

John Muir

A Reading A-Z Level Y Leveled Book
Word Count: 1,561

LEVELED BOOK • Y

JOHN MUIR

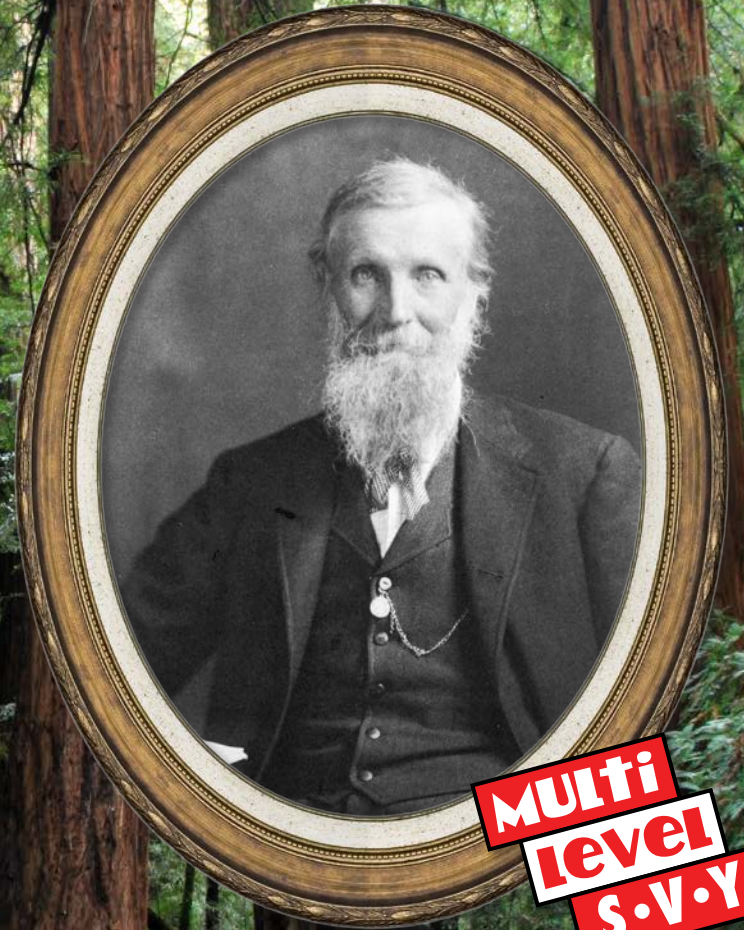
Connections

Writing

Imagine you are presenting John Muir with an award for his accomplishments. Write a speech explaining the award and the reasons John Muir is receiving it.

Social Studies

Create a brochure about a national park in the United States. Include information and images about its history and reasons people would want to visit it.



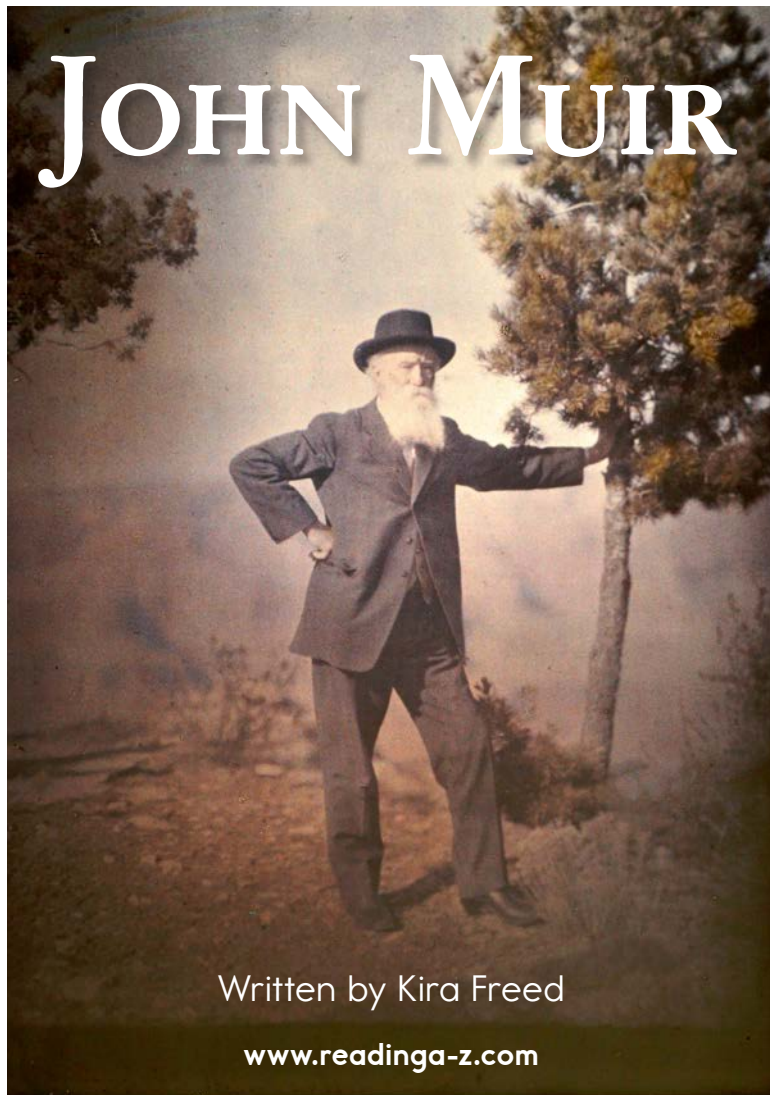
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level
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Written by Kira Freed

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Words to Know

- | | |
|---------------|-------------|
| advocate | eloquent |
| avid | glaciers |
| conservation | mentor |
| controversial | naturalists |
| designated | passion |
| ecstatic | remote |

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Focus Question

What impact did John Muir have on wilderness areas in the United States?

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 Level Y Leveled Book
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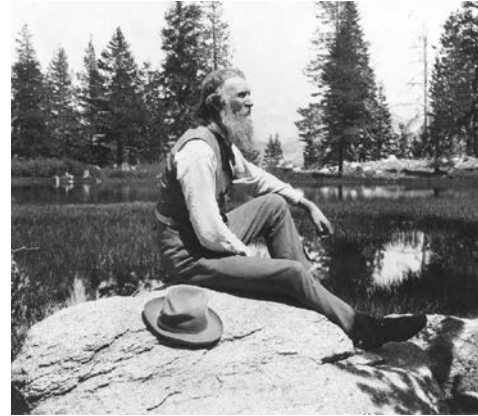
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Reading Recovery	40
DRA	40



A Passion for Nature



John Muir explored nature as a way of becoming closer to what he considered “the heart of the world.”

Long ago when people in the United States were settling the West, many spoke about conquering nature. They wanted to clear land and use natural resources without restraint for houses, food, clothing, and other

needs. John Muir instead spoke about honoring nature. Muir’s **passion** for the natural world lured him away from civilization to live for years in **remote** cabins. It drew him to explore—on foot—vast areas of California as well as travel to many other parts of the world.

Muir’s deep devotion to nature helped expand public awareness of the environment. He was an **avid** champion of wild places, an **eloquent** writer and speaker, and the founder of a key environmental organization. His words persuaded many people to become involved in the effort to preserve wilderness, including his beloved Yosemite Valley.

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John Muir's birthplace in Scotland is now a museum dedicated to his life and work.

Early Life

John Muir was born on April 21, 1838, in Dunbar, Scotland. His father, Daniel, was a businessman and former soldier. His mother, Anne, was a homemaker who enjoyed painting, poetry, and nature. John was the oldest son in a family with eight children.

In 1849, when John was eleven, the family moved to Wisconsin, in the United States, so Daniel could start a farm and earn more money. Daniel was a strict disciplinarian who forced John and his siblings to work long hours doing farm labor and only allowed them one small meal a day. The children's health suffered as a result.

John received no formal education during those years, yet he had a deep thirst for knowledge. His father grudgingly allowed him to awaken early to have time to read. John rose at 1:00 a.m. each morning, thrilled to have five extra hours each day to pursue his interests. He studied literature, philosophy, mathematics, and geometry on his own. Any free daylight hours were spent exploring the woods and fields around the family farm.



During John's teen years, he became an accomplished inventor. He spent some of his early-morning time on his inventions, which included water wheels and weather instruments. A later invention—a makeshift "alarm clock"—pushed him out of bed at a **designated** time.

John Muir's "alarm clock" was a combination desk and clock that attached to a collapsing bed. At the appointed time, the invention lit a lamp and gently deposited John on the floor.

Freedom and Wild Places

By the time Muir was a young adult, he was restless to follow his passions and escape from the farm. An irresistible opportunity presented itself when he was twenty-two. A neighbor suggested that Muir show his inventions at the 1860 Wisconsin State Agriculture Fair in Madison. The inventions, particularly Muir's alarm clock, were a huge hit. Jeanne Carr, one of the judges and Muir's future **mentor**, awarded him a cash prize. As a result, he had some independence for the first time in his life. Instead of returning home, he decided to stay in Madison and attend college.



Jeanne Carr, a writer and amateur botanist, and Ezra Carr, a geology professor, became friends and teachers of Muir's.



A young John Muir

That fall, Muir flourished in his new life, studying botany—the science of plants—which, as he later wrote, “sent [him] flying to the woods and meadows in wild enthusiasm.” Muir also studied geology and chemistry but did not complete a degree program.

In 1863, he left Madison to attend what he called the “University of the Wilderness.” He traveled on foot around Canada and parts of the northern Midwest, closely observing nature and taking odd jobs to pay his way.

In 1866, Muir took a job working as a mechanic in Indianapolis, Indiana. The following year, he suffered a work-related eye injury that temporarily blinded him. Although he feared that he would permanently lose his vision, it returned over a period of a month. Able to see again, Muir suddenly realized that his interest in inventions kept him from what he loved most. He left his job and vowed to spend the rest of his life in nature.

Muir took off on September 1, 1867, hiking about 1,000 miles (1,609 km) to Florida along the “wildest, leafiest, and least trodden way,” he recalled in his writings. He covered at least 20 miles (32 km) a day and took detailed botanical notes during the trip. Muir reached the Gulf Coast in just over seven weeks but fell seriously ill just



days later. He had contracted malaria while crossing Florida’s swampland.

The following January, partially recovered but still in poor health, Muir boarded a ship to Cuba. He hoped to eventually travel to the Amazon to study the native plants but instead went to San

Francisco. Arriving on March 28, 1868, he asked someone to show him the closest way out of town. When the man asked where he wanted to go, Muir replied, “To any place that is wild.”

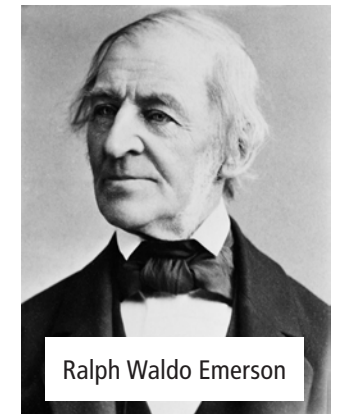


The High Sierra

Traveling on foot, Muir headed for California’s Sierra Nevada mountains. The natural beauty of the area filled him with awe. Although Muir was lonely without human connection, he was **ecstatic** to be in a wilderness area.

When he faced a choice between people and nature, the call of nature generally won out.

Muir’s first trip to the High Sierra was short, but he returned the following year. He worked briefly as a shepherd and then took a job running a sawmill near Yosemite Falls. Muir spent his free time exploring the land and celebrating nature. He drew inspiration from the writings of Ralph Waldo Emerson, a famous writer and lecturer who often wrote about the importance of connecting with nature.



Ralph Waldo Emerson

In the early 1870s, Muir proposed a **controversial** theory that the movement of **glaciers** had carved Yosemite Valley. At the time, the accepted theory was that Yosemite had formed as a result of an enormous earthquake. Muir was so fascinated with glaciers that he journeyed deeper into the mountains to search for evidence. In October 1871, his efforts paid off: after tracking the paths of ancient, long-melted glaciers to mountain peaks, he finally found an actual glacier. That winter, Muir’s article about glaciers forming Yosemite—his first publication—was printed in the *New York Tribune*. His theory was confirmed over time.

People were beginning to take notice of Muir and his nature observations. Other **naturalists** went out to his cabin in Yosemite to meet with him, including Emerson in 1871.



El Capitan and Yosemite Falls are two features of Yosemite Valley.

Nature Writer and Activist

After getting to know Yosemite so thoroughly, Muir began to devote more time to writing about his experiences. In 1873, he moved to Oakland, California, and started writing magazine articles that made him famous throughout the United States. Muir wrote on behalf of nature, both to call attention to its beauty and to urge people to protect it from destruction.

In April 1880, Muir married Louisa (Louie) Strentzel and moved to Martinez, California, where her family owned a fruit ranch. Just a few months later, he left on a trip to Alaska that lasted over a year. After returning, he limited his travels for seven years and worked on the ranch. Although Muir was a dedicated husband, he was



Muir with his wife and their two daughters

unhappy with his responsibilities on the ranch, and his health suffered. Always restless to be in wilderness, he resumed his travels with Louie’s encouragement.

Muir's trip to Yosemite in 1889 resulted in the publication of two widely read articles about the area's beauty and the importance of protecting it. Other people helped Muir by persuading Congress to protect Yosemite. These efforts to build public support on behalf of **conservation** were successful. The following year, Yosemite became the third U.S. national park, after Yellowstone and Sequoia.

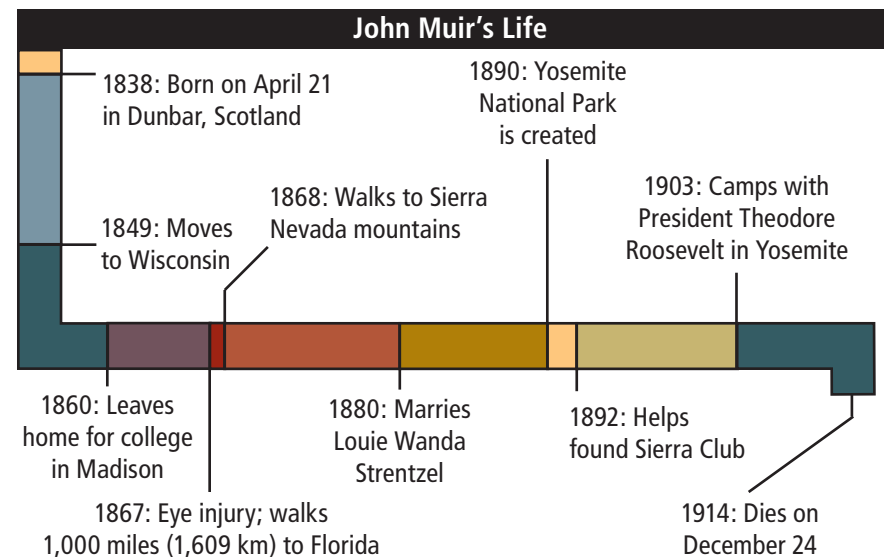
It was clear to Muir and other conservationists that an organization was needed to keep Yosemite and other parts of the Sierra Nevada protected. Muir helped found the Sierra Club in 1892 and became its first president. The club's purpose now includes protecting nature areas and wildlife throughout the United States as well as finding solutions to global climate problems.

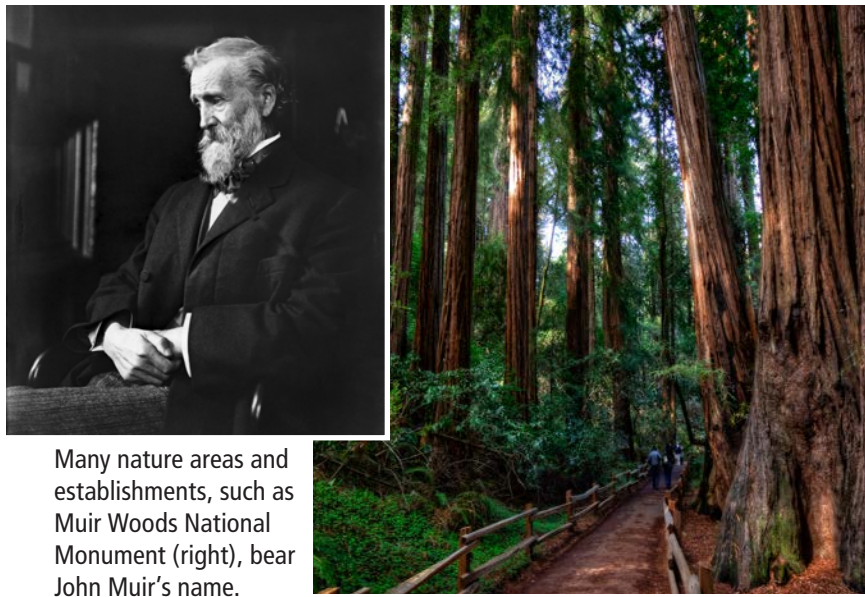
In 1903, President Theodore Roosevelt asked to meet with Muir to better understand the needs of wilderness areas in the West. Honored, Muir took him on a camping trip into Yosemite. Muir used the opportunity to **advocate** for setting aside wilderness areas as protected parks. As a result of that trip, more areas of Yosemite became part of the national park. Roosevelt also set aside many other wilderness areas for protection, including Crater Lake and Wind Cave National Parks.

In his later years, Muir spent more time writing about his travels. He was awarded honorary degrees from four universities.

Muir also led a twelve-year fight to protect Yosemite's Hetch Hetchy Valley from being flooded by a proposed dam. Despite efforts to stop the project, including a letter Muir wrote to Congress, it was approved in 1913. However, the fight raised public awareness about the protection of wild places. It also contributed to the 1916 creation of the National Park Service, which established stronger protections for all U.S. national parks.

John Muir died on December 24, 1914. Although he did not live to see the founding of the National Park Service, his efforts helped make it a reality.





Many nature areas and establishments, such as Muir Woods National Monument (right), bear John Muir's name.

Muir's Legacy

John Muir was one of the first people to call for practical action on behalf of preserving wild places. As a founding father of the conservation movement, he devoted much of his life to protecting wilderness areas for future generations.

John Muir came from humble beginnings and struggled for years to find his true path in life. Yet the natural world always called to him, inviting him to know it better and witness more of its wonders. As he did, his purpose became clear. Muir's contributions to environmental conservation have earned him a place of honor in American history.

Glossary

advocate (<i>v.</i>)	to support or recommend (p. 13)
avid (<i>adj.</i>)	showing a great interest in or desire for something; eager (p. 4)
conservation (<i>n.</i>)	the protection of wild lands and the living things found there (p. 13)
controversial (<i>adj.</i>)	causing much disagreement (p. 11)
designated (<i>v.</i>)	marked, named, or chosen for a special purpose or position (p. 6)
ecstatic (<i>adj.</i>)	feeling overwhelming happiness, excitement, or delight (p. 10)
eloquent (<i>adj.</i>)	simple, powerful, and elegant in speech or writing (p. 4)
glaciers (<i>n.</i>)	large bodies of accumulated ice and compacted snow that are found year-round and that slowly move downhill (p. 11)
mentor (<i>n.</i>)	an experienced teacher and adviser (p. 7)
naturalists (<i>n.</i>)	people who study nature and natural history, especially plants and animals (p. 11)
passion (<i>n.</i>)	intense enthusiasm or emotion (p. 4)
remote (<i>adj.</i>)	distant or isolated; in the distant past (p. 4)