

Arthur Carhart National Wilderness Training Center's  
***Wilderness Investigations***  
High School

**Wilderness Hero #4**  
***John Muir***



**John Muir Wilderness**

(from Wilderness.net; Image #1955)

**Common Core Standard Connections**

Standards addressed will vary depending on how the teacher chooses to approach the lesson and/or activities.

**Instructions for the teacher:**

John Muir is one of the iconic figures in American wilderness history. Although he died 50 years before the Wilderness Act was signed into law, his almost mythical wilderness lifestyle, prolific wilderness writing, and co-founding of the Sierra Club in 1892 made him the face of wilderness preservation for many future wilderness advocates including some of those who helped bring about the reality of official wilderness designation.

To help students get to know this historic wilderness figure, choose one or more of the following:

- Photocopy and hand out *Wilderness Hero Sheet #4* to each student.
  - Based on the information found there, have them write a short biographical essay about John Muir.

- Use the *Writing a Wilderness Hero Biography (Prompt Page)* located in the Appendix if students are just learning to write biographies and need a little assistance.
- Download a blackline map of the World. Have students find and label the following places important in John Muir's life: Dunbar, Scotland; Madison, Wisconsin; Indianapolis, Indiana; Yosemite National Park, California (and others they discover). Next, have them research Muir's life and write a short paragraph explaining what significant life-event took place in each location.
- Use the handout as the basis of a short mini-lesson about John Muir.
  - To enhance your lesson, go online or visit your school/local library for books by and/or about him.
- Have students write, film, edit and share a podcast about John Muir.
  - Have students use information found on their website and on *Wilderness Hero Sheet #4*.
- Get one of John Muir's books and read selected passages that illustrate Muir's love of wild places. Especially interesting essays include his account of riding out a windstorm at the top of a tree, climbing up Yosemite Falls, and wandering the wilds of Alaska with the stray dog Stickeen.
  - After reading a passage or essay, discuss what Muir was saying and feeling.
  - Compare his wilderness experiences with how people might experience wilderness today.
- Get copies of Muir's autobiography *The Story of My Childhood and Youth* and study with students how his early experiences shaped him into the person he later became.
- Muir's writing is in a style that may be unfamiliar with today's students. After exposing them to his often flowery, passionate, and very descriptive writing, have students try their hand at writing about a wild place or wild experience using their *own* style.
- Create a *Wilderness Hero* classroom display or post on class website.
  - Have students create illustrations, maps, descriptive words, etc. that tell the story of John Muir

**Wilderness Hero #4**  
***John Muir***  
**1838 - 1914**



***John Muir***  
(from Wilderness.net; Image #134)

**Introduction to a Hero**

John Muir was born in Dunbar, Scotland April 21, 1838. He attended local schools there until he was 11 years old. He loved to wander the Scottish countryside, with his beloved grandfather, exploring and marveling at the things he found. In 1849 the Muir family immigrated to the United States and moved onto a farm near Portage, Wisconsin.

Muir's explorations continued in this new place. His younger brother Davey often accompanied him. His home life was challenging because his father was very strict and often overbearing. By the time he was in his early teens John had memorized all of the New Testament and most of the Old Testament. He, like the other members of his family, worked from dawn to dusk on their farm. Muir kept the creative side of himself busy by exploring, trying to figure out the mysteries of the natural world, reading, and inventing.

John Muir once walked from the college town of Madison, Wisconsin throughout the northern United States and parts of Canada just to see what was out there. Later he walked all the way to Florida. Eventually he

ended up in San Francisco (after a long trip by ship) and here he walked to what is now Yosemite National Park. There Muir found his short-term physical home and his life-long spiritual place.

Throughout Muir's life he explored new wild places and then wrote about them. Eventually his writings were published and many who read them were motivated to help work for state and federal protection of places like Yosemite National Park, Petrified Forest National Park, Mount Rainier National Park, Grand Canyon National Park and many other special landscapes.

John Muir co-founded the Sierra Club in 1892 with several of his supporters to "do something for wildness and make the mountains glad." In 1903 President Theodore Roosevelt visited and camped with Muir. During that time Muir helped shape many of the President's future conservation programs.

John Muir died in 1914 in Los Angeles, California where he was visiting one of his daughters. Although not everyone loved the outspoken and sometimes *wild* John Muir, it is clear that he helped move the country towards an attitude that would allow the Wilderness Act to become law 50 years after his death. Today Muir's writings continue to inspire wilderness lovers.

### **Learn more about *Wilderness Hero* John Muir**

- A young John Muir once did an experiment to see if cats really did have nine lives.
- John Muir invented an alarm clock bed that would *dump* its occupants onto the floor when it was time to get up.
- John Muir, working as a factory boss in Indianapolis, lost his eyesight for a while as the result of a factory accident.
- One time John Muir rode an avalanche down a snowy mountainside and lived.
- John Muir would often leave for month long (or longer) walks through wilderness with nothing but tea and bread in his pockets.

These stories and more are found in his many books. Check out your library for books by and about Muir and be ready for some great reading.