



Wild Illinois History

Words and Pictures Connect Nature and People: The American Conservation Movement

Concepts:

- ❑ Writers and illustrators helped shaped environmental attitudes and policies in a time now referred to as the American Conservation Movement.
- ❑ Essays on nature or persuasive articles or speeches can communicate to others the need to preserve, protect or care for natural areas or wildlife.

Objectives: Students will be able to:

- ❑ Identify individuals from the American Conservation Movement.
- ❑ Understand how writing can help readers visualize and feel concern for something they may have never seen or experienced themselves.
- ❑ Write a persuasive article or speech about a place they care about.

Standards: 16.E.2b

Materials: Writing and drawing supplies

Space: Classroom

Key Points:

- ❑ Men and women during the American Conservation Movement used their skills as writers and illustrators to communicate their passion of the natural world to others.
- ❑ Persuasive essays and articles have been used throughout history to motivate people to be concerned about environmental issues and special places.

Educator Background:

In the late 19th-century, a sense of the special importance of nature for America led people to become increasingly concerned that urban life and industrial products were overwhelming the natural environment. This was the start of the American Conservation Movement, which is recognized as a period from 1850 to 1920. There was a rise in concern to protect natural areas that had not been developed. Naturalists and writers such as John Muir were pivotal in establishing the first National Parks and preserving scenic areas of the American West. Others worked hard to protect wildlife and bird populations that had been devastated by unregulated hunting on top of decreased habitat.

The Conservation Movement had an important effect on government policy in the United States. Many laws were passed, including those that established national parks, national forests, and created policies for protecting fish and wildlife throughout the nation.

Examples of landmark legislation for the Conservation Movement include the establishment of Yellowstone National Park in 1872, of Yosemite National Park in 1890, and the creation of the National Park Service in 1916. Laws for hunting and trapping wild animals and birds were enacted as people realized that unregulated activities could lead to the extinction of these animals. Americans' desire for nature-based recreation grew into an interest in preserving wildlife and wild lands, and the desire to make the great outdoors available to everyone.

In this activity, students research some of the men and women who help to raise the environmental consciousness of the American people through their writings and drawings.

Then, through a guided imagery activity, students experience how descriptive writing can connect them visually, even emotionally, to something about nature that they may have never experienced. Finally, students can try their hand at writing a persuasive piece about a special outdoor place from their own experience.

Procedure:

1) Who's Who in the American Conservation Movement

Provide the students with an overview of the American Conservation Movement. Students conduct research on notable men and women from the American Conservation Movement listed below, and others.

In pairs, students introduce each other. One student introduces the “guest” from the era giving a history of their accomplishments. The other, playing the role of the guest from the American Conservation Movement, provides comments about what they would like the audience to know or remember. (i.e., “My message is....”)

2) Guided Imagery

Writers in the American Conservation Movement shared their love of nature with others through their words. In this way, they helped to connect people with the natural world.

Distribute drawing supplies to each student. Read the Sky Dance passage from Aldo Leopold's *A Sand County Almanac*. (See brief bio about Leopold below.) Explain that this passage describes a long-billed bird called the woodcock, a bird of wet prairies and shrubby areas. The story was written in the late 1940s. It's a bird that most people have never seen, however, woodcocks can be readily found if you know when and where to look for them. The male bird, when trying to attract a female, makes a funny call that you can imitate by saying “peent” in a normal voice, and plugging your nose at the same time.

Ask the students how many of them have ever seen a woodcock. Then, while you read the passage, have the students draw what they think the words describe to them.

Sky dance

(from *A Sand County Almanac*, by Aldo Leopold, copyright 1966. Oxford University Press.)

I owned my farm for two years before learning that the sky dance is to be seen over my woods every evening in April and May. Since we discovered it, my family and I have been reluctant to miss even a single performance.

The show begins on the first warm evening in April at exactly 6:50 pm. The curtain goes up one minute later each day until June 1, when the time is 7:50. Do not be late, and sit quietly, lest he fly away in a huff.

The stage props, like the opening hour, reflect the temperamental demands of the performer. The stage must be an open amphitheater in the woods or brush, and in its center there must be a mossy spot, a streak of sterile sand, a bare outcrop of rock, or a bare roadway. Why the male woodcock should be such a stickler for a bare dance floor puzzled me at first, but I now think it is a matter of legs. The woodcock's legs are short, and his struttings cannot be executed to advantage in dense grass or tall weeds, nor could his lady see them there. I have more woodcocks than most farmers because I have more mossy sand, too poor to support grass.

Knowing the place and the hour, you seat yourself under a bush to the east of the dance floor and wait, watching against the sunset for the woodcock's arrival. He flies in low from some neighboring thicket, alights on the bare moss, and at once begins the overture: a series of queer, throaty "peents" spaced about two seconds apart, and sounding much like the summer call of the nighthawk.

Suddenly the peenting ceases and the bird flutters skyward in a series of wide spirals, emitting a musical twitter. Up and up he goes, the spirals steeper and smaller, the twittering louder and louder, until the performer is only a speck in the sky. Then, without warning, he tumbles like a crippled plane, giving voice in a soft liquid warble that a March bluebird might envy. At a few feet from the ground he levels off and returns to the peenting ground, usually to the exact spot where the performance began, and there resumes his peenting.

It is soon too dark to see the bird on the ground, but you can see his flights against the sky for an hour, which is the usual duration of the show. On moonlight nights, however, it may continue, at intervals, as long as the moon continues to shine.

The drama of the sky dance is enacted nightly on hundreds of farms, the owners of which sigh for entertainment, but harbor the illusion that it is to be sought in theaters. No one would rather hunt woodcock in October than I, but since learning

of the sky dance I find myself culling one or two birds enough. I must be sure that, come April, there be no lack of dancers in the sunset sky.

Questions for the students:

- What did they learn about woodcocks?
- What did they learn about how Leopold felt about woodcocks?
- Why do you think Mr. Leopold wrote this story about the woodcocks?

3) Passion for Place

Discuss with students that writers and illustrators of the American Conservation Movement used their work to convince others to take action or to protect a place they loved. People such as John Muir and Enos Mills wrote books, lectured and spoke with Congress about protecting land to become National Parks.

From their research on important people in the American Conservation Movement, (see below for a sample list) did the students discover things that the authors and illustrators wrote about to try to save, protect or get others to appreciate?

People use essays on nature, influential articles or speeches to communicate to others the need to preserve, protect or care for natural areas or wildlife.

Read the examples below of writings from the Forest Preserve of Cook County, IL from 1946 and 1947. Then follow up with the questions below.

Copyright: Forest Preserve District of Cook County, Illinois
Nature Bulletin No. 86 October 5, 1946

****:AUTUMN STROLLS

Take a walk. Get out in the country these cool crisp days and see Jack Frost's paintings on the leaves-masses of crimson and maroon on the sumac, bright yellow on the maples, deeper yellow on the hickories, purple and red on the oaks. The cattails and bulrushes in the marshes are a rich tobacco brown. The meadows are clothed with russet, pale blue, purple and gold.

Take a walk. Wander through the timber, scuffling your feet through the rustling carpet of fallen leaves. Sample the red haws, wild crabapples and wild grapes. Try munching the meat of an acorn from a gnarly-branched bur oak. Keep your eyes and ears open and you'll see a pheasant, or a flock of crows, or juncos flashing through the bushes. The squirrels are busy gathering acorns; muskrat houses dot the sloughs wild ducks are resting or standing on their heads to feed in the ponds. Soon the geese will come; then winter.

Take a walk. Wear old clothing of some hard smooth cloth that the burs and stick-tights can't cling to. Wear stout comfortable shoes. Forget your hat. Stick a sandwich or two in your pocket and "travel light." Take it easy. Have fun. Relax. Sit down once in a while and be utterly quiet, watching and listening for the wild creatures.

There are 175 miles of trails in the forest preserves -- trails that can be reached in less than an hour's ride by streetcar or bus from the heart of Chicago. Write to Clayton F. Smith, President, Forest Preserve District, 535 County Building, Chicago 2, for a trail map that shows where to go and how to get there.

Get outdoors. Use your feet and eyes and nose and ears as they were intended to be used. Get out of that squirrel-cage. Get going.

Copyright: Forest Preserve District of Cook County, Illinois

Nature Bulletin No. 104 February 2, 1947

****:A PRAIRIE STATE PARK

Illinois is the Prairie State. In 1830, about 60 percent of its area was grassland ablaze with color from spring until late fall. On the wet prairies the big bluestem and other grasses, and the flowering plants, grew to the shoulders of a man on horseback. There, and in the upland "little bluestem" prairies, were successions of flowering plants providing magnificent vistas of colors that changed, month by month, from the delicate greens, yellows, blues and pinks of May to the broad horizontal bands of purple and gold in October.

Then came the invention of the steel moldboard plow -- the only implement that could cut and turn over the thick tough prairie sod, thousands of years old. Illinois became the heart of the Corn Belt. Today only 9 percent of its area is grassland and only a few remnants of its lovely prairies remain.

On the south bank of the Kankakee River, from Wilmington to Kankakee, runs state highway Route 113-S. Six miles south of Wilmington, at the Wabash R. R. crossing, is the hamlet of Custer Park. Two miles farther southeast, on the same highway, begins an area that should be purchased and preserved as a state park typical of the original Illinois prairies.

Roughly 3/4 mile wide, this area extends 4 miles due south from the river, half of it in Will County and half in Kankakee County, and includes approximately 2000 acres. There are a few farm dwellings and some land under cultivation or pasture, but most of it is wild land. There is a small creek angling across the north half. There are several wooded knolls, many sloughs and marshes, bleak sand dunes, upland prairies and wet prairies. There are various types of soil and all the various types of prairie plants.

We have walked over this tract with eminent botanists at different seasons of the year. Its beauty defies description. A list of the species of native prairie plants, some of them very rare today, most of them in quantities that provide great masses of color and texture would require many pages.

Illinois, of all states, should have a prairie state park, now, before it is too late.

Questions for the students:

- ❑ Why do they think the author wrote the articles?
- ❑ What were they trying to convince the reader to do?
- ❑ What are some things the writers included in the articles that helped the reader understand the need or request for action?
- ❑ Locate a state map that shows state parks. Did Illinois ever did obtain a state “prairie state park” south of Wilmington?
- ❑ Contact your nearest forest preserve or natural area and find out how many people visit it each year.

Next:

Ask students to think about an outdoor nature place they enjoy. It might be a corner of their backyard, a garden, a favorite tree, a bird feeding area, a neighborhood park, or an outdoor lab in your school yard. It might be a nature center that your class visited on a field trip, a summer camp, a wildlife area, or a place where they go swimming or canoeing. Then ask them to write a letter to the editor of the local newspaper or to their classmates about why it is important to have and protect the place they enjoy.

Alternate Activity:

- ❑ Students create a poster of an outdoor nature place they enjoy that includes information about how to visit, or protect it.
- ❑ Students write and present a speech about saving their favorite outdoor place.
- ❑ Write and role play a nature news segment for a mock TV newscast.

Extensions:

- ❑ From the information the students gather, create a timeline of significant events in the American Conservation Movement.
- ❑ Research the “Feather Trade.”
- ❑ Find out if there people in your community who helped start city or county parks, or other nature areas. Call a local nature center or park district to find out who was instrumental in starting the park system and when it began.
- ❑ Make a list of wild animals that live in your area. (songbirds, squirrels, insects, turtles, etc) Are there people in your community that help protect wild animals? A local nature center or the DNR may be able to provide you with list of licensed rehabilitators. The DNR can provide you with a list of Conservation Officers that help enforce laws that protect fish and wildlife. Invite one of them into the classroom as a guest to talk about their work.
- ❑ Find out if there any nature clubs, conservation clubs or land trusts in your area that work to protect and care for natural areas or wildlife.

A sampling of authors and illustrators from the American Conservation Movement

John Muir , 1838-1914

John Muir was perhaps this country's most famous and influential naturalist and conservationist. He grew up in the Midwest, but in later years moved west. He founded The Sierra Club and was instrumental in establishing Yosemite National Park. As a writer, he published 300 articles and 10 major books, most of which helped teach people the importance of experiencing and protecting our natural heritage.

http://www.sierraclub.org/john_muir_exhibit/

John Burroughs, 1837-1921

In his time he was an immensely popular nature writer. The writing he is best known for are his gentle observations of nature. Known as the Hudson River naturalist and the father of the American nature essay, Burroughs became one of the most popular and respected authors of his time.

<http://www.johnburroughs.org/bio/bio.htm>

Theodore Roosevelt, 1858-1919

The twenty-sixth president of the United States was sometimes referred to as a naturalist in the White House. Conservation became one of Roosevelt's major concerns. During his Presidency, Roosevelt established the US Forest Service. He also established 5 national parks, 51 wildlife refuges and 150 national forests. As Governor of New York, Theodore Roosevelt had insisted that the state forbid factories to make bird skins into articles of apparel. Birds in the trees and on the beaches were much more beautiful than on women's hats, he insisted.

<http://www.nps.gov/thro/>

Mabel Osgood Wright, 1859-1934

Osgood-Wright became a keen amateur naturalist as a young girl and published her first essay on nature in the New York Evening Post at the age of 16. She founded the Connecticut Audubon Society. For the National Audubon Society, she was editor and writer for *Bird-Lore*, the precursor to *The Audubon* magazine. Birdcraft, the sanctuary named after Wright's successful book, was the first bird preserve of its kind.

<http://www.cwhf.org/hall/wright/wright.htm>

Gene Stratton Porter, 1863-1924

Geneva (nicknamed Gene) Stratton was born on a farm in Indiana. Her favorite spot as an adult, however, was the Limberlost Swamp in Wabash County, Indiana. Porter authored seven nature books, the most popular being *Girl of the Limberlost*, which was also made into a movie. Her depiction of unspoiled nature full of wonders attracted new generations of readers, who shared the author's fascination with wildlife.

<http://www.kirjasto.sci.fi/stratton.htm>

Florence Merriam Bailey, 1864-1948

While growing up, Florence took an avid interest in the wildlife surrounding her home, especially the birds. She dedicated her life to observing and protecting birds and recording the wonders of the natural world. She was horrified by (and worked to eliminate) the fashion trend of the late 1800s which not only used feathers, but entire birds to decorate women's hats. She became one of the foremost women writers of her era and traveled for 50 years studying birds.

<http://www.northnet.org/stlawrenceaauw/bailey.htm>

Enos Mills, 1870-1922

Mills was an author and photographer and is widely credited with being the “father of Rocky Mountain National Park”, established in 1915. He helped convince Congress of the importance of setting aside large land areas for preservation of scenery and the wild life inhabitants. He also launched the first school for “nature guiding.” Mills stressed the importance of “nature guides” (today known as park naturalists or interpreters) connecting visitors to natural resources to foster appreciation and stewardship.

<http://home.earthlink.net/%7Eenosmillscbn/index.htm>

Ding Darling, 1876-1962

A top-ranking political cartoonist, conservation and politics were Darling’s favorite passions. Concerned with pollution and extinction of wildlife, he worked these themes into his cartoons. An avid hunter and fisherman himself, Darling used his cartoons to emphasize that regulations governing these sports should be observed. As a conservationist, he believed that people can benefit from nature without damaging it.

http://www.dingdarlingsociety.org/html/who_is_ding_darling_.html

Aldo Leopold, 1887-1948

Aldo Leopold is best known as the author of *A Sand County Almanac*, a book of nature essays written on his Wisconsin River farm. The book is recognized as a timeless expression of an ecological attitude toward people and the land. He was an internationally respected scientist and conservationist helping to create environmental policy and preservation of wilderness. He founded The Wilderness Society.

<http://www.aldoleopold.org/Biography/Biography.htm>

References:

American Conservation Movement Library of Congress web site:

<http://memory.loc.gov/ammem/ndlpedu/collections/conserv/>

Speaking for Nature, Paul Brooks

Nature Bulletins. Forest Preserve of Cook County IL website.

<http://www.newton.dep.anl.gov/natbltn/natbltn.htm>

A Sand County Almanac. Aldo Leopold