



A DAY BY THE BUFFALO

KEEPING OUR NATIONAL TREASURES

This lesson will help students identify the significance of Buffalo River to our nation. It reviews the role of *national park system* areas and the use and *preservation* of these areas for future generations.

TEACHER BACKGROUND

Our government has set aside special lands and properties as public lands for the benefit of all citizens of the United States. One agency in the Department of Interior, the *National Park Service*, is charged with *preserving* our nation's natural and cultural heritage.

In 1872, Yellowstone became the first national park established by Congress. Our lawmakers answered the question that many who had visited or seen images of Yellowstone wanted to know -- What to do with a place as *unique* and unusual as Yellowstone? By establishing Yellowstone as a national park, Congress was establishing a means for preserving natural and cultural resources in the years to come. They established Yellowstone for future generations as a "pleasuring ground" to be *conserved* for its special qualities and values. Thus was the beginning of a system of special areas, both natural and cultural, that has come to represent our nation's heritage. Additional areas were established during the next 44 years. In 1916 the National Park Service (NPS) was created to manage the developing *national park system*. The *national park* idea began in the United States.

Today after over 80 years of management by the NPS, there are more than 375 units of our country's *national park system*. These units are classified as national parks (NP), national historic sites (NHS), national monuments (NM), national lakeshores (NL), national rivers (NR), national recreation areas (NRA), national memorials (N Mem), and a handful of other designations. Created by an act of Congress or as in the case of some national monuments, by presidential proclamation, these areas are afforded federal *protection*, with management directed to allow use of these resources "by such means as will leave them unimpaired for the enjoyment of future generations."



CLASSROOM: PRE-VISIT ACTIVITIES

ACTIVITY 1. The Buffalo River: Our National Treasure

STATE STANDARD:

Social Studies – Strand Geography

Standard 1. Physical and Spatial

Students shall develop an understanding of the physical and spatial characteristics and applications of geography.

OBJECTIVES

Students will:

1. name the federal agency that is entrusted with *preserving* our nation's natural and cultural heritage.
2. describe significant features or events that make *national park system* areas special and qualify them for inclusion in a *national park system*.
3. identify five *unique* qualities of the Buffalo River that led to the designation as a national river.

MATERIALS

- outline maps of the United States
- maps of the *national park system* or U.S. atlas
- park folders from various NPS units
- map/folder of the Buffalo National River area
- chalkboard
- paper
- pencil

ACTIVITY

1. Have the students name any *national park system* areas they have visited. If there are many responses, make a list on the chalkboard. Introduce the *national park system* map to the class. Identify some of the areas across the country, indicating natural and cultural areas. Utilize any picture books of the *national park system* that may be in the school or public libraries. Ask the students if they can identify the six *national park system* units in the state of Arkansas [Buffalo NR, Hot Springs NP, Arkansas Post NMem, Pea Ridge NMP, Fort Smith NHS, Central High]. Were any of these not on the class list? Were they overlooked because the students did not realize these areas were “parks?”

2. Divide the class into teams of three or four students. Give each team an outline map of the United States and three park folders from different park areas around the country. (Contact your local ***national park system*** area for addresses of the park areas of which you would like brochures. Write these parks and they will gladly send you their park folder and other information. You may also research park areas via the Internet at <http://www.nps.gov>.) Ask the teams to do the following: (1) label their park names on the U.S. map and look over the brochures for each park, and (2) make a list of five important (unique) things about each park. After an appropriate length of time, have each team share with the class the names and important aspects of the parks they investigated.
3. Now give each group a park folder of Buffalo National River. Have the groups identify five characteristics of the Buffalo National River that are special and make it worthy of national designation. When completed, have the students write down their answers and share their ideas.
4. Read the enclosed essay and have students reevaluate step 3 of this activity. Allow them to make any revisions they feel are necessary and compare answers again.
5. Assign students a project of researching more about the ***national park system*** or about a park they might wish to visit some day. Have them submit a written story on the significance of the park and why they would want to visit it.



ACTIVITY 2. Your Special Place

STATE STANDARDS:

English - Strand: Oral and Visual Communications

Standard 1. Speaking

Students shall demonstrate effective oral communication skills to express ideas and to present information.

Science - Strand 2: Life Science

Standard 2. Living Systems: Characteristics, Structure, and Function

Students shall demonstrate and apply knowledge of living systems using appropriate safety procedures, equipment, and technology.

OBJECTIVES

Students will:

1. name and describe their special place.
2. state why their special place is important to them.

MATERIALS

- paper
- pencil

ACTIVITY

1. Ask students if they have a “special place,” perhaps alongside a river, spring, or waterfall? How does it make them feel to spend time near water, like a river? Was their “special place” clean (and would they return if it weren’t)? Does their water “course” to someplace else? Is their “special place” a **tributary**? Does it travel on for someone else to enjoy?
2. Ask students to name plants they have seen near rivers they have visited. Were these plants important to the river?
3. Have students look around their homes or school and list the different ways they use water and how the water affects their daily lives. Are there things they do now with water that they would be unable to do if it were not clean? What are some ways they have seen water **polluted**? How can they help to ensure that water in the **Ozarks** remains as clean as possible?

4. Ask students to write about their “special place” and how it makes them feel, and whether or not they think their special place is worthy of becoming a national treasure.



THE BUFFALO RIVER: OUR NATIONAL TREASURE

An old marker at Buffalo Point near Yellville reads in part:

“There are little corners of this earth put aside to be discovered ... and to bring joy... The lands over which you look here, across this beautiful river, are such a corner ... set aside forever for all...”

This marker brings to light the need for boys, girls, men, and women to experience nature and to see areas unspoiled by human hands. The Buffalo River in northwest Arkansas is such a place. In 1972, the United States Congress enacted legislation *“for the purpose of conserving and interpreting an area containing unique scenic and scientific features, and preserving as a free flowing stream an important segment of the Buffalo River in Arkansas for the benefit and enjoyment of present and future generations.”*

What are these “unique scenic and scientific features?” The Ozarks are the only extensively elevated land between the Appalachian and the Rocky Mountains. The Ozarks aren’t actually mountains at all but an uplifted plateau of soft limestone that has been eroded into steep valleys and ravines. Several writers describe the Ozarks, the oldest highlands in North America, as too low to be true mountains but too rugged and grand to be mere hills.

The Ozarks are an ecological island because they are bordered on all sides by terrain that isolates its plant and animal species. These include glacially flattened terrain to the north in Missouri; the Mississippi River Alluvial Plain to the east; the Mississippi River Delta to the south; and the Great Plains to the west. This island of highlands has preserved a diverse community of over 3,500 plant species that include isolated patches of prairie and the western most expanse of the eastern deciduous forest. Of the 160 species of fish found in Ozark waters, 13 are unique to its streams. The isolation may explain why only 43 species of mammals are native to the Ozarks. Thirteen of these are bat species and the remaining thirty include elk, cougar, bear, and bison. The bison, once so numerous that the Buffalo River and Bull Shoals on White River were named for them, are now gone from the area. Elk also became extinct but were reintroduced in the 1980s along the upper portions of the Buffalo River. A herd now roams the park and surrounding lands.

The Buffalo River is the longest undammed river in the Ozarks Region, and is the second longest free flowing river in the lower 48 states; the longest is the Yellowstone in Yellowstone National Park. Because of the porous limestone bedrock, the depth and flowrate of the river change drastically with seasonal weather changes. At times much of the water is moving below the surface of the ground in cavern systems. The river itself begins in a wilderness area of the Ozark National Forest and flows through a protected

corridor until it merges with the White River at Buffalo City. In this corridor, activities that may degrade the water quality are not allowed and the water is closely monitored for any changes that may occur. Along this corridor the river has carved enormous bluffs, with sheer faces many hundreds of feet high.

Areas around the river were developed mainly as marginal farmland because the ridges of the Ozarks feature poor soil. Because of this, the area existed in an isolated status, sparsely populated with few roads and fewer industries. Even farmers with the good soil along the river had a difficult existence due to lack of transportation and their isolation. This left the Buffalo River country as a window in time. The pioneer cabins and historic sites let us see how the homesteader of 100 years ago lived in these hills. The many archeological remains allow us to peer into the world of the first Americans who inhabited this land for thousands of years, and the magnificent geologic formations of the area allow us to see fossil life forms from long ago. The wilderness areas and the river itself let us experience the Ozarks in an unhurried, peaceful pace. The Buffalo River remains a place to be discovered by all whom will take the time and trouble to look, to all that seek this national treasure now and in the future.



KEY WORDS

preservation, preserving, National Park Service, unique, protection, Ozarks, tributary, polluted, plateau, national park system, conserved

RESOURCES

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