



American Masters “John Muir in the New World”
Family Discussion and Activity Guide

Monday, April 18th at 9 p.m. ET (check local listings)



John Muir in the New World — Family Activity Guide

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“How our young wondering eyes reveled in the sunny, breezy glory of the hills and the sky, every particle of us thrilling and tingling with the bees and glad birds and glad streams!” — *The Story of My Boyhood and Youth*, 1912

WELCOME

John Muir knew from personal experience that children love nature. The fields and forests of his youth were his playground and his refuge. He also believed in nature’s healing power. Fresh air, mountain views, nights under the stars—these were his prescriptions for good health and good spirits.

We’ve designed this guide to be a launching place for families who’ve seen the American Masters film “John Muir in the New World” and now want to get outside for their own nature adventures. Kids have become increasingly disconnected from nature since John Muir’s time. But it’s easy to change that simply by making sure our families spend more time outdoors, whether for backyard play or wilder treks. In fact, studies now suggest that time in nature helps make people healthier, happier...and even smarter! All it takes is opening the door and opening up the possibilities for discovery, wonder, play, and renewal.

On the pages that follow, you’ll find inspiring quotes from Muir’s writing. We’ve paired each of these quotes with activities you can try with your family...or, better yet, a group of families. Whether you’re venturing outdoors for the first time or are a seasoned nature enthusiast, we think you’ll find something in these pages to enrich your nature discoveries.

**American Masters “John Muir in the New World” will premiere nationally
Monday, April 18th at 9pm ET on PBS. (Check local listings.)**

Introducing Nature Clubs for Families

When Janice Swaisgood’s boys were small, she loved taking them outdoors to canyons, woods, fields, and beaches. Time in nature was so rewarding for her young family...why shouldn’t she share the fun? With that in mind, Janice and her husband Ron founded the Family Adventures in Nature (FAN) club, which gathers families for short and long outings into natural areas. FAN is one of more than 100 family nature clubs currently registered with the Children and Nature Network. These clubs vary in size. They go by different names (Muddy Boots, Muddy Sneakers, and Nature Strollers, to name a few). But all share a commitment to getting families into nature with as much enthusiasm and fun as possible! To learn more, go to <http://www.childrenandnature.org/movement/naturalfamiliestools/>.



FAMILY ACTIVITIES

SOCIAL CLIMBERS

“Climb the mountains and get their good tidings. Nature’s peace will flow into you as sunshine flows into trees. The winds will blow their own freshness into you, and the storms their energy, while cares will drop off like autumn leaves.” — *Our National Parks*, 1901

Try organizing a group outing into nature. You don’t have to go as far as the mountains to find nature’s peace and freshness; simply pull out a map and locate a promising natural area near you! Then invite friends and families to join you.



Here are some tips:

- For your first outing, pick a place with easy access and trails.
- Make a quick reconnaissance visit. Locate the parking area and any restrooms. See whether or not the trails can accommodate any kind of stroller.
- Pick a date and a rain date. Call or email friends, neighbors, and/or other local families to join you.
- Be sure to describe the terrain, trail conditions, and the duration of your outing (1-2 hours is a good starting place). Pick a meeting point and start time. Tell everyone you’ll be leaving right on schedule!
- Provide a short list of things people should bring, such as water, snacks, sunscreen, extra layers, and bug spray. Pack some extras of the above as well as a simple first aid kit.
- Send out a reminder a few days before the event.
- Relax and have a wonderful time! Those families we know who make regular trips together into nature describe lively conversations among the adults, beaming babies, toddlers who pause at every puddle and fungus, and packs of bigger kids who race off together. Don’t worry about needing to teach or lead. Share the joy of being outside and noticing the world, but be open to the exuberant (and sometimes messy) ways that your kids will lead their own discoveries!
- If your outing is a great success, do it again! Or consider starting your own nature club for families.



THE PLAY'S THE THING

“Surely all God’s people, however serious or savage, great or small, like to play. Whales and elephants, dancing, humming gnats, and invisibly small mischievous microbes—all are warm with divine radium and must have lots of fun in them.” — *The Story of My Boyhood and Youth*, 1913

Getting into nature shouldn’t be serious business. Encourage your kids to play! The more fun they have outside, the more likely they are to go again.

Here are some of our favorite ideas:

- Play with sticks. Is yours a stout walking stick to help traverse bumpy terrain? Is it a magic wand for casting spells on the trees and rocks? Is it a giant spoon for stirring up stream soup?
- Imitate animals. Have each child in your group pick a favorite local animal. Try hopping, slithering, or flitting about like your chosen creature. What are your favorite places to hide? Eat?
- Have a scavenger hunt. Look for items beginning with different letters of the alphabet or sporting different colors of the rainbow.
- Play pinecone baseball. All you need is a stick and a pinecone!
- With older kids, try playing Sardines or regular Hide and Seek. They’ll love finding a spot to be alone for a while. And with any luck, they’ll get in some great observations of nature while they’re at it!

DOG DAYS

“The days that were too stormy for sailing I spent in the woods, or on the adjacent mountains, wherever my studies called me; and Stickeen always insisted on going with me, however wild the weather, gliding like a fox through dripping huckleberry bushes and thorny tangles of panax and rubus, scarce stirring their rain-laden leaves; wading and wallowing through snow, swimming icy streams, skipping over logs and rocks and the crevasses of glaciers with the patience and endurance of a determined mountaineer, never tiring or getting discouraged.”— *Stickeen, the Story of a Dog*, 1909

John Muir wrote about amazing adventures he shared with his friend’s dog, Stickeen. Do you or your friends own dogs? If so, bring them along on your outings with kids. Dogs are a great reminder, if you or your kids need it, of how to throw oneself into adventures with nature. Play a kind of dog follow-the-leader: Sniff plants. Race after squirrels. Dig in the mud. Splash in the shallows. Release your inner puppies as you enjoy some exuberant nature play!



IMAGINE THAT!

“We hear only woodpeckers and squirrels and the rush of turbulent streams. But imagination gives us the sweet music of tiniest insect wings, enables us to hear, all around the world, the vibration of every needle, the waving of every bole and branch, the sound of stars in circulation like particles in the blood....Imagination is usually regarded as a synonym for the unreal. Yet is true imagination healthful and real, no more likely to mislead than the coarse senses. Indeed, the power of imagination makes us infinite.”

— unpublished journal fragment in *John of the Mountains*, edited by Linnie Marsh Wolfe, 1938

Help your children stir their senses and wake up their imaginations with one or more of the following activities:

- Stay silent for five minutes outdoors. What do you hear? Do you think, if you listen hard enough, you might be able to hear insect wings beating? Ants crawling? Flowers opening? Try one more minute of listening!
- Sit outside your house. Look around and try to imagine what this place looked like before humans settled here. Draw a picture of what you imagine.
- Read stories about fairyfolk who live in nature. Then go on walks outdoors looking for possible tracks, houses, and other signs of these secretive creatures. Use fallen sticks and leaves, rocks, acorns, and other natural objects to build your own fairy houses under trees or along waterways.

TAKE A NATURE BREAK

“Wander a whole summer if you can. Thousands of God’s blessings will search you and soak you as if you were a sponge, and the big days will go by uncounted. If you are business-tangled and so burdened by duty that only weeks can be got out of the heavy laden year, give a month at least. Time will not be taken from the sum of life. Instead of shortening, it will indefinitely lengthen it....”

— *Our National Parks*, 1901

Have you ever thought about taking your kids to a rustic family camp in the woods? Or to a national park? Or on a backcountry camping trip? Maybe now’s the time to take the plunge! Vacations in nature are often much less expensive than trips to cities or theme parks. They can deepen the whole family’s relationship to the natural world and even each other. With luck, they’ll leave you feeling clear-headed and restored, especially if you go unplugged! Here are some ideas to consider:

- Most national parks have visitor centers that can give you information on lodging, trails, and the natural history of the region. Find a park at <http://www.nps.gov/index.htm>.
- The National Audubon Society runs nature camps for kids and families. Visit <http://education.audubon.org/nature-camps> to learn more.
- The Sierra Club hosts family nature trips that allow you to venture into wild areas with experienced leaders. Visit <http://tioga.sierraclub.org/TripSearch/>.



RESOURCES



For more information on the Children and Nature Network, visit www.childrenandnature.org.

To get directly to C&NN's Family Nature Clubs page, visit <http://www.childrenandnature.org/movement/naturalfamilies/>.

Take part in conversations with other families committed to connecting to nature in the Natural Families Network on C&NN's social networking site, C&NN Connect: at <http://childrenandnature.ning.com/group/natureclubsforfamilies>.

For direct links to John Muir's original writing about nature, see http://www.sierraclub.org/john_muir_exhibit/writings/default.aspx.

Naturalist Joseph Cornell has simplified John Muir's writings about his life in nature in *John Muir: My Life with Nature* (Dawn Publications, 2000). The book also includes ideas for family activities in nature.

Find parks near you, as well as fun and easy activities in nature you can try with your family, at www.naturerocks.org.

Get a set of "Nature Circles"—simple activities to do in nature with your family printed on round paper—at <http://naturecircles.org/index.html>.





The Children and Nature Network is honored to help celebrate the life, accomplishments, and legacy of John Muir. We respect a range of values and beliefs about the natural world, including but not limited to those of John Muir as presented in this film. We encourage everyone who participates in the movement to connect people to the natural world to exercise appropriate caution and responsibility when engaging in any nature-based outdoor activities.

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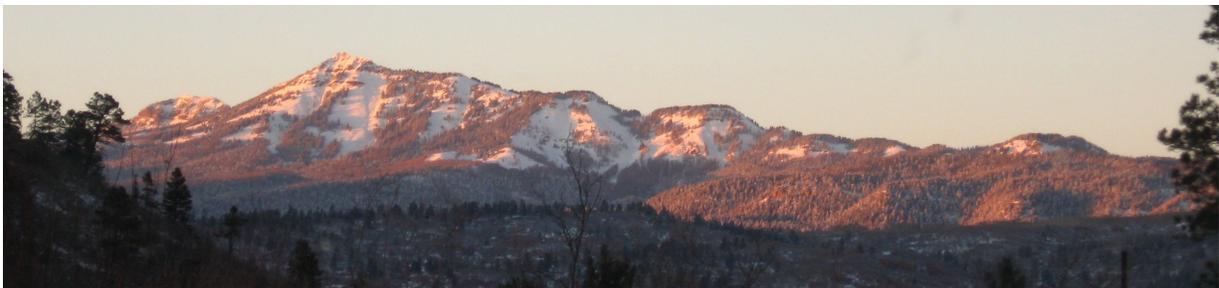
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The mission of the Children & Nature Network (C&NN) is to build a worldwide movement to reconnect children and nature—for their health and well-being and the health of the Earth itself. C&NN builds awareness, provides access to state-of-the art resources, supports the grassroots with tools and strategies, develops publications and educational materials, synthesizes the best available research, and encourages collaboration to heal the broken bond between children and nature. C&NN is a 501c3 non-profit organization.



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