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07. Culture Heritage Lesson #1: PERCEPTIONS OF YELLOWSTONE

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Culture Heritage Lesson #1: PERCEPTIONS OF YELLOWSTONE

Overview: This lesson introduces youth to the National Park Service’s (NPS) mission, while exploring the perceptions of early visitors to Yellowstone National Park (YNP) through a letter activity.

Learner Outcomes

Youth will:

1. Understand that past events are relevant and helpful in making present and future decisions.

2. Be able to explain the mission of the NPS and describe the resources YNP protects.

3. Be able to identify two major types of resources for which National Parks are established to protect.

Getting Ready

Materials: Youth will need their journal and pencil; staff will need the handout.

Preparation: Staff should prepare for this lesson by reading over the background information.

Background

The following material is supplemental information. Adapted from Yellowstone Resources and Issues Handbook: 2012, 2012, p. 15-16.

One of the most enduring legends of Yellowstone National Park involves its beginning. In 1870, explorers gathered around a campfire at the junction of two pristine rivers, overshadowed by the towering cliffs of the Madison Plateau. They discussed what they had seen during their exploration and realized that this land of fire, ice, and wild animals needed to be preserved. Thus, the legend goes, the idea of Yellowstone National Park was born.

It is a wonderful story—and a myth. But those men were real, and so is this land they explored. Thanks to their reports and the work of explorers and artists who followed, the United States Congress established Yellowstone National Park in 1872. The Yellowstone National Park Protection Act says “the headwaters of the Yellowstone River ... is hereby reserved and withdrawn from settlement, occupancy, or sale... and dedicated and set apart as a public park or pleasing-ground for the benefit and enjoyment of the people.” In an era of expansion, the federal government had the foresight to set aside land deemed too valuable to develop.

As an older state park, Yosemite had a strong influence on the founding of Yellowstone because Congress used language in the State Park Act as a model. Congress may have preferred to make Yellowstone a state park in the same fashion as Yosemite, had it not been for the fact that Yellowstone was within three territorial boundaries. Arguments between the territories of Wyoming and Montana that year resulted in a decision to federalize Yellowstone. A generation later in 1906, Congress passed the Antiquities Act, which gave the president authority to establish national monuments. By 1914, the United States had 30 national parks and monuments, each managed separately and administered by three different federal departments—Interior, Agriculture, and War. No unified policy or plan provided for the protection, administration, and development of these parks and monuments.
Lesson at a Glance

**Mission Statement** (25 minutes)
Youth are introduced to the NPS’s dual mission of preservation of resources and providing enjoyment and education of the people.

**Yellowstone Letters** (20 minutes)
Youth step back in time using first forms of communication about the NPS by reading letters from Yellowstone. Afterwards they discuss how the author of the letters included historical information by writing what they observed.

**Concluding the Lesson** (15 minutes)
Youth reflect about the letters and write their own letter about their experiences at YNP.

The management of Yellowstone from 1872 through the early 1900s helped set the stage for the creation of an agency whose sole purpose was to manage the national parks. Promoters of this idea gathered support from influential journalists, railroads likely to profit from increased park tourism, and members of Congress. The National Park Service Organic Act was passed by Congress and approved by President Woodrow Wilson on August 25, 1916:

“There is created in the Department of the Interior a service to be called the National Park Service, [which] . . . shall promote and regulate the use of the Federal areas known as national parks, monuments, and reservations . . . by such means and measures as conform to the fundamental purpose to conserve the scenery and the natural and historic objects and the wild life therein and to provide for the enjoyment of the same in such manner and by such means as will leave them un-impaired for the enjoyment of future generations.”
**Suggested Procedure:**

**Mission Statement** (30 minutes)

The staff will:

1. Ask: What is a mission statement? **Answer:** A mission statement is a statement of the purpose of a company, organization, or person. It guides the actions and decisions of the organization.
2. Ask: What is the mission of the NPS? Do you know any specific parts of the mission?
3. Record their ideas on the dry erase board and compare it to the actual mission.
4. Next, write the NPS’s mission on the dry erase board.
   - a. **Mission:** “The National Park Service preserves unimpaired the natural and cultural resources and values of the national park system for the enjoyment, education, and inspiration of this and future generations” (National Park Service, 2013).
   - b. **Background on the Mission:** Explain that by August 1916 the Department of Interior oversaw 14 national parks, 21 national monuments, and 2 reservations. However, there was no unified leadership or organization to operate these places, which meant that they were vulnerable to competing interests. The National Park Service Organic Act legislation established the basis for the fundamental mission, philosophy, and policies of the National Park Service.
5. Ask youth to record the two major purposes of the NPS on the white board. **(D1) Answer:** Preservation of resources and for the enjoyment and education of the people.
6. Ask: Why is preservation and recreation important in our society?
7. Transition the discussion by presenting pictures of cultural and natural resources (refer to handouts: i.e. Orange Spring Mound, Old Faithful Inn, Bison, Arrowhead, and Jar of Coins). Ask youth to determine if the objects in the picture are either cultural or natural resources, or both.

**Yellowstone Letters** (25 minutes)

Staff will:

1. Ask: What do you think were the first forms of communication about the National Park Idea or Yellowstone National Park?
2. Explain that letters used to be the only way to communicate with loved ones far away. They didn’t have the internet, phones, or quick ways to travel. To understand Yellowstone’s past, we must understand the perspectives that visitors brought with them when visiting.
3. Introduce **Yellowstone Letters**; these letters illustrate the final balance between use and preservation, and how visitors enjoyed YNP.
4. Read three of the Yellowstone Letters. Note that these letters are fictional, but are based on historical facts.
5. After each reading, ask the following questions:
   - a. **Letter #1 Calamity Jane:** What stuck out for you about the journey to Yellowstone or the town of Livingston? What kind of picture did it paint?
   - b. **Letter #2 Fort Yellowstone:** After reading this letter, what was added to your picture of Yellowstone in the early days?
   - c. **Letter #3 Paradise ‘n’ Pranks:** Next, discuss the letters collectively using the following questions: What are the differences between visiting Yellowstone in the past and visiting now? Which historical information did Jo (the letter writer) include by writing about what she observed and by describing her experiences?
6. Explain that one day they will be a “voice from the past” and encourage them to write about their experiences and their way of living in YELL-YCC. **(F1)**

**Conclusion:** (20 minutes) **(S2)** Ask youth to write a postcard to a loved one who might never get a chance to visit YNP. The letter should go into detail about their life in Yellowstone and what they have observed. Draw a connection to the Yellowstone Letters by emphasizing how important it is to accurately capture their experiences. Maybe future explorers will be reading these postcards to find out about life in Yellowstone in the twenty-first century!
a. Natural Resources: *Occur naturally within environments that exist relatively undisturbed by humans. A natural resource is often characterized by amounts of biodiversity that exist in various ecosystems* (Princeton, n.d.)

b. Cultural Resources: *“The collective evidence of past activities and accomplishments of people. Buildings, objects, features, locations, and structures with scientific, historic, and cultural value are examples of cultural resources. Cultural resources are finite and non-renewable resources that, once destroyed, cannot be returned to their original state”* (New York State Museum, n.d.).

9. Next challenge everyone to complete the mission statement in the order it is written with just the individual words, as if the words were puzzle pieces. Mix up the words and provide the words to the group (refer to handouts: NPS mission statement). *(S1)*

10. Give each person one of the words from the mission statement and instruct them to line up in the order in which the words form together to create the NPS mission. An alternative is to have them create the mission statement on a flat surface. After successful completion, have them read aloud the mission and correct any words that may be out of order. Make sure to emphasize the importance of each word. Ask: What would the implications be if one of these words was missing or a different word was chosen?

11. Transition by presenting youth with pictures of visitors doing things that they could not do today (refer to handouts: Superintendent toll with pet lion, early visitors at the Mammoth Terraces, travertine coating rack, tourist wading in Great Fountain, and the bear feeding platform). Describe what is happening in each of the pictures.

12. After reviewing the pictures, ask: Do you think that the NPS was communicating a different message then? How do you feel the NPS communicates these values or its mission in Yellowstone National Park now? (If they struggle to come up with answers, give the example of the north entrance where you enter under an arch that says “for the benefit of the people”.)

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1. After they have finished writing their postcards, return them to YCC camp to be mailed.

2. *(Optional)* Invite youth to share what they wrote with the group.

**Assessment Check In:**

**(D1):** Examines prior knowledge, interests and misconceptions of the National Park Service Mission. This information will assist the staff in planning instruction.

**(F1):** Provide insight youths understanding of Jo’s experiences in Yellowstone.

**(S1):** Demonstrates and examines their ability to work together in recreating the NPS’s mission statement.

**(S2):** Examines their ability to articulate their experiences in Yellowstone through letters like Jo (the letter writer) in the Yellowstone Letters.

**Staff Notes:**

- Yellowstone Letters: When reading the Yellowstone Letters, try to engage students with a fun old-timey accent or by having the youths take turns reading the letters out loud.
- If youth struggle with thinking of a loved one to write a postcard to, brainstorm with them about another person. For example, they could write to someone at the YELL-YCC camp or they could write a letter to themselves to read when they return home.
References:


Incorporates the Letters to Yellowstone activity, which served as the central activity. It was modified in the following ways: Instructional language was changed to match the REC; The introduction and conclusion were additions.


Incorporates the “Letters to Yellowstone” which served as the central activity. It was modified in the following way: Edited for grammatical errors.


Handouts:
- Pictures of Cultural and Natural Resources
- NPS Mission Statement
- Yellowstone Letters


Pictures of Visitors Doing Things That They Could Not Do Today

The National Park Service preserves unimpaired the natural and cultural resources and values of the national park system for the enjoyment, education, and inspiration of this and future generations.
LETTERS FROM YELLOWSTONE

The following materials are from Robinson, 1986.

First Letter
Letter Title: Calamity Jane

June 25, 1902
Mammoth Hot Springs, Wyoming

Dear Grandmother Chinook,

I have not been eaten by a grizzly bear! But I have been busy with my new horse (yes, Papa kept his promise). And I am having many exciting adventures at Fort Yellowstone.

First, let me tell you about our trip west. As you know we took the train from St. Louis. What a great, open country we passed through! But nothing extraordinary happened until we arrived at Livingston, Montana. Between trains Mother suggested we take some exercise, so we strolled Main Street. I am not sure if it was Mother’s “condition” (why can’t we just say she’s having a baby?) or the mountain lion chained before the taxidermist’s store, but Mother became quite faint. As she sank down on a rough wooden bench, she told me to fetch a glass of water. She was pale.

In my excitement I ran into the nearest open doorway and was brought up short by a rough hand on my collar.

“No girkies in here- now out with ya,” said a man in a rough voice.

“No girlys? Don’t be insultin’, Patsy, I don’t take kindly to it,” replied a woman, her voice cracked with age.

“Calamity, ’tis a long time since you have been a girly,” Patsy guffawed.

This exchange gave me a moment to look around. After the bright sunlight of the street, I was blind in the darkened room. But my nose sensed the sharp, biting odor of Grandmother’s rheumatism remedy. In the corner a man coughed. Relieved, I thought I had stumbled into a hospital with several patients lined up at a long, shiny bar “taking their medicine.”

Suddenly I remembered my poor Mother. “Sir, please my mother is ill. May I trouble you for a glass of water, or if you are the doctor, perhaps you will have a look at her?”

The man called Patsy threw his head back and roared with laughter. The “patients” joined him, and the small room echoed with their raw merriment. Hot tears of shame ran down my cheeks.

Suddenly I felt a gentle arm around my shoulders. “Come on, child, perhaps I can help your mama.”
I looked into a weathered face lined with age, but the eyes were bright and kind. The old woman wore buckskins, boots, and a sweat-stained Stetson. I took the old woman to Mother, who was soon revived under her gentle care.

The woman walked with us to the train. After we were settled into our seats, she slipped me a photograph and a little pink pamphlet. She winked at Mother and told us "to give her best to the 'boys in blue' at Fort Yellowstone." Then she was gone.

On the way to Cinnabar, I opened the pink leaflet and began to read. Grandmother, that old woman was Calamity Jane! Reading the booklet, I learned she had been a scout with General Custer and had ridden into the thick of an Indian battle to rescue a fallen Captain Egan. She had been a Pony Express rider. A friend of Wild Bill Hickok, she rounded up his murderer and, threatening him with a meat cleaver, had brought him in to face justice.

Glancing at Mother finally resting with a pink flush to her pale cheeks, I hid the pamphlet. I think it best Mother remember her only as that kind old woman.

I must close now. From my window I can see that the soldiers have finished their drill. Mother is calling me. We are going for a buggy ride and a picnic. Will tell more in my next letter.

Your loving granddaughter,
Jo

P.S. Grandmother, that was not a hospital at all! It was the "Bucket of Blood Saloon" a hangout of Calamity Jane’s. (Mother doesn’t know that either.)

P.P.S. If the baby is a girl, I think we should name her Jane. What do you think?
Dear Grandma Chinook,

I have made a wonderful friend at Fort Yellowstone. Her name is Sarah. We are the same age. As her mother is also having a baby, we have a lot in common. Her father is a sergeant, and her mother takes in laundry. When Sarah’s mother was quite young, she was an army laundress who followed the soldiers and did their washing. They live in a row of houses called “Soap-Suds Row” or sometimes “Hungry Hill.” They do not have much money, but they do not go hungry.

The only “fly in the ointment” (as Papa says) is Mother. She forbids me to play with Sarah as Sarah’s father is not an officer. Mother and I had a terrible row about it, and to spite her I went to my room and scissored off all my blonde curls (I now have bangs and a Dutch-boy cut). Papa tried to console Mother by saying it was a “practical cut,” but to no avail. This will be a long letter, Granny; I am in “solitary confinement” for a week. At least it is only my room in which I am locked, and not Barracks 13.

I am wasting a lot of paper in telling you my troubles. In your last letter you asked me to describe the fort. I shall do my best. We live in one of the four officers’ houses. It is a double house, that is, another family lives on the other side of the plaster wall. It is another officer and his wife.

The house is two stories; it is white and made of wood, with a red tin roof and red trim. Mother loves it as it is very spacious. You know how worried she is about being “ranked out.” If an officer should move in who has a higher rank than Papa, and if he likes our house, he can command us to move. Then, of course, Papa must move out someone of lesser rank than himself, and on and on it goes. Mother has been assured by the other wives that it probably won’t happen at Fort Yellowstone.

I have my own room. Mother and Papa have a room, Mother has hung blue curtains in the nursery (her heart is set on a boy), and there is an extra room for guests. Our Chinese cook works in the large kitchen and pantry, and we take our meals seated around the oval oak table in the dining room. Mother has done the parlor in blue velvet, and of course her little porcelain treasures are everywhere. It takes hours to dust them, and Mother insists they be done every day!

Much to Mother’s relief, the bathroom is in the house. Mother has a small garden in the backyard, but she is constantly waging war against the little ground squirrels who love to nibble the tender leaves. From my window I can see the parade ground with the tall flagpole. To the left of the parade ground is Capitol Hill, where the cannon stands. It is fired for the sunrise and sunset salutes each day. (I think the sun must be quite proud to have such a fuss made over its comings and goings.)

There has been much activity on the parade ground this summer. Not with soldiers’ drills, but with the manure-spreading and seeding. The dust is awful and Captain Hiram Chittenden, an officer with the Army Corps of Engineers, was determined to defeat it. So our roads are now graveled, and we
have concrete sidewalks. The parade ground, once chalky white and painful to the eyes because of the harsh glare from the sun, is green.

There are caves beneath the parade ground. Sarah's father told me that one day the ground collapsed beneath a cavalry horse. There is now a small fence around this dark, steaming hole in the ground.

Every night when Mother puts on her night cap, she says our house is sure to sink to the ground while we sleep, and tomorrow morning we'll have our tea in China. A friend of Mother’s says she hears sounds like those of a geyser beneath her husband’s quarters.

The fort also has a hospital (and morgue), headquarters, stables, barracks (for the enlisted soldiers), guardhouse, granary, bakery and other buildings.

Across from the fort is the National Hotel. It is a large, awkward, red and green building with a veranda running the entire length of it. The tourists often sit on the porch and sip cool drinks as they watch the soldiers drill or the stagecoach drivers put on a bucking bronc show.

So, Grandmother, that is Fort Yellowstone. I shall end my letter with a funny story. Perhaps that will cheer us both. Earlier I mentioned our Chinese cook- he is really our second cook. Our first cook, Chan, has returned to Billings, Montana.

Early one morning Chan began preparations for a formal dinner that Mother had planned for that evening. It was for a senator who was touring the Park. As Chan stepped into our backyard to put garbage in one of the cans he came face-to-face with a large, angry bear.

With his baggy pants flapping and his queue streaming behind him, he raced back into the house. You have never heard such a flood of words. Mother said for once she had no trouble understanding him- and it was all in Chinese! When he finally calmed down, he turned to Mother and said, “I go ‘way now, Missy.” Mother was sympathetic, but as Papa heard the story from the little man, she raced to Chan’s room and hid his trunk.

The dinner that night was delicious: oyster stew, potato, cabbage, and onion salad, boiled ham, roast goose, tender beef, sweet spuds, fresh rye bread, gooseberry jelly, and chocolate, apple, peach, and rhubarb pies. But when Chan brought in the decorated cake thick with icing and set it before mother it read: “Goodbye Missy, I leave tomorrow.” Yes, Mother did give the poor man back his trunk.

Do take care of yourself for I miss and love you much.

Your granddaughter,
Jo
Third Letter
Letter Title: Paradise ‘n’ Pranks

November 5, 1902
Fort Yellowstone, Wyoming

Dear Grandma Chinook,

I guess summer cannot last forever, but fall certainly gives in quickly to winter in the mountains.

After Miss Pinshaw’s Academy for Young Ladies, the post school is easy. A solider who was once a teacher in Chicago instructs us. Sarah and I are the oldest, so we help the little ones with their ciphers.

Papa knows that Sarah is my best friend in the whole world. He says we are lucky, because on some posts the officers’ children and the enlisted men’s children attended separate schools. Mother is so occupied with getting ready for the baby that she pays little attention to my comings and goings.

But Sarah and I had a grand time this summer. We rode Spanky (my horse), had picnics, and went fishing every sunny day. Though we are as close as sisters, Sarah and I are quite different looking. My hair and skin are so light and sensitive to the sun, but Sarah is tanned brown as an Indian, with heavy black hair and dark eyes. Papa says we shall both be beauties one day. Isn’t that silly?

There are other children at the fort. The Scoyen boys, Clarence and Eivind, are young, but they make up for it by being daring. Clarence got into trouble with the officers. The officers are encouraging the deer to stay on the parade ground by feeding them. One day Clarence hid in the sagebrush close to the parade ground and howled like a coyote. You should have seen those deer scatter! As you might expect, Major Pitcher, the commander and acting superintendent of the Park, was not amused.

I had a scary experience at Devil’s Kitchen. This is a cavern on top of the Mammoth Hot Springs Terraces. At the urgings of my friends, I climbed into this dark, hot hole by means of a rickety wooden ladder. As I climbed deeper and deeper, it became hotter and hotter. My heart beat furiously, for I imagined that at any moment I would meet the devil himself. But I survived and occasionally made things exciting for the tourists who went there.

Porters from the hotel took groups of tourists into the cavern by means of the same shaky spruce-tree ladder. My friends and I hid in the trees and just as they reached the bottom of the cheerless hole, we dropped lighted papers into it. This stirred up the bats, who flew madly about. You should have seen the ladies screaming and flinging their arms about their heads to keep the bats out of their hair. (Please don’t tell Mother or even Papa about this.)

Sometimes Papa allowed Sarah and I to peek in on the dances held at the National Hotel. What a beautiful sight! With fresh flowers twisted in their hair, ladies in colorful gowns whirled about the room in the arms of a young tourist or dashing soldiers.

The boys were always spying on the soldiers “rotten-logging” with their sweethearts (generally maids from the hotel). Sarah and I thought that terribly childish.
The summer was fun, but it is nice to have Papa home. With his bedroll, coffee pot, frying pan, and fishing rod, he was gone most of the time. He was inspecting the soldier stations throughout the Park. During the year the soldiers live at many different outposts. In summer they watch the tourists and in winter the poachers.

According to Papa, the Park was saved by the cavalry, who “came to the rescue” in 1886. Before that the civilian superintendents were allowing fires to burn out of control, poachers to kill the animals, and tourists with their rock hammers to chip away the Park’s wonders. Papa says the cavalry restored order to the Park. He is proud of his work and his men.

Yet, as the duty is lonely, there are deserters. I heard Papa tell a young man who works at the hotel and is interested in soldiering that the work of a cavalryman includes: guard duty, kitchen detail, patrols (on horseback and skis), target practice, foot and mounted drills, and stable call.

Papa recently went out on an unusual detail. One officer had the idea to supply the soldiers at the outposts with piglets to raise for food. Papa laughingly admits that it was fine idea, but difficult in practice. It seems that after raising the baby pigs, the soldiers could not bring themselves to butcher their pets. So Papa is now exchanging the pigs from station to station so that no one will have to eat bacon for breakfast that once was affectionately called “Sparky.”

Much love,
Your Granddaughter,
J