

A FILM BY KEN BURNS
THE NATIONAL PARKS
America's Best Idea

THE NATIONAL PARKS: AMERICA'S BEST IDEA
LESSON PLANS

TOURISM AND PRESERVATION

For more information, visit

www.pbs.org/nationalparks/for-educators/

TOURISM AND PRESERVATION

Overview

A tension lies at the heart of the national parks idea. On the one hand, the parks exist to preserve nature, protecting it from development or destruction by humans. On the other hand, the parks also exist to be available to everyone. Opening national parks to all Americans is part of the democratic ideal of equality – in this case equal access to natural beauty. This lesson focuses on that tension: how to preserve nature and at the same time make the parks available to all Americans who want to visit them. Grounding their work in historical examples, students participate in a deliberation activity to solve the problem of overcrowding at the national parks.

Objectives

The student will:

- Discuss why preserving nature might have been important to 19th century Americans
- Discuss how turning other natural wonder sites into tourist destinations would conflict with preserving these areas for all time
- Review and record information from selected video clips
- Participate in a group activity to address the problem of overcrowding in the national parks
- Write an agreement form supporting their solution to the current overcrowding problem

Estimated Time

Two class periods, plus homework

Materials Needed

Internet access

Activity/Procedure

Day 1

Day 1 walks students through the argument against making spectacular natural sites into tourist destinations – which John Muir described as “commercial.” Instead, the argument goes, Americans should preserve those spectacular natural sites as part of the United States’ cultural heritage.

Part I: Not Niagara Falls

- For students to understand the concern about tourism, they need to know what Niagara Falls was like in the late-19th century. This part of the lesson will be a 10-minute PowerPoint presentation (**Appendix 1**) by the teacher, showing some photos and giving examples of what Niagara Falls was like.

Part 2: Cultural Heritage

In this part of the lesson, students learn why it’s so important not to turn natural grandeur into tacky tourist attractions. The last slide of the PowerPoint presentation is this quote from historian William Cronon:

“Americans [in the late 19th-century] feel that the United States is somehow inferior to Europe. Where the United States doesn’t have the ruins of Rome or Greece, it doesn’t have the Acropolis, it doesn’t have the Parthenon. And so it seems like we’re an inferior nation.

And yet the one thing we do have is a nature that looks closer to the new morning of God's own creation, closer to Paradise than anything that Europe has to offer. And so the thought is that if we're to preserve anything that stands for the glory of America, then these overwhelmingly beautiful, sacred spots are the ones we ought to preserve."

Make sure students understand the quote. Explain that the United States was still a young country, much younger than European countries. Ask: In this context, why might preserving nature matter to 19th-century Americans? How might "making Niagara Falls" out of other natural wonder sites conflict with the "use" for nature that William Cronon talks about in the quote?

Part 3: Tourists at the Parks

For the remainder of Day 1 (about 30 minutes), students learn more about the specifics of tourism at the places that were to become parks. Divide the class into three groups and assign each group one of the three parks (Yosemite, Yellowstone, Grand Canyon) as a case study for a class activity. You may divide students into sub-groups, if desired. Distribute to each person a graphic organizer (**Appendix 2**). Tell students to use the graphic organizer to take notes as their group watches the clips about its park. Ask students to pay particular attention to the tension in these early years between preservation advocates and tourism entrepreneurs. Each group will present to the class what it discovers.

Assign for homework **Overcrowding at the National Parks (Appendix 3)** about recent overcrowding at the parks. Explain that the next day students will participate in an activity to see what solutions they can find for the overcrowding problems.

Day 2: Negotiating the Issue

This activity is not a debate, but more of a deliberation. Students role play stakeholders who have strong opinions, but also have a common need to find a solution to a problem. It will be important to stress to students that they will need to express their position with conviction but also listen to others' concerns and ideas and compromise with them to solve the problem at hand.

Divide the class into groups of five. Each group will complete the assignment. Give each person a **Procedures** page, a **Pros and Cons** chart (**Appendix 4**) and markers. Go over the procedures with the class. Answer any questions that come up.

Then assign the following roles in each group. Give each student a name tag with his or her role written on it.

- Preservationist: someone in the spirit of John Muir
- Representative of the tourism industry: e.g. a tour company operator, a hotel owner in a gateway town
- Park Service employee who works at a park
- Park visitor
- Facilitator

Have each group proceed through the activity to develop their agreements. If time permits, have each group present their options and rationale to the entire class.

Then have each student complete the Agreement Form.

Assessment Suggestions

Each student will individually complete an Agreement form (**Appendix 5**) with his or her own solution to the overcrowding problem. (Students should use their group's discussion as the basis for their work, but if they reach conclusions that differ from other group members' conclusions, they may complete their form with their own solution.) Score the forms using the sample answers provided. Teachers may also wish to use the graphic organizers from Day 1 for assessment.

Julie Weiss is an educational consultant with a Ph.D. in American Civilization. She taught media analysis and women's studies at Hampshire College and the University of New Hampshire, and has written social studies, English, and ESL materials for the Newsweek Education Program, the California Education and the Environment Initiative, Saudi Aramco World, and many other organizations.

Related Academic Subjects

This lesson meets the following curriculum standards set by McREL – Mid-continent Research for Education and Learning:

United States History

Standard 20: Understands how Progressives and others addressed problems of industrial capitalism, urbanization, and political corruption

- Benchmark 1. Understands the spread of Progressive ideas and the successes of the Progressive movement

Standard 31. Understands economic, social, and cultural developments in the contemporary United States

Historical Understanding

Standard 2: Understands the historical perspective

- Benchmark 1. Analyzes the values held by specific people who influenced history and the role their values played in influencing history
- Benchmark 2. Analyzes the influences specific ideas and beliefs had on a period of history and specifies how events might have been different in the absence of those ideas and beliefs

Language Arts

Standard 1: Uses the general skills and strategies of the writing process

- Benchmark 6. Uses strategies to adapt writing for different purposes (e.g., to explain, inform, analyze, entertain, reflect, persuade)

Standard 7: Uses reading skills and strategies to understand and interpret a variety of informational texts

- Benchmark 1. Uses reading skills and strategies to understand a variety of informational texts

Standard 8: Uses listening and speaking strategies for different purposes

- Benchmark 3. Uses a variety of strategies to enhance listening comprehension)
- Benchmark 4. Adjusts message wording and delivery to particular audiences and for particular purposes

Standard 9: Uses viewing skills and strategies to understand and interpret visual media

- Benchmark 1. Uses a range of strategies to interpret visual media

Civics

Standard 8: Understands the central ideas of American constitutional government and how this form of government has shaped the character of American society

- Benchmark 9. Knows ways in which Americans have attempted to make the values and principles of the Constitution a reality

Geography

Standard 4: Understands the physical and human characteristics of place

- Benchmark 1. Knows how social, cultural, and economic processes shape the features of places

Standard 6: Understands that culture and experience influence people's perceptions of places and regions

- Benchmark 3. Knows ways in which people's changing views of places and regions reflect cultural change

Standard 14: Understands how human actions modify the physical environment

- Benchmark 1. Understands how the concepts of synergy, feedback loops, carrying capacity and thresholds relate to the limitations of the physical environment to absorb the impacts of human activity
- Benchmark 4. Knows how people's changing attitudes toward the environment have led to landscape changes

Appendix 1: PowerPoint (Separate file)

Slide 1: Niagara Falls: The Not-So-Great Tourist Destination

Script: By the time national parks became a possibility, Niagara Falls had already been a tourist destination for decades. Many entrepreneurs realized that people would come to see the falls, and that while they were there, they would be happy to spend their money on all sorts of *other* spectacles.

Slide 2: The Spectacles at the Falls

Slide 3: Burning Spring

Image: Drawing of Burning Spring, labeled "Burning Spring"

Site: www.niagarafontier.com/image/burningsprings307.gif

Script: Among the natural features at the falls was a natural gas vent. For would-be money-makers, it was ripe for exploitation. They built a building around it. Inside the building, they surrounded the spring with a barrel, put a pipe into the barrel, and corked the pipe. When tourists paid a fee, they removed the cork. Gas escaped from the vent, they lit the gas with a match, and it caught fire. Voila! A burning spring.

Slide 4: Stunts

Image: Sam Patch Jumps into the fall

Site: www.nflibrary.ca/Portals/0/Sam%20Patch.jpg

Script: Sam Patch began jumping into Niagara Falls in 1829, and became known as the "Yankee Leaper." He jumped from as high as 130 feet--and survived.

Slide 5: Stunts

Image: Blondin crossing a tightrope over the falls

Site: www.wisdomportal.com/Dates/June30.html

Script: Jean Francois Gravelet, known as Blondin, became a fixture at the falls. For a fee, he would walk across the falls on a tightrope.

Slide 6: Stunts

Image: Jean Francois Gravelet crossing a tightrope over the falls pushing a wheelbarrow, or on stilts

Site: www.jamd.com/image/g/2525069

www.nflibrary.ca/Portals/0/clifford%20Calverly.jpg

Script: Blondin's stunts became grander. He was seen crossing a tightrope over the falls pushing a wheelbarrow and wearing stilts. He was even said to have pushed a cook stove onto the tightrope and made an omelet for the audience while the falls roared beneath him.

Slide 7: America's Cultural Heritage

"Americans [in the late 19th-century] feel that the United States is somehow inferior to Europe. Where the United States doesn't have the ruins of Rome or Greece, it doesn't have the

Acropolis, it doesn't have the Parthenon. And so it seems like we're an inferior nation. And yet the one thing we do have is a nature that looks closer to the new morning of God's own creation, closer to Paradise than anything that Europe has to offer. And so the thought is that if we're to preserve anything that stands for the glory of America, then these overwhelmingly beautiful, sacred spots are the ones we ought to preserve."

--Historian William Cronon

[Read the quote to students. Make sure students understand the quote. Explain that the United States was still a young country (many would say it still is), much younger than European countries.]

Script: In this context, why might preserving nature matter to 19th-century Americans? How might "making a Niagara Falls" out of other natural wonder sites conflict with the "use" for nature that William Cronon talks about in the quote?

Appendix 2: The Film Clips

1. Fill in this table as you watch the film clips.

- In the left-hand column are listed stakeholders in the debate about tourism and national parks.
- In the middle column, list what each stakeholder wants to achieve.
- In the right-hand column list what that stakeholder does.

Note that you might not find any park workers in your clips, as the areas you will be seeing were not parks yet.

2. After the film clips, talk with your group members to see if you have filled in your tables the same way. Discuss any differences and make changes if you want or need to.

Name of the Park: _____

| Who | Goal(s) | Actions |
|------------------|---------|---------|
| Preservationist | | |
| Tourism Advocate | | |
| Park Worker | | |
| Park Visitor | | |

3. What do you notice in the film clips and your discussion regarding the tension between tourism and the parks? _____

You will present what you've learned to the rest of the class

Appendix 3: Overcrowding at the National Parks

The national parks exist for two purposes. One is to preserve the natural wonders in the United States. The other is to make those natural wonders available for Americans to visit. That democratic vision is at the heart of the national parks idea. Beginning in the parks' early years, advocates urged Americans to visit these special sites. They believed that if Americans experienced the parks themselves, they would favor government support for them. To that end, they enticed visitors to the parks.

Numbers of visitors to the national parks increased steadily through the 20th century. In 1933, the parks hosted nearly 3.5 million visitors. By 1962, the number had increased to 88.5 million. In 2007, 275.6 million people visited the parks. The parks do seem to be meeting their goal of being available for Americans to visit.

But huge numbers of visitors can cause problems. Visitors who go to the parks to connect to nature may find themselves breathing car fumes while they wait in traffic jams – and not just to enter the parks, but once they're actually in them! Or they may find that the roads they had hoped to travel on in the parks have been closed for repairs. And all those visitors need basic services, like bathrooms. The sewage systems at some parks were never meant to handle the amount of waste that millions of visitors generate. A 2000 National Park Service report put it this way: "During peak visitation periods the noise, smell, glare, and congestion associated with motor vehicles can overwhelm the resource-related visitor experience." Inconvenient? Yes, of course. But worse, these problems threaten the other purpose of the national parks: to protect natural wonders. Thus, the two purposes for the national parks come into conflict.

What to do about the overcrowding? Many people have proposed solutions. One solution is to raise entrance fees to the parks. By the law of supply and demand, when prices rise, demand drops. Others have proposed raising fees during peak visiting seasons. That way, people would pay a premium for visiting at crowded times of year. It's the same idea as charging more money to ride the subway at rush hour than at off-peak hours. Still others have suggested setting a quota on the number of visitors allowed in the parks, with a variety of schemes for distributing entry permits. Some suggest dividing entry permits among tour operators, commercial recreation operators, and then distributing remaining permits to the public by lottery.

Other options wouldn't place limits on the number of people who can visit the parks; instead they would place limits on the way those visitors get into and around the parks. For example, as parking shortages plague some parks, one option is to prohibit parking in the parks. Instead, a mass transit system would bring visitors into the parks and shuttle them around once they're there.

Surely other options exist to protect America's parks while making it possible for those who want to visit to do so.

Appendix 4: Day 2 Procedures

Your group is meeting to come to an agreement about how to deal with overcrowding at the national parks.

To begin with, you need to know that this activity is *not* a debate. A debate would have you put forward your best argument; then one side would win and the other would lose. But in many situations—including this one—something more difficult and subtle is called for.

Your goal is to solve a problem about which you have strong opinions. The hitch is that you need to solve the problem while working with other people who also have strong opinions—opinions that are different from yours. As in a debate, you will need to put forward your best argument. But you will also need to listen to others’ concerns and ideas, and compromise with them to solve the problem at hand.

Use the procedure below to guide your efforts.

The group’s goal is to answer this question: *What is the best way to protect the parks while continuing to allow visitors?*

1. Opening Statements

Each person (except the facilitator) will make an opening presentation, not longer than one minute. Take a few minutes to prepare yours. Use the notes you took on the film clips and the homework assignment to formulate your point of view. Your statement should answer the questions: *What do I do? What is my goal?*

After your statement, write a one-sentence summary of your point of view on the chart called **Stakeholders’ Points of View** (next page).

The facilitator keeps track of time and moves from one presenter to the next.

2. Statement of Premises

Think about each person’s opening statement. Your group no doubt has some common assumptions. After all, if you didn’t have any common assumptions, you wouldn’t be meeting at all. What are those assumptions? List them on the **Negotiations Records** chart. One assumption is already listed on the recording chart to get you started.

3. Identifying Options

From the **Negotiations Records** chart, the group makes a list of options for how to deal with overcrowding. The facilitator asks the group: “Based on the information in the chart, what are our options for how to deal with overcrowding at the park?” Make a list of options in the left-hand column of the **Pros and Cons** chart. Come up with five options. (You may find you have more, but it will be difficult to have enough time to explore more than five.)

4. Evaluating Options

The facilitator says, “Let’s look at Option 1. What are the benefits of Option 1?” The facilitator lists them on the chart. “What are the drawbacks?” Have all students list them on their chart.

The group moves through all five options in this manner, making notes of pros and cons on the chart.

5. Deciding on the Best Option

The group studies the chart. The facilitator asks: “Which options have the most benefits? Which have the fewest drawbacks?” He or she circles those options. Then the facilitator asks: “Is one option clearly superior to the others?” If not, each group member should have a chance to state which option he or she favors and why. Does one option appear to be the best one now?

6. Completing the Agreement Form

On your own, complete the Agreement form – in class, if there is time or as homework if there isn’t.

Stakeholders' Points of View

| Who | Point of View |
|--|---------------|
| Preservationist | |
| Representative of the tourism industry | |
| Park Service employee | |
| Park visitor | |

Day 2: Negotiation Records

Common Assumptions

1. The national parks are overcrowded.
- 2.
- 3.
- 4.

Pros and Cons

| Option | Pros | Cons |
|--------|------|------|
| 1. | | |
| 2. | | |
| 3. | | |
| 4. | | |
| 5. | | |

Appendix 5

Agreement Between:

(Fill in names and roles here of those who are participating in this agreement):

I. Background

We are studying the issue of tourism and the national parks. We understand that the parks are facing the following problems:

II. Premises

We have reached the following basic understandings, and have based our conversations on them. (e.g. Parks must be protected.) List at least four.

III. Possible Solutions

We have discussed the following 5 possible solutions.

IV. Solution on which all parties agree:

We have agreed on the following solution to the problems stated above. Explain why you believe it is the best option.

Sample Answers

Agreement Between:

(Fill in names and roles here of those who are participating in this agreement):

I. Background

We are studying the issue of tourism and the national parks. We understand that the parks are facing the following problems: (4 points)

The parks are suffering from overcrowding, which causes numerous problems, including some that threaten the parks' conservation efforts. For example, car fumes pollute the air, and overused sewage systems threaten to pollute the natural wonders with human waste. Other problems include traffic jams, long waits to see attractions, insufficient parking, and lack of solitude for enjoying nature.

II. Premises

We have reached the following basic understandings, and have based our conversations on them. (e.g. Parks must be protected) List at least four. (4 points)

1. The natural resources at the parks must be protected.
2. People must be able to visit the parks.
3. The parks cannot sustain the current visitor load.
4. The parks and the tourist industry can work together to solve problems.

III. Possible Solutions

We have discussed the following 5 possible solutions. (5 points)

1. Peak and Off-peak visitor fees
2. Raising/lowering entrance fees
3. Lottery to decide who can visit parks.
4. Quotas for park attendance
5. Tax on tourist operators to support the parks
6. Prohibiting cars in parks and providing public transit options
7. Increased government or private funding to improve infrastructure

IV. Solution on which all parties agree:

We have agreed on the following solution to the problems stated above. (7 points)

Answers will vary.