Muir didn’t stop there, however. Muir wrote the book “Our National Parks.” Teddy Roosevelt read the book and came to visit John Muir. Together, they trekked through Yosemite.

¹ <https://www.nps.gov/yose/learn/historyculture/muir.htm>

² Lasky, Kathryn. John Muir America’s First Environmentalist. Massachusetts: Candlewick Press, 2005.

Because of this journey, Teddy decided to make more national parks and laid a foundation for other innovative conservation programs.

John Muir died on Christmas Eve, 1914. However, his name lives on in places like Muir Woods and John Muir Health Hospital. Even more importantly, his lessons live on. Because of John Muir, I've learned to appreciate and preach about God's creation every day, because you don't know when the world will end. I want to visit a national park in silence someday, for, as Muir once said, "only by going alone in silence, without baggage, can one truly get into the heart of the wilderness."

Bibliography

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