

HISTORY and/or CURRENT EVENTS: Early Environmentalism and current Climate Change issues and experiences
From Mary Haberman, Whatcom Community College

In this assignment students are asked to read excerpts from John Muir and Gifford Pinchot about conservation and environmentalism from the early 1900s for a US History course. They also read/listen to stories about the latest COP meeting on climate change. They discuss key ideas and relate them to their own region, lives, experiences, region and feelings. After preparing with notes on the readings, students hold a student-led Socratic seminar discussion in class.

Here's a description of a Socratic Seminar (but there are many other resources online about how to run them). Basically, students come prepared to discuss an issue or text and run the discussion themselves. Instructors can provide specific questions or one big question. Before the first Socratic Seminar a class does, it's a good idea to discuss parameters and ideas for practices that make for a good discussion with students. [Socratic Seminar | Facing History and Ourselves](#)

Readings:

- Excerpts from: "Gifford Pinchot: the ABC of Conservation" by Char Miller found at the National Forest Foundation blog: <https://www.nationalforests.org/blog/gifford-pinchot-the-abc-of-conservation>
- *Muir excerpts at the end of this doc
- COP 27: Check out these sources to help you answer the above question:
 - [Who Has the Most Historical Responsibility for Climate Change? New York Times. Via the Way Back Machine](#): Good charts.
 - [Did the world make progress on climate change? Here's what was decided at global talks from NPR](#) (Please listen to the 4 minute story and also read the article.)
 - Optional/recommended: Explainer on the COP27: [What Is COP27 and What's at Stake? What to Know About the UN's Climate Summit. - The New York Times \(nytimes.com\)](#) Or via the Way Back Machine: <https://web.archive.org/web/20221127021519/https://www.nytimes.com/article/cop27-climate-change-summit.html>

Prep questions I asked students to do before the seminar discussion:

- Take notes, including your understanding of conservation and preservation from these readings.
- Select a key quote and why you think it is meaningful.
- Create a question

Please read Sources about the COP27 meeting:

- Take notes that help answer the question: How does the history of industrialization impact current obstacles in coming to agreements on how to reduce emissions for climate change? (What's the history and what are difficult issues on getting international agreements?)

Qs for Socratic Seminar:

Pinchot and Muir:

- What is the value of nature to John Muir? Can you relate? How?
- What is the value of nature to Gifford Pinchot?
- What do each want to do with lands and resources?
- Can you define/explain Conservation?
- Who do you support more? Why?

COP 27:

- What were the issues and accomplishments at COP 27?
- What do you think about wealthier countries helping poorer countries? Should they? Why or why not? What do you think your perspective might be if you were not living in the US?
- What is 1.5? Or "Keep 1.5 alive"?

Climate change and your feelings:

- How do you feel about what you learned?
- How have you experienced climate change in your life and/or where you live?
- How do you handle the reality of climate change emotionally? Many people experience climate anxiety? Can you relate?
- How can we cultivate hope for the future for the planet, the animals, humans? What's going right?

Assessments:

- Student notes/answers earned them points. (I didn't assess quality but I have found that requiring some notes or identifying quotes ahead of time makes for a more informed and fluid discussion in class.)
- I didn't assess the discussion individually, but regularly provide participation points.
- Students were asked short essay questions on key ideas in the readings in a future quiz.

Instructor Reflections on the assignment.

- I would not provide all these questions at once to students but rather release them as the discussion was going, to avoid too much jumping around and less depth.
- Students provided a lot of examples of progress toward lessening emissions and addressing climate change. A future assignment idea: to ask students to bring in examples of what is going right and share them.

Thanks to my Whatcom Community College colleagues Irena Lambrou, Jennifer Zovar and Kaatje Kraft for leading the Climate Anxiety and Ecogrief Workshop, funded by WCC Foundation's Funds for Excellence. It motivated me to include space in this discussion for students to reflect on their feelings about climate change--to create some room for expressions of grief and cultivation of hope.

If anyone has suggestions or additions to this work-in-progress assignment, please share them with me:

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***MUIR excerpts:**

From "American Forests" chapter 10 in *Our National Parks*

The forests of America, however slighted by man, must have been a great delight to God; for they were the best he ever planted. ...And in the fullness of time it was planted in groves, and belts, and broad, exuberant, mantling forests, with the largest, most varied, most fruitful, and most beautiful trees in the world. Bright seas made its border, with wave embroidery and icebergs; gray deserts were outspread in the middle of it, mossy tundras on the north, savannas on the south, and blooming prairies and plains; while lakes and rivers shone through all the vast forests and openings, and happy birds and beasts gave delightful animation. Everywhere, everywhere over all the blessed continent, there were beauty and melody and kindly, wholesome, foodful abundance...

Any fool can destroy trees. They cannot defend themselves or run away. And few destroyers of trees ever plant any; nor can planting avail much toward restoring our grand aboriginal giants. It took more than three thousand years to make some of the oldest of the Sequoias, trees that are still standing in perfect strength and beauty, waving and singing in the mighty forests of the Sierra. Through all the eventful centuries since Christ's time, and long before that, God has cared for these trees, saved them from drought, disease, avalanches, and a thousand storms; but he cannot save them from sawmills and fools; this is left to the American people.

From Ch 9, in Yosemite "Hetch Hetchy Valley"

Intro: In this excerpt Muir discusses the valley that is in danger of being dammed to bring water to the growing city of San Francisco.

....Hetch Hetchy Valley, far from being a plain, ...common, rock-bound meadow, as many who have not seen it seem to suppose, is a grand landscape garden, one of Nature's rarest and most precious mountain temples.

Sad to say, this most precious and sublime feature of the Yosemite National Park, one of the greatest of all our natural resources for the uplifting joy and peace and health of the people, is in danger of being dammed and made into a reservoir to help supply San Francisco with water and light, thus flooding it from wall to wall and burying its gardens and groves one or two hundred feet deep. This grossly destructive commercial scheme has long been planned and urged (though water as pure and abundant can be got from outside of the people's park, in a dozen different places), because of the comparative cheapness of the dam and of the territory which it is sought to divert from the great uses to which it was dedicated in the Act of 1890 establishing the Yosemite National Park. The making of gardens and parks goes on with civilization all over the world, and they increase both in size and number as their value is recognized. Everybody needs beauty as well as bread, places to play in and pray in, where Nature may heal and cheer and give strength to body and soul alike.

...Yosemite Park [is] a wonderland which the Congress of the United States sought by law to reserve for all coming time as nearly as practicable in the condition fashioned by the hand of the Creator--a worthy object of national pride and a source of healthful pleasure and rest for the thousands of people who may annually sojourn there during the heated months.

These temple destroyers, devotees of ravaging commercialism, seem to have a perfect contempt for Nature, and, instead of lifting their eyes to the God of the mountains, lift them to the Almighty Dollar.