

Essay: From Arbor Day to Earth Day

The Roots of the Modern Environmental Movement

The idea for Arbor Day came from a Nebraska newspaper editor named J. Sterling Morton. Like most of Nebraska's citizens in the 1860s, Morton was a homestead farmer, newly relocated from the East. The settlers were encouraged to settle Nebraska by the Homestead Act of 1862. Attracted by the description of mild climate and deep topsoil, families moved to the tall grass prairies in droves. They were surprised, however, to find the landscape so empty of the trees that they would need for homebuilding, fuel, shade, and windbreak. So when the Arbor Day proposal was put forth on the editorial page of the *Nebraska City News*, those missing the comfort and utility of trees embraced the idea.



Image 1: 1882 Celebration of Arbor Day Frank Leslie's Illustrated Newspaper

When the first Arbor Day was celebrated on April 10, 1872, Nebraska school children planted more than a million trees. Thirty years after the first Arbor Day, Sterling Morton reflected on the day in an essay in the *Kalamazoo Telegraph*.

Kalamazoo Telegraph, 1902

by J. Sterling Morton

KALAMAZOO: Arbor Day is now one of the recognized institutions of the country. Every spring it directs attention to the interest that attaches to trees and gives instruction respecting the kinds and their cultivation. The spirit of the movement has not stopped with trees. Often on Arbor Day, bushes and vines and humbler plants are transplanted; and in the schools the day is made an occasion for directing the attention to the out-of-doors and literature. [...] In Nebraska, the anniversary has accomplished much more than I dared to hope it would accomplish at its birth, thirty years ago last January. The public mind has been centered upon that--upon the importance from an economic, as well as from an aesthetic standpoint of arboriculture. Governor R. W. Furnas of the state board of agriculture has statistics that prove billions of trees have been planted on that day during the last thirty years. The celebration of this anniversary, which is the only one established which looks entirely to the future instead of the past, can be made more and more practical as the science of tree-planting, and its necessity, are thoroughly discussed and inculcated in the common schools of the country.

As the rapid settlement and industrialization of the late 1800's rapidly deforested millions of acres of trees, concern for the preservation and conservation of resources became a hot

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political topic. Preservationists like John Muir wanted the remaining forests protected from future cutting. Conservationists like Gifford Pinchot wanted to harvest timber, but more scientifically.

By the early 1900's, many eastern woodlands had been reduced to tree-stump forests. The word conservation became a household word as families, newspaper editors and politicians proposed the preservation and repair of dwindling natural resources. Planting trees on Arbor Day was viewed as the patriotic duty of every good citizen. Arbor Day thus became the symbol of the new era of conservation, touted from the bully pulpit by the President himself. *Vicks Magazine* published a letter from the President Theodore Roosevelt in 1908 extolling the importance of the endeavor to schoolchildren.

****TRANSCRIPTION OF NEWSPAPER ARTICLE BELOW****

President Theodore Roosevelt

His Great interest in Arbor Day, Arboriculture, and the Forestry Cause

By virtue of special arrangement with Colonel William Loeb, Jr. Secretary to President Roosevelt, this Arbor Day Proclamation, issued April 15, 1907, is here published with the President's facsimile autograph attached hereto. The beautiful half-tone picture of the President appearing herewith is from autograph photo presented to the editor of Vick's Magazine through the courtesy of Colonel Loeb.

To the School Children of the United States: Arbor Day (which means simply "Tree Day") is now observed in every State in our Union mainly in the schools. At various times from January to December, but chiefly in the months of April and May, you give a day or part of a day to special exercises and perhaps to actual tree planting, in recognition of the importance of trees to us as a nation, and of what they yield in adornment, comfort, and useful products to the communities in which you live. It is well that you should celebrate your Arbor Day thoughtfully, for within your lifetime the Nation's need of trees will become serious. We of an older generation can get along with what we have, though, with growing hardship; but in your full manhood and womanhood you will want what nature once so bountifully supplied and man so thoughtlessly destroyed: and because of that want you will reproach us, not for what we have used, but for what we have wasted. For the nation, as for the man or woman and the boy or girl, the road to success is the right use of what we have and the improvement of present opportunity. If you neglect to prepare yourselves now for the duties and responsibilities which will fall upon you later, if you do not learn the things which you will need to know when your school days are over, you will suffer the consequences. So any nation, which in its youth lives only for the day, reaps without sowing, and consumes without husbanding, must expect the penalty of the prodigal, whose labor could with difficulty find him the bare means of life. A people without children would face a hopeless future; a country without trees is almost as hopeless; forests which are so used that they cannot renew themselves will soon vanish, and with them all their benefits. A true forest is not merely a storehouse full of wood, but as it were, a factory of wood. When you help to preserve our forests or to plant new ones you are acting the part of good citizens. The value of forestry deserves, therefore, to be taught in the schools, which aim to make good citizens of you. If your Arbor Day exercise helps you to realize what benefits each one of you receives from the forests, and how by your assistance these benefits may continue, they will serve a good end.

**If Trees
Could Talk**

From Arbor Day to Earth Day

Activity
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Note: You may have to print this page alone.

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VICK'S MAGAZINE

MAY

PRESIDENT THEODORE ROOSEVELT

HIS GREAT INTEREST IN ARBOR DAY, ARBORICULTURE, AND THE FORESTRY CAUSE

[Foreword—By virtue of special arrangement with Colonel William Loeb, Jr., Secretary to President Roosevelt, this Arbor Day Proclamation, issued April 16, 1909, is here published with the President's facsimile autograph attached thereto. The beautiful half-tone picture of the President appearing herewith is from an autograph photo presented to the editor of Vick's Magazine through the courtesy of Colonel Loeb.]

Proclamation of the President to the School Children of the United States

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For the nation, as for the man or woman or the boy or girl, the road to success is the right use of what we have and the improvement of present opportunity. If you neglect to prepare yourselves now for the duties and responsibilities which will fall upon you later, if you do not learn the things which you will need to know when your school days are over, you will suffer the consequences. So any nation which in its youth lives only for the day, reaps



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Theodore Roosevelt

President Roosevelt's Tribute to the Memory of J. Sterling Morton

I knew him in public life, and as a friend outside of public life; and I value him most highly for these qualities of sturdy manual, of courage, fearlessness, broadmindedness, and absolute integrity, which we like to see in one whom we regard as specially representative of our nation. Mr. Morton was prominent among that limited number of men who champion great movements; to whom it is given to associate their names with a movement of marked benefit to the people as a whole. More than any other man, Secretary Morton will stand as the representative of those far-sighted enough to realize the great need of tree culture.

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Forty-five years ago my father who was himself a doctor, had a violent cancer that was eating away his life. The best physicians could do nothing for him. After nine long years of awful suffering and when the cancer had totally eaten away his nose and portions of his face (as shown in his picture) he gave up his life. His palate was entirely destroyed together with part of his throat. Father fortunately discovered the great remedy that cured him. This was over forty years ago, and he has never suffered a day since.

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Drs. MIXER, 206 State St., HASTINGS, MINN.

The Branches of the Conservation Movement

The idea for the first Earth Day came from Wisconsin senator Gaylord Nelson, who, like many others, was terribly concerned about the deteriorating state of the environment. In 1969, at a speech in Seattle, Senator Nelson suggested a simultaneous set of national environmental teach-ins for the Spring of 1970. The environmental crisis, Nelson asserted, was "the most critical issue facing mankind," making "Vietnam, nuclear war, hunger, decaying cities, and all the other major problems one could name... relatively insignificant by comparison." On April 22, 1970, when the first Earth Day was



Earth Day, 1970
Neol Boenzi, The New York Times

celebrated in the United States, twenty million people participated in demonstrations and teach-ins around the country. In the

energized months and years following the first Earth Day, President Nixon enacted the Clean Air Act, the Clean Water Act, National Environmental Protection Act, and created the Environmental Protection Agency. Concern for the environment became a patriotic value. In 1990, Earth Day was again a huge celebration across America and celebrated in 141 countries around the world. Today, there are hundreds of sites containing the phrase "Earth Day" accessible on the World Wide Web.

EPA Journal

by Gaylord Nelson, 1995

Since Earth Day 1970, Congress has enacted nearly 40 major federal environmental laws addressing a wide range of issues, including clean air, clean water, energy conservation, hazardous wastes, herbicides and pesticides. Dozens of individual public lands bills have been enacted since 1970 to designate or expand wilderness areas, wild and scenic rivers, national parks, and wildlife refuges. Perhaps most important, more than 80 percent of Americans now regard themselves as concerned environmentalists. Increasingly, we are coming to understand that air, water, soil, forests, minerals, rivers, lakes oceans, scenic beauty, wildlife habitats and biodiversity constitute the wealth of the nation. This is our capital. In short, these resources are all there is. That's the whole economy. That's where all the economic activity—and all the jobs—comes from. At this point in history, no nation has managed to evolve into a sustainable society. All are pursuing a self-destructive course; we are fueling our economies by degrading our resource base. The challenge of creating a sustainable society implies a bigger destiny than Roosevelt was thinking about in 1936. I am optimistic the generation now preparing to take the helm will have the foresight and will do so."

Worksheet 1: Keywords

Read the essays entitled "Arbor Day" and "Earth Day" to find the meaning of the keywords. First (1), copy the sentence in the essay that uses the word, and then (2) propose your own definition of the word.

Arbor Day

1. Sentence:
2. Definition:

Conservationist

1. Sentence:
2. Definition:

Earth Day

1. Sentence:
2. Definition:

Environmentalist

1. Sentence:
2. Definition:

Worksheet 2: Essay Analysis

Read the Essay and answer the following questions.

1. What was the purpose of the first Arbor Day?
2. What did Sterling Morton say was unique about the celebration of Arbor Day?
3. How had the scale of the Arbor Day celebrations changed by 1908?
4. What did President Roosevelt say to schoolchildren in 1908?
5. What was the purpose of the first Earth Day?
6. What did Gaylord Nelson say was the most important result of the celebration of Earth Day?
7. How had the scale of Earth Day celebrations changed by 1990?
8. What do the numbers and variety of Earth Day websites say about the current celebration of Earth Day?

How to Create a Bibliography

Research a thorough bibliography on your character:

- Materials written or created **by** your character:
Books:
Journal articles:
Media (Radio, Television, Newspaper) essays signed by your character:
Internet documents:
Archival Collections of your character's work:
- Materials written or created **about** your character:
Books:
Journal articles:
Media (Radio, Television, Newspaper) essays about your character:
Internet documents:
Archival Collections about your character's work:

Use these examples as a guide to cite references for your bibliography:

- **Books**
Wild, Peter. *Pioneer Conservationists of Eastern America*. Missoula, Mont.: Mountain Press, 1985.
- **Journal Articles**
"Champions of Conservation." *Audubon* 100 (November-December, 1998): 80-91, 120-122, 124-134.
- **Media**
Wilson, Elizabeth. "Glades Icon Calls Law a Blunder." *St. Petersburg Times*, 3 March 1994, City ed., p. 16.
- **Internet Documents**
Arbor Day: <http://www.arborday.org> Accessed 12 October 1999. (Since web pages change, always includes the date you accessed the page.)
- **Archival Collections**
Idaho Wildlife Federation. Records. Minutes of Meetings Oct 1967. Idaho State Historical Society.

List of Characters

Conservation Roots

1854

Henry David Thoreau
wrote *Walden*

1856

Frederick Law Olmstead
designed New York City's Central Park

1864

George Perkins Marsh
wrote *Man and Nature*

1897

John Muir
founded the Sierra Club

1905

Gifford Pinchot
1st Chief of the U.S. Forest Service

1929

Rosalie Edge
founded the Emergency Conservation Committee

1930

Robert Marshall
founded the Wilderness Society

1934

Jay (Ding) Darling
political cartoonist

1949

Aldo Leopold
wrote *Sand County Almanac*

Environmental Branches

1962

Rachel Carson
wrote *Silent Spring*

1968

Paul Ehrlich
wrote *The Population Bomb*

1969

David Brower
founded Friends of the Earth

1970

Barry Commoner
biologist who reported the death of Lake Erie

1971

Marjorie Stoneham Douglas
founded Friends of the Everglades

1972

William O. Douglas
Sup. Court Justice argued that trees have legal standing

1972

Garrett Hardin
wrote *The Tragedy of the Commons*

1987

Edward Abbey
wrote *The Monkey Wrench Gang*

1992

E.O. Wilson
wrote *The Diversity of Life*

Worksheet 4: Biographical Sketch

Name _____ Life Span _____

Worksheet 4 Sample: **J. Sterling Morton: 1832-1902**

Biographical Sketch

Brief personal history

Sterling Morton was born in Adams, New York, the son of a prosperous produce commission businessman. He attended the University of Michigan but received his B.A. from Union College in Schenectady, New York. He married Carolina Joy French in 1854 and moved to Nebraska City to start the Nebraska City News. He served as secretary of the Nebraska territory and acting governor. He was an uncompromising conservative Democrat from a section of the country that was more comfortable with Republican radicals. When he ran for Congress, he lost the election.

Turning his attention from politics to his quarter section of tall grass Nebraska prairie, Morton experimented with tree planting, evaluating the best forest and fruit trees for the climate. Morton believed the Nebraska prairie would benefit from trees because they would provide lumber, fruit, windbreaks, and soil moisture. In 1872, he presented a resolution to the State Board of Agriculture recommending that the 10th day of April be "set apart and consecrated for tree planting" in the state. The state proclaimed Arbor Day which Morton dubbed "the battle against the treeless prairies." The first Arbor Day proved unexpectedly popular and well over a million trees were planted.

Essence of Environmental Opinion/Activity:

"Other holidays repose upon the past; Arbor Day proposes for the future." Morton's legacy is in the area of agriculture, where he was one of the earliest conservationists, even before the term was known.

Publications/Accomplishments

Newspaper Editor (1854)
Secretary of Nebraska Territory (1858)
Acting Governor of Nebraska (1860)
Put forth Arbor Day resolution (1872)
Secretary of Agriculture under Cleveland (1883)
President of the American Forestry Association
Fallacies of the Free Silver Arguments (1885)
Illustrated History of Nebraska (Editor)

Spirit of the Times

Post Civil War
Westward Expansion

Technological revolutions

Train transportation, telegraph,
photography

Condition of the air, water, soil and biodiversity

The tall grass Nebraska prairie was newly emptied of buffalo but otherwise a thriving ecosystem of deep soil, rich diversity, and clean water.

Worksheet 4 Sample: **Gaylord A. Nelson: 1916-2005**

Biographical Sketch

Brief personal history

Born in Clear Lake, Wisconsin, Nelson graduated from San Diego State College and Wisconsin Law School. He rose through Wisconsin State politics to become governor in 1959. His environmental activism dates at least as far back as his governorship, when he imposed a tax on cigarettes that was used to buy wetlands and park lands for the state. He served as senator from 1963 until his defeat at the hands of national conservative organizations in 1980. He continued to live in the Washington D.C. area after his senate term ended and in 1981 he became a counselor for The Wilderness Society. His continuous work for environmental causes led him to receive the Presidential Medal of Freedom in September 1995 in recognition of his environmental work. Nelson died on July 3, 2005 at the age 89.

In 1963, Nelson wrote President Kennedy: Though the public is dimly aware that all around them, here and there, outdoor assets are disappearing, they really don't see the awful dimension of the catastrophe. The real failure has been in political leadership...But strangely, politicians don't talk about it. Nelson got Congress to embrace the issue of the "environment" working for curbs against industrial pollution of the Great Lakes, introducing legislation to ban DDT, and to force industry to restore stripe mined land.

Essence of Environmental Opinion/Activity:

In a speech to the Senate in 1970, he charged that the environmental crisis was threatening constitutional rights to life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness.

Publications/Accomplishments

Conceived of and promoted the celebration of Earth Day in 1970.

Spirit of the Times

Atomic testing, cold war, Vietnam, dead songbirds, burning rivers, oil spills, toxic fogs.

Technological revolutions

Petro-chemical revolution--plastics, biocides, solvents.

Condition of the air, water, soil, and biodiversity

Contamination of air, water and soil by chemical pollution. Individuals in each species suffering.

ASSESSMENT 2: TEST

1. Describe the origin of Arbor Day.
2. Who were the primary participants in the first Arbor Day celebrations?
3. Who was President of the United States in 1908 and how did he respond to Arbor Day?
3. Summarize the effects of rapid industrialization on the environment and the emergence of the first conservation movement.
4. Describe the origin of Earth Day.
5. Who were the primary participants in the first Earth Day celebrations?
6. Who was President of the United States in 1970 and how did he respond to Earth Day?
7. Give one example of the similarity between Arbor Day and Earth Day.
8. Give one example of the difference between Arbor Day and Earth Day.

Assessment 3: In Your Own Words

Write an essay relating personal changes to social, cultural, and historical contexts.

Personal Landscapes

Use notes below as a guide to writing a cohesive essay.

Paragraph 1: Take a stance.

Do the conditions of the environment impact on the development and identity of the individual? Why or why not?

Body: Back up your argument with proof.

Example 1: Describe the conditions of the environment at the turn of the century and how one conservationist responded to it. Identify the specific event or circumstance that moved this individual to action. Describe how the action changed the course of the life of the individual. Argue whether or not this event helped shape the identity of the individual.

Example 2: What was the condition of the environment in the mid 1970s? Describe how an environmentalist responded to it. Identify the specific event or circumstance that moved this individual to action. Describe how the action changed the course of the life of the individual. Argue whether or not this event helped shape the identity of the individual.

Last Paragraph: Conclusion

Restate your stance. Summarize your proof. State the long-range implications of your argument for society.