

John Muir

Victorian conservationist



John Muir, Scottish American

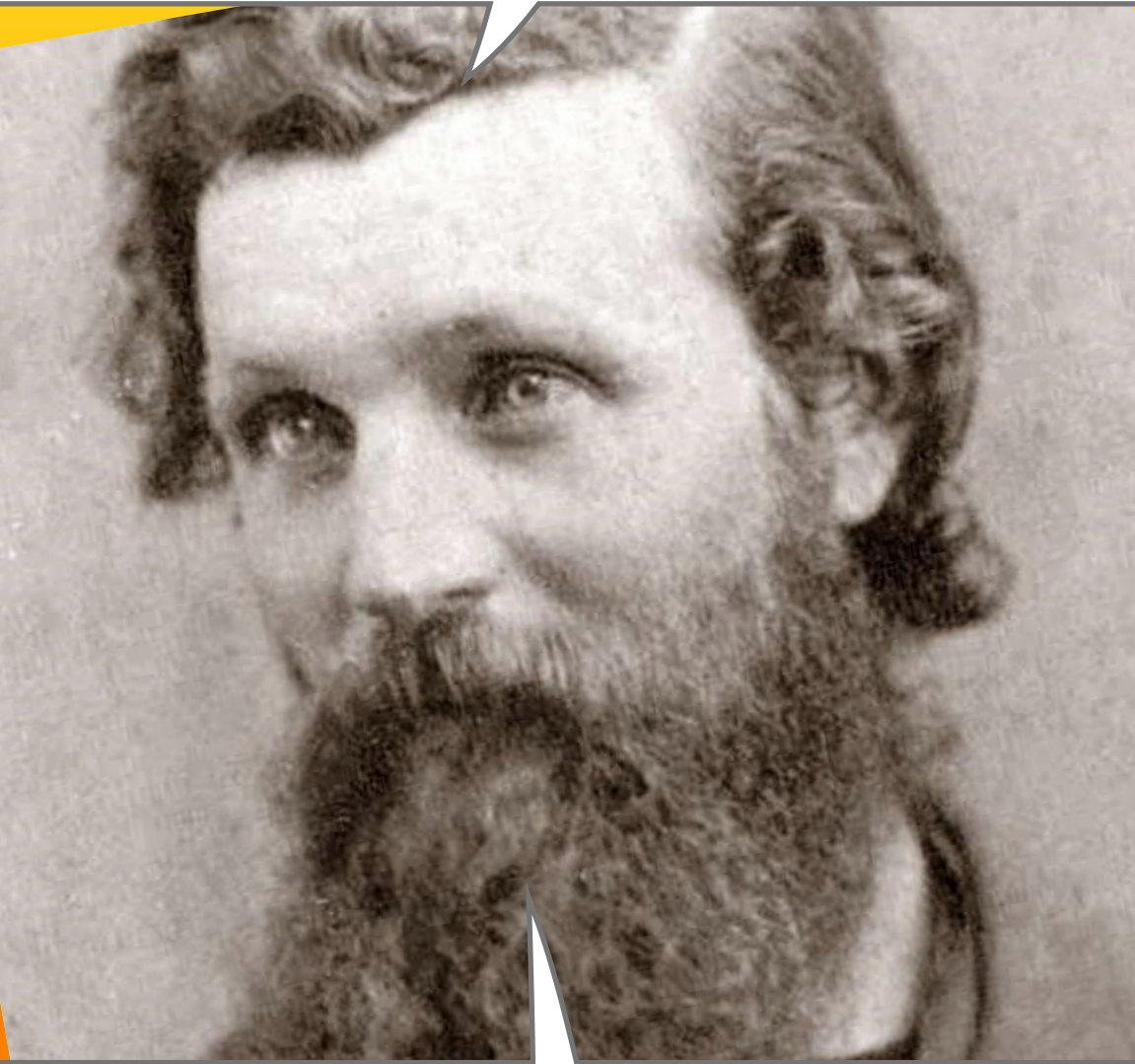


Find out about the meaning of stories and articles

John Muir

John Muir was born in Dunbar, Scotland in 1838 and emigrated with his family to the United States in 1849, where they started a farm. John Muir then went to university to study science. He later wrote about his first botany lesson:

"This fine lesson charmed me and sent me flying to the woods and meadows in wild enthusiasm."



In September 1867, Muir undertook a walk of about 1,000 miles (1,600 km) from north to south of the United States.

"We are now in the mountains and they are in us, kindling enthusiasm, making every nerve quiver, filling every pore and cell of us," Muir later wrote. . . . "No temple made with hands can compare with Yosemite... The grandest of all special temples of Nature."

In 1868 he built a small cabin along Yosemite Creek, designing it so that a section of the stream would flow through a corner of the room, where he could enjoy the sound of running water. Visitors to the valley often included scientists, artists, and celebrities, many of whom made a point of meeting with Muir.

Muir realised that many of the wilderness areas were in danger of being lost to loggers, farmers and others. Using influential friends, he was able to get a bill passed in the United States government to make Yosemite into a national park. The bill was passed in 1890.

In 1892 he helped to found a society of people who love mountains. It was called the Sierra Club after the name of the Sierra Nevada mountains where Yosemite is found. The Sierra club was very important in helping to continue to preserve the region.

Muir valued nature for its peace and calm. He called the mountains "places for rest, inspiration, and prayers."

Muir had a great deal of sympathy for native Americans "being robbed of their lands and pushed ruthlessly back into narrower and narrower limits by alien races who were cutting off their means of livelihood." He praised and grew more respectful of their low impact on the wilderness, compared to the heavy impact by European-Americans.

During his lifetime John Muir published over 300 articles and 12 books. Muir has been called the "patron saint of the American wilderness".



Understanding words

Before we can understand a story we have to know what all of the words mean. Let's try one...

a Write the sentence in which you found the word 'praised'.

b From that sentence, suggest what 'praised' means.

c Write a new sentence using the word 'praised'.

d Use a dictionary to find words with a similar meaning (synonyms) to 'praised'.

e Draw a small picture showing what you think 'praised' means.



Finding key words

Next, we need to find the key words that tell us what the story is about...

Read the story and underline the key words. Write the most important of these key words in a list like the one below. Write next to it a word that means a similar thing (a synonym). You don't have to use all the spaces, but you should not use more.

Key word	Synonym (similar word)
Example: section	part

3

Summarising

(the gist of the story)

To summarise means to rewrite the story in a shorter version using as many of our key words from Task 2 as needed.

Elderly John Muir

1 Write a heading for your summary.

2 Now write the main idea in one sentence.
e.g. "This story tells us..."

3 Now add some detail to the main idea
by writing more sentences after it.

**Finally,
can you rewrite your
summary to make it better?**

- 1. Look out for errors such as using the same word too often – use alternatives.**
- 2. Make sure you have summarised the author's purpose in your OWN words.**
- 3. Make sure your summary is in a logical order.**
- 4. Is your summary informative AND interesting to others?**

**There is
nothing wrong
with rewriting; even
the best authors
rewrite their
work.**

123
4

Sequencing

Sequencing means getting the events in the right order. Write these sentences in the correct order, so they make sense.

John Muir with
President Roosevelt on
Glacier Point, Yosemite
National Park.



John Muir published 12 books in his lifetime.

John Muir was born in Dunbar, Scotland.

On arriving in California in 1868, he went to Yosemite.

In September 1867 he trekked 1000 miles.

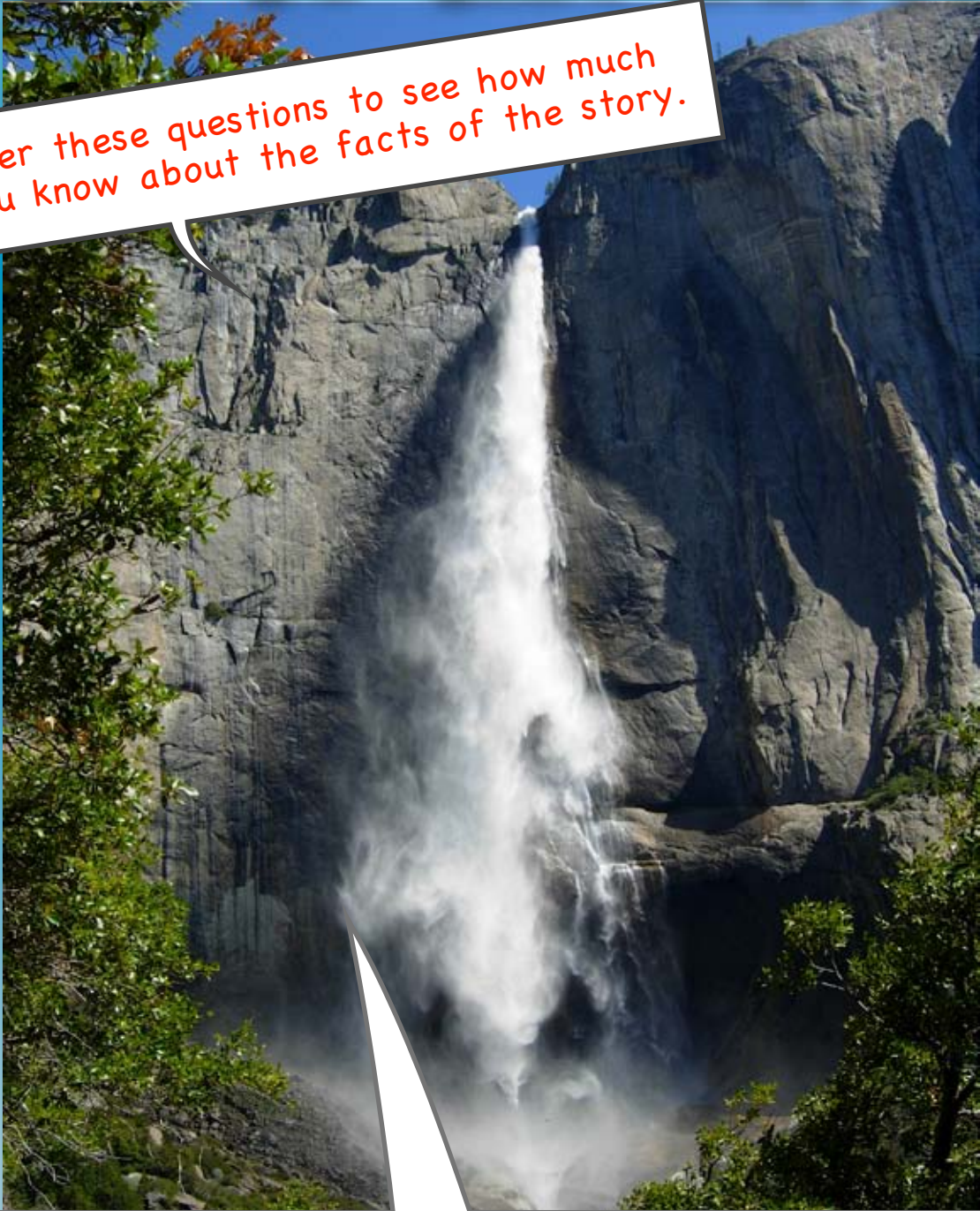
The Yosemite National Park Bill was passed in 1890.

He was inspired by his first science lesson at university.



Get to the facts

Answer these questions to see how much you know about the facts of the story.



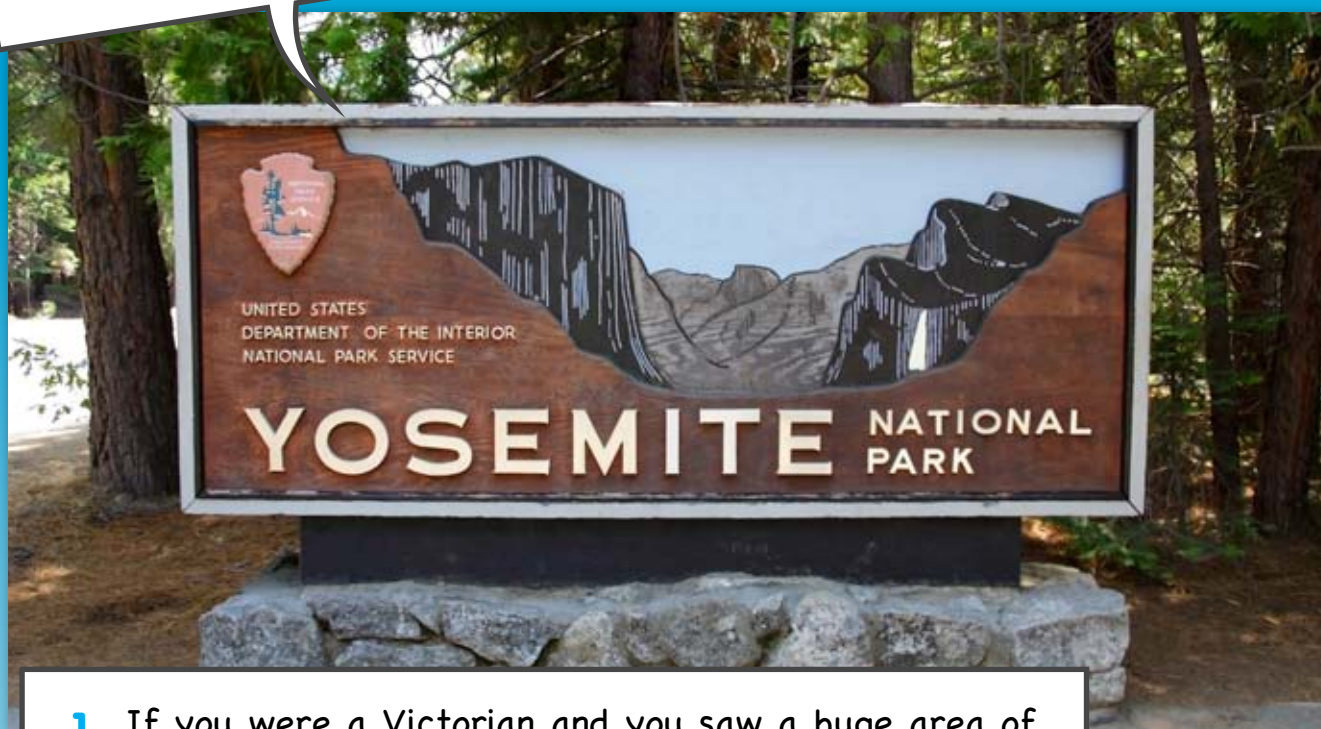
Write a sentence to answer each of these questions:

- (a) How long was Muir's first walk?
- (b) Where was Muir born?
- (c) Where did he build his small cabin?
- (d) What was the conservation club called?
- (e) Where is Yosemite?



Whys and wherefores

Answer these questions to see how much you know about the meanings in the story and how it was written.



- 1 If you were a Victorian and you saw a huge area of forest, would you want to cut it down or conserve it?
- 2 If you wanted to make a sign like the one above to tell people of a special area for nature in your school, what would it look like?
- 3 What does Muir mean by 'the grandest of all special temples of Nature'?
- 4 What could the pros and cons be of having a stream in the corner of your cabin?."



Opinions matter

Answer these questions to give your views and to develop the story.

- 1 Do you agree that Muir should be called the 'patron saint' of the American wilderness?
- 2 What did Muir mean when he said of the mountains "they are in us"?
- 3 Write a letter from John Muir to the American government explaining why they should make Yosemite a national park.
- 4 If you were worried by the growth of British cities today, would you start a campaign, or do you think we already have a suitable organisation, and if so, what is it called?
- 5 Why do you think it was unusual at the time for Muir to be sympathetic to the native Americans?





Talking it through

Half Dome mountain.

It often helps if a group of people get together and discuss a problem.



Discussion topic: Hiking Yosemite

The mountains at Yosemite (pronounced 'Yo- sem-ittee') are some of the most famous, special and most-visited in the world. Discuss what you think is needed to keep them as John Muir saw them.



Make a story...

Half Dome mountain.

When you read a description it often gives you ideas about how the same place might be at a different time.



Camping with John Muir

Here is a view over Yosemite National Park. Imagine you are going to trek to the far mountain, accompanying John Muir, but it is getting dark. At night there are bears about, so you decide to camp.

(Now you continue the story until daylight the next day...)

John Muir, Victorian conservationist...

John Muir was born in Dunbar, Scotland in 1838 and emigrated with his family to the United States in 1849, where they started a farm. John Muir then went to university to study science. He later wrote about his first botany lesson

"This fine lesson charmed me and sent me flying to the woods and meadows in wild enthusiasm."

In September 1867, Muir undertook a walk of about 1,000 miles (1,600 km) from north to south of the United States.

In March 1868, Muir arrived in California and immediately left for a week-long visit to Yosemite, a place he had only read about.

"We are now in the mountains and they are in us, kindling enthusiasm, making every nerve quiver, filling every pore and cell of us," Muir later wrote. . . . "No temple made with hands can compare with Yosemite... The grandest of all special temples of Nature."

In 1868 he built a small cabin along Yosemite Creek, designing it so that a section of the stream would flow through a corner of the room, where he could enjoy the sound of running water. Visitors to the valley often included scientists, artists, and celebrities, many of whom made a point of meeting with Muir.

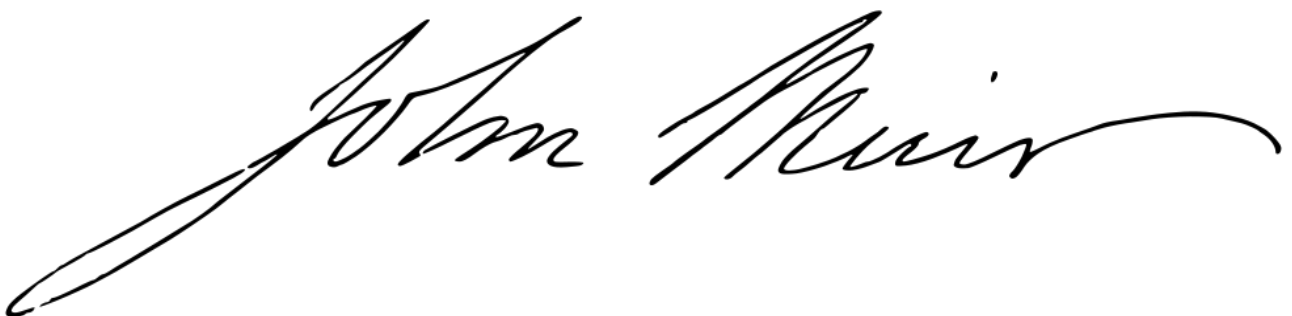
Muir realised that many of the wilderness areas were in danger of being lost to loggers, farmers and others. Using influential friends, he was able to get a bill passed in the United States government to make Yosemite into a national park. The bill was passed in 1890.

In 1892 he helped to found a society of people who love mountains. It was called the Sierra Club after the name of the Sierra Nevada mountains where Yosemite is found. The Sierra club was very important in helping to continue to preserve the region.

Muir valued nature for its peace and calm. He called the mountains "places for rest, inspiration, and prayers."

Muir had a great deal of sympathy for native Americans "being robbed of their lands and pushed ruthlessly back into narrower and narrower limits by alien races who were cutting off their means of livelihood." He praised and grew more respectful of their low impact on the wilderness, compared to the heavy impact by European-Americans.

During his lifetime John Muir published over 300 articles and 12 books. Muir has been called the "patron saint of the American wilderness".

A large, elegant handwritten signature of John Muir in black ink, featuring a long, sweeping underline that extends to the left.