

Alaska's National Parks: Treasures of a Great Land

Teacher's Guide

Grade Level: K-8

Curriculum Focus: Geography

Lesson Duration: 1-2 class periods

Program Description

Visit Alaska's national parks to see what this rich and wild land has to offer. Explore the largest national park in the country, Wrangell-Saint Elias National Park; travel to one of the greatest wildlife sanctuaries in the world, Denali National Park; and view the marine life at Glacier Bay.

Discussion Questions

- Why do people visit Alaska's national parks?
 - Describe Denali National Park during the winter.
 - What do you think it was like to travel in Alaska during the Gold Rush?
 - What makes Alaska a land of extremes?
 - Describe the different habitats in Alaska's national parks.
 - What is the importance of caribou to native Alaskans?
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Video Index

Segment 1: Welcome to Alaska's National Parks (3 min.)

Description

Alaska's national parks total two-thirds of the United States' parklands, and they're filled with natural wonders, rich history, and abundant wildlife.

Pre-viewing question

Q: What do you know about Alaska?

A: Answers will vary.

Post-viewing question

Q: What percentage of the land area of the United States does the state of Alaska make up?

A: 20 percent

Segment 2: Alaska's Brown Bear (3 min.)

Description

Meet the abundant wildlife in Alaska's national parks, particularly the brown bear.

Pre-viewing question

Q: What kinds of wildlife live in Alaska?

A: Answers should include moose, bears, and eagles.

Post-viewing question

Q: What type of behavior is discouraged if you encounter a bear in the wild?

A: Park rangers suggest you do not away from a bear because the bear may give chase.

Segment 3: A History of Alaska's National Parks (12 min.)

Description

Take a look Alaska's many national parks, focusing on Denali, Klondike, and Glacier Bay.

Pre-viewing question

Q: What do you know about the Alaska gold rush?

A: Answers may include that prospectors went to the Klondike, a region of Yukon Territory, in search of gold.

Post-viewing question

Q: What made the prospectors' quest for gold so challenging in the Klondike?

A: The Klondike's steep mountain passes made travel very difficult.

Lesson Plan

Student Objectives

- Identify geographic features in Alaska.
- Map Alaska's national parks system.
- Compare the national parks of Alaska.

Materials

- *Alaska's National Parks: Treasures of a Great Land* video and VCR, or DVD and DVD player
- Blank maps of Alaska printed on white construction paper, 1 per student (maps can be found online at <http://www.50states.com/maps/print/alaska.htm>)
- Crayons, colored pencils, or markers
- Pencils and erasers
- Rulers
- Black felt-tip pens
- Maps of Alaska and its national parks system
- Print resources about the national parks of Alaska
- Computer with Internet access (optional)



Procedures

1. Introduce the topic by showing *Alaska's National Parks: Treasures of a Great Land*. Then discuss the environmental features, natural resources, and animal species in Alaska's national parks. Discuss the state's terrain and the differences students noticed between the parks featured in the program.
2. Then tell students to imagine that they are cartographers and that their next assignment is to create a map of Alaska that includes its 17 national parks. Each park must be outlined or identified in some fashion; label all major geographic features within each park – mountains, rivers, glaciers, tundra, and forests; and identify natural resources and the most dominant animal and plant species.
3. Show students examples of physical maps and their labels and features. Discuss how students can clearly identify the geographic features (such as making a map key).
4. Encourage students to make their maps colorful and easy to read. Give them time in class and as a homework assignment to finish. The following Web sites have maps and information on Alaska's national parks:
 - <http://www.nps.gov/akso/>
 - <http://www.alaskatravel.com/parks/>
 - <http://www.us-national-parks.net/state/ak.htm>
 - <http://gorp.away.com/gorp/location/ak/ak.htm>
 - <http://www.nps.gov/akso/gis/parklist.htm>
5. After maps are finished, talk about Alaska's 17 national parks. Ask students these questions:
 - How are they different?
 - How are they alike?
 - Which of Alaska's national parks is the most mountainous?
 - Which parks are the most remote?
 - Which has the most abundant marine life?
 - Do all the parks contain tundra and forests?
 - What kinds of natural resources are found in the parks?
 - How important are these resources to human activities?
6. Discuss the parks the students would most like to visit and why. Later you may want to display the maps around the classroom.

Assessment

Use the following three-point rubric to evaluate students' work during this lesson.

- **3 points:** Students were highly engaged in class discussions; created colorful and legible maps that clearly identified the 17 national parks and met the criteria stated in the lesson; and were able to describe the different parks and their geographic features and compare the parks with great detail.
- **2 points:** Students were engaged in class discussions; created somewhat colorful and legible maps that clearly identified at least 14 of the 17 national parks and met most of the criteria stated in the lesson; and were able to describe the different parks and their geographic features and adequately compare the parks.
- **1 point:** Students minimally participated in class discussions; created incomplete or illegible maps that identified fewer than 10 of the 17 national parks and did not meet the criteria stated in the lesson; and were unable to describe the different parks and their geographic features or adequately compare the parks.

Vocabulary

abundance

Definition: A great or plentiful amount

Context: Glacier Bay has a great variety and abundance of marine life.

coexist

Definition: To live or exist in the same area

Context: Evidence suggests that bears and humans have learned to coexist in Alaska.

glacier

Definition: A huge mass of ice slowly moving over a landmass

Context: Glaciers in Alaska may date back to around 13 million years.

habitat

Definition: The area or environment where an organism or an ecological community usually lives

Context: Plants and animals can evolve in their natural habitat.

haven

Definition: A place of refuge or rest

Context: Denali National Park provides a haven for caribou, moose, and wolves.

subsistence

Definition: A means of maintaining life, especially barely sufficient to sustain life

Context: Some subsistence activities help people maintain traditional ties to the land.



tundra

Definition: A treeless area between the ice cap and tree line of the Arctic region, having a permanently frozen subsoil and supporting low-growing vegetation such as moss and lichen

Context: In the Far North, tundra and desert meet in a place that was the last and perhaps most extreme habitat on Earth settled by humans.

Academic Standards

National Academy of Sciences

The National Academy of Sciences provides guidelines for teaching science in grades K–12 to promote scientific literacy. To view the standards, visit this Web site:

<http://books.nap.edu/html/nses/html/overview.html#content>.

This lesson plan addresses the following science standards:

- Life Science: Interdependence of organisms; Diversity and adaptations of organisms; Populations and ecosystems
- Earth Science: Properties of earth materials
- Science in Personal and Social Perspectives: Populations, resources, and environments; Natural resources; Environmental quality

Mid-continent Research for Education and Learning (McREL)

McREL's Content Knowledge: A Compendium of Standards and Benchmarks for K-12 Education addresses 14 content areas. To view the standards and benchmarks, visit

<http://www.mcrel.org/compendium/browse.asp>.

- Geography – Places and Regions: Understands the physical and human characteristics of a place
- Geography – Physical Systems: Understands the characteristics of ecosystems on Earth's surface
- Geography – Environment and Society: Understands how human actions modify the physical environment
- Geography – The World in Spatial Terms: Knows the location of places, geographic features, and patterns of the environment; Understands the characteristics and uses of maps, globes, and other geographic tools and technologies
- Language Arts – Viewing: Uses viewing skills and strategies to understand and interpret visual media;
- Language Arts – Reading: Uses reading skills and strategies to understand and interpret a variety of informational texts



National Council for the Social Studies

The National Council for the Social Studies (NCSS) has developed national standards to provide guidelines for teaching social studies. To view the standards online, go to <http://www.socialstudies.org/standards/strands/>.

- People, Places, and Environments

Geography

National Council for Geographic Education

The National Council for Geographic Education (NCGE) provides 18 national geography standards that the geographically informed person knows and understands. To view the standards online, go to <http://www.ncge.org/publications/tutorial/standards/>.

This lesson plan addresses the following NCGE standards:

- Places and Regions
 - Physical Systems
 - Environment and Society
 - The World in Spatial Terms
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Support Materials

Develop custom worksheets, educational puzzles, online quizzes, and more with the free teaching tools offered on the Discoveryschool.com Web site. Create and print support materials, or save them to a Custom Classroom account for future use. To learn more, visit

- <http://school.discovery.com/teachingtools/teachingtools.html>
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