The Blacksmith in Society

Lesson Plan #5 - Revitalizing the Spirit

Teacher Background

As open space shrinks, citizens become more acutely aware of the benefits of communing with nature. While this need was not as obvious in earlier times, people have long realized that the human spirit can be revitalized by a brief sojourn away from the hustle and bustle of the industrial world. This lesson plan highlights the "Return to Nature" movements of the early 20th century that lead to the creation and preservation of multiple National Park Service areas including Catoctin Mountain Park.

Goal

After contemplating the attached readings, students will have a greater appreciation of the "special places" set aside for the enjoyment of the general population realizing that we owe today's recreational opportunities to the forward thinking of our predecessors.

Objectives

- To illustrate how the use, conservation or depletion of natural resources affects an area.
- To show how people "return to nature" hoping to find inspiration that will help them cope with the stresses of their everyday lives.
- To tell how Franklin Roosevelt's economic recovery programs jump-started the American economy and left a legacy for future generations.

This activity is relevant to the following Maryland Learing Outcomes:

For Grades 4 and 5

#1 Social Studies Skills

Students will demonstrate an understanding of historical and current events using chronological and spatial thinking, develop historical interpretations, and frame questions that include collecting and evaluating information from primary and secondary sources.

- Apply and organize information specific to social studies disciplines by reading, asking questions, and observing. (MLO 1.2)
- Interpret and organize primary and secondary sources of information including pictures, graphics, maps, atlases, artifacts, timelines, political cartoons, videotapes, journals, and government documents. (MLO 1.3)
- Make decisions and analyze decisions of individuals, groups, and institutions. (MLO 1.5)

#3 Geography

Students will use geographic concepts and processes to examine the role of culture, technology, and the environment in the location and distribution of human activities and spatial connections throughout time.

- Identify and locate physical and human characteristics of places and explain how those characteristics have affected people living there. (MLO 3.2)
- Describe the relationship between physical characteristics of a place and the location of human activities. (MLO 3.3)
- Identify ways and reasons why people adapt to and modify the natural environment with technology, and analyze consequences of the modifications. (MLO 3.8)

For grades 6-8

#1 Social Studies Skills

Students will demonstrate an understanding of historical and current events using chronological and spatial thinking, develop historical interpretations, and frame questions that include collecting and evaluating information from primary and secondary sources.

- Evaluate and organize information specific to social studies disciplines by reading, asking questions, investigating, or observing. (MLO 1.2)
- Interpret, evaluate, and organize primary and secondary sources of information including pictures, graphics, maps, atlases, artifacts, timelines, political cartoons, videotapes, journals, and government documents. (MLO 1.3)
- Make decisions and analyze decisions of individuals, groups, and institutions in other times and places and evaluate the consequences. (MLO 1.5)

#3 Geography

Students will use geographic concepts and processes to examine the role of culture, technology, and the environment in the location and distribution of human activities and spatial connections throughout time.

- Analyze geographic characteristics that influence the location of human activities in world regions. (MLO 3.3)
- Evaluate ways and reasons why humans modify their natural environment to meet their wants and the consequences of the modifications. (MLO 3.8)

#4 Economics

Students will develop economic reasoning to understand the historical development and current status of economic principles, institutions, and processes needed to be effective citizens, consumers, and workers participating in local communities, the nation, and the world.

- Analyze the relationship between the availability of natural, capital, and human resources, and the production of goods and services now and in the past. (MLO 4.3)

Materials Needed

1. Reading, "Camp Misty Mount: A Place for Regrowth", taken from the Teaching with Historic Places Lesson Plan for Camp Misty Mount, a complete copy of which can be found at :
   www.cr.nps.gov /nr/twhp/wwwlps/lessons/47misty/47misty.htm

2. Readings for Lesson Plan #5, provided.

3. Reading, "The Changing Uses of the Catoctin Mountain Forests".

4. Drawing 1, Camp Misty Mount (needed for Follow-up Activity only)

Suggested Activity

1. After reviewing the introduction to the Teaching with Historic Places Lesson Plan, "Camp Misty Mount: A Place for Regrowth", complete the "Setting the Stage" teaching activity so that students will understand how the land that comprises Catoctin Mountain Park has been used over the past several centuries.

2. Distribute copies of the readings for Lesson Plan 5 to students and have them read both excerpts. Ask students to write a paragraph describing how an experience with nature has influenced their lives. When the paragraphs are complete, have students exchange paragraphs so that they can read about another student's experience. After reading about Christian Weller, the National Park study and other student's experiences, lead students in a group discussion addressing the benefits that can be obtained by communing with nature.

3. Distribute the Reading, "The Changing Uses of the Catoctin Mountain Forests", have the students complete the questions on the worksheet for that reading.

4. Have students work in small groups to locate state or federally protected forests or other natural places in their immediate area. Have them find out the current ownership and history of the sites and explain why they are publicly or privately owned. If possible they should look for maps of their locality from 10, 25, and 50 years ago, and note how much natural land was undeveloped compared with today. They might use field guides to determine how long various places have been left to nature or whether they have been part of a reclamation project. Then have students analyze the current conditions of the properties, the growth of surrounding communities, the availability of recreational areas, and the importance of the ecosystem to decide if these areas should be preserved. Have each group present its findings to the class and then hold a general discussion about the quality of the remaining natural places in their locality.

Follow-up Activity

Explain to students that during the 1930s, organization camps were seen as the most effective means of helping urban populations obtain an experience in nature.

1. Break students into groups of three to four, and tell them they have just become counselors at a facility like Camp Misty Mount. Their job is to organize a one-week outdoor education program for students their age.

2. Their plans should run Monday through Friday and mix recreation and environmental education.
    - What topics should the students study, how will they learn, and why?
    - What will the daily schedule be?
    - Are there any facilities they would like to add to Drawing 1 to make this week more enjoyable?
    - Have the groups reassemble and discuss their plans. Conclude by asking them if they think such programs are important, and why they have reached that conclusion. (This activity may also be presented as an individual written assignment.)
3. The "Forging Ahead" picture used on the cover of this folder is a copy of a historic Works Progress Administration (WPA) poster. Test student's ingenuity by having them design a poster representing the goals of the WPA. After the posters are completed, search the internet for additional posters. Were the students ideas similar to those published?
4. Show your students that learning can be fun! Encourage students to visit a nature center, natural history museum or attend an interpretive program at a park. Ask them to report what they learning and show how the learning experience was different from a typical class in school.

Setting the Stage

Establishing a location for settlement depends on both the availability of resources and the ease of transportation. In the Catoctin Mountains of Maryland, the forest simultaneously provided an exceptional source of raw materials and an obstacle to farming and transport. Since settlers saw wood as an inexhaustible resource, they chose to cut at will so they could grow more crops and move more easily over the hilly terrain. This attitude toward the forest meant that by the beginning of the 20th century many of the areas mountain slopes stood bare. Most surviving trees then died during the next generation, as the Chestnut blight, a fungus originally from Asia, spread over the area.

The New Deal began the long process of reclamation and reforestation. Throughout the country the Works Progress Administration (WPA) and the Civilian Conservation Corps (CCC) built public recreation areas on damaged land like that in the Catoctin Mountains. These areas, called Recreational Demonstration Areas (RDAs), provided organized camps that enabled urban dwellers to escape the city and enjoy the benefits of nature. The section of the Catoctin Mountains near Thurmont, Maryland, was one of the sites selected to be developed into an RDA. Although most of the 46 RDAs established across the country were eventually turned over to their respective states for management, much of the Catoctin RDA was retained by the federal government as part of the National Park System. Today, Camp Misty Mount, one of the camps within the Catoctin RDA (now called Catoctin Mountain Park), is significant for several reasons. Not only is it a prime example of National Park Service rustic architecture, but it also represents a successful WPA project that continues to meet the recreational needs of individuals and organized groups from Baltimore, Maryland, and Washington, D.C. Perhaps most important, Camp Misty Mount has allowed the forest to regrow.

Camp Misty Mount: A Place for Regrowth

The gentle Hunting Creek water gap in Maryland's Catoctin Mountains has long drawn people to it. Although the Susquehannoughs, northern Iroquois, and Algonquins who lived in the area had battled one another for many years, these tribes agreed to preserve this bountiful place as neutral ground. Starting in the 1730s European Americans arrived in increasing numbers, as second-generation Americans and German immigrants pushing out from Philadelphia turned southwest at the Susquehanna River.

Throughout the 18th century, Germans, Swiss, and Scotch-Irish continued to appear. Some trudged on west in search of fertile lands, but many settled the mountainsides. One of the area's largest communities became known as Mechanicstown, a name reflecting its thriving manufacturing and service industries.

Crucial to successful settlement were trees. Originally legions of them covered the mountainsides, but their ranks began to fall as European Americans moved in. Settlers cut them to build simple but sturdy log homes and to clear fields for farming. On creeks water-powered sawmills popped up, producing lumber for more elaborate houses or for distant markets. When an iron furnace was built near Mechanicstown, larger areas were clear-cut for the charcoal needed to feed its voracious appetite. By the beginning of the 20th century, most hills had been stripped of their guardians and bore only scars of erosion. Starting in the 1930s, however, people began to reclaim the land. The story of how the area near Hunting Creek regained its forest is the story of Camp Misty Mount.

The Changing Uses of the Catoctin Mountain Forest

Farming and timber harvesting and jobs associated with the iron industry were the primary occupations of people living in the Catoctin Mountains during the 18th, 19th, and early 20th centuries. Several sawmills operated in the area, and wood—especially the abundant American Chestnut—was used for fuel, railroad ties, barrel staves, and mine supports. Thousands of additional acres were clear-cut to make charcoal for the Catoctin Iron Furnace. Other residents found work in the range of manufacturing industries that prospered in Mechanicstown, now known as Thurmont.

At the end of the 19th century the area's economy began to decline. In the 1880s many local workers became unemployed when the furnace stopped using charcoal; those who survived this cutback lost their jobs later when the entire operation closed in 1903. Sawmills used up the remaining large timber by 1911; the last barrel stave factory closed in 1926, after the Chestnut blight, a fungus originally from Asia, had killed virtually all of that species. Years of poor farming practices and many fires from logging operations also had damaged the natural resources of the region.

Conditions in the area deteriorated as the 1930s continued. During the early part of the Great Depression, rural Maryland fared better than much of the country. While many urban residents found themselves without work, farms managed to provide an adequate living for their occupants. As a result many city dwellers returned to the country, which for a short time supported them as well. Several years of drought, however, combined with the increased population to overtax the local economy. Limited state aid was insufficient to ease these economic problems, and so in 1933 Maryland applied to participate in federal relief programs. Maryland's struggle coincided with a growing back-to-nature movement. Many influential people, including members of the Roosevelt administration, believed that Americans needed to move back to, or at least spend their leisure time in, a natural environment. A National Park Service study of the time illustrated these ideas:

> Man's loss of intimate contact with nature has had debilitating effects on him as a being which can be alleviated only by making it possible for him to escape at frequent intervals from his urban habitat to the open country....He must again learn how to enjoy himself in the out-of-doors by reacquiring the environmental knowledge and skills he has lost during his exile from his natural environment.[1]

President Roosevelt's New Deal contained programs that attempted to meet these goals and at the same time offer relief from the Great Depression. The Federal Emergency Relief Administration, for example, spent $5 million to acquire submarginal land—that is, agricultural property that did not provide its owners

reasonable incomes—that would create new sites for public recreation. A series of federal agencies subsequently created 46 "Recreational Demonstration Areas" (RDA) across the country; these spots were either waysides along important highways, extensions to national parks, additions to state scenic areas, or camping areas. In addition to providing recreation, RDAs also contributed to efforts to conserve water, soil, and wildlife resources.

The federal and state governments soon identified the Catoctin Mountains of Frederick and Washington Counties, Maryland, as a potential camping area. The guidelines for that type of RDA called for 2,000 to 10,000 acres deemed submarginal, a metropolitan area of at least 300,000 people within a day's round trip (considered at that time to be 50 miles), an abundance of water and building materials, and a generally interesting environment. Around the Catoctins much of the land was submarginal: of the 50 families relying on agricultural production, 8 were making a subsistence living from the land, 26 were cutting timber, and 16 were living on relief. The area was just under 50 miles from Baltimore and Washington, each of which far exceeded 300,000 people.

Though most of the forest was gone, many large, dead trees remained; the area also had ample water. As a result, starting in 1934 the Federal Government sent letters to landowners in the area explaining the program and offering to purchase their land at a fair price. Enough landowners sold their property that the project began the next year.

The Catoctin RDA was scheduled to include four public recreation group camps and two picnic areas. The Works Progress Administration (WPA) hired hundreds of men: the number of workers at a given time averaged 250, but in one case rose as high as 595. In 1939, after the completion of the building program, workers from the Civilian Conservation Corps (CCC)—another Depression-era relief program—occupied a camp and constructed waterlines, set stone walls, and trimmed trees. Each young man (ages 18-25) received $1.00 per day in wages, room, board, and the opportunity for some education. The men enrolled for six months and could reenlist. These federal relief programs ended abruptly with the onset of World War II. As the nation geared up for the coming battles, both industry and the military provided jobs for all who could be recruited.

[1] U.S. Department of the Interior, National Park Service, A Study of the Park and Recreation Problem of the United States (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1941),

Reading for Lesson Plan #5

Old Christian Weller

Old Christian Weller, one of the best and earliest mechanics of this village, who impressed his mechanical genius upon the town, who did not care much for abstruse mechanics, but only for the experimental and practical, as is usually the case with those whose knowledge has been self-acquired by hard industry, often used to say that he was taught many a useful lesson by the constant toil of the industrious ant. In the spring time of the year he used to repair to the mountain, in the neighborhood of Chimney Rock, and there sitting on an old log he used to observe the work of the industrious ant toiling at their work with incessant labor. The idea and the example gave Mr. Weller courage. It was soon bolted into his mind, and when he returned to his shop on the following morning, it seemed that he could turn out a better horse shoe or make a better edge tool, an axe, an adze or drawing knife, and temper it with more power and durability. As a blacksmith Mr. C. Weller was known to stand at the head of the mechanical art, and this town takes its name * in a great measure from his genius and skill as one of the forged sons of Vulcan.

We mention these circumstances to show that there is much, very much indeed, in the animal and vegetable economy, if properly studied, to guide our mechanics, farmers and miners in beginning the pathway of life. The ant, studied from a practical point of view, may be said to be a natural Geologist and Mineralogist. It is like the screw in mechanics which holds on to all it gets, and at every turn gains a little more.

From "One Hundred Years Ago"
Catoctin Clarion, March 4, 1871

*The original name of the town of Thurmont, Maryland was Mechanicstown. Tradition states that the town was named for the large number of mechanics who worked there.

National Park Service

Man's loss of intimate contact with nature has had debilitating effects on him as a being which can be alleviated only by making it possible for him to escape at frequent intervals from his urban habitat to the open country ...He must again learn how to enjoy himself in the out-of-doors by reacquiring the environmental knowledge and skills he has lost during his exile from his natural environment.

U.S. Department of the Interior
National Park Service
'A Study of the Park and Recreation Problem of the United States'
Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1941

The Changing Uses of the Catoctin Mountain Forests

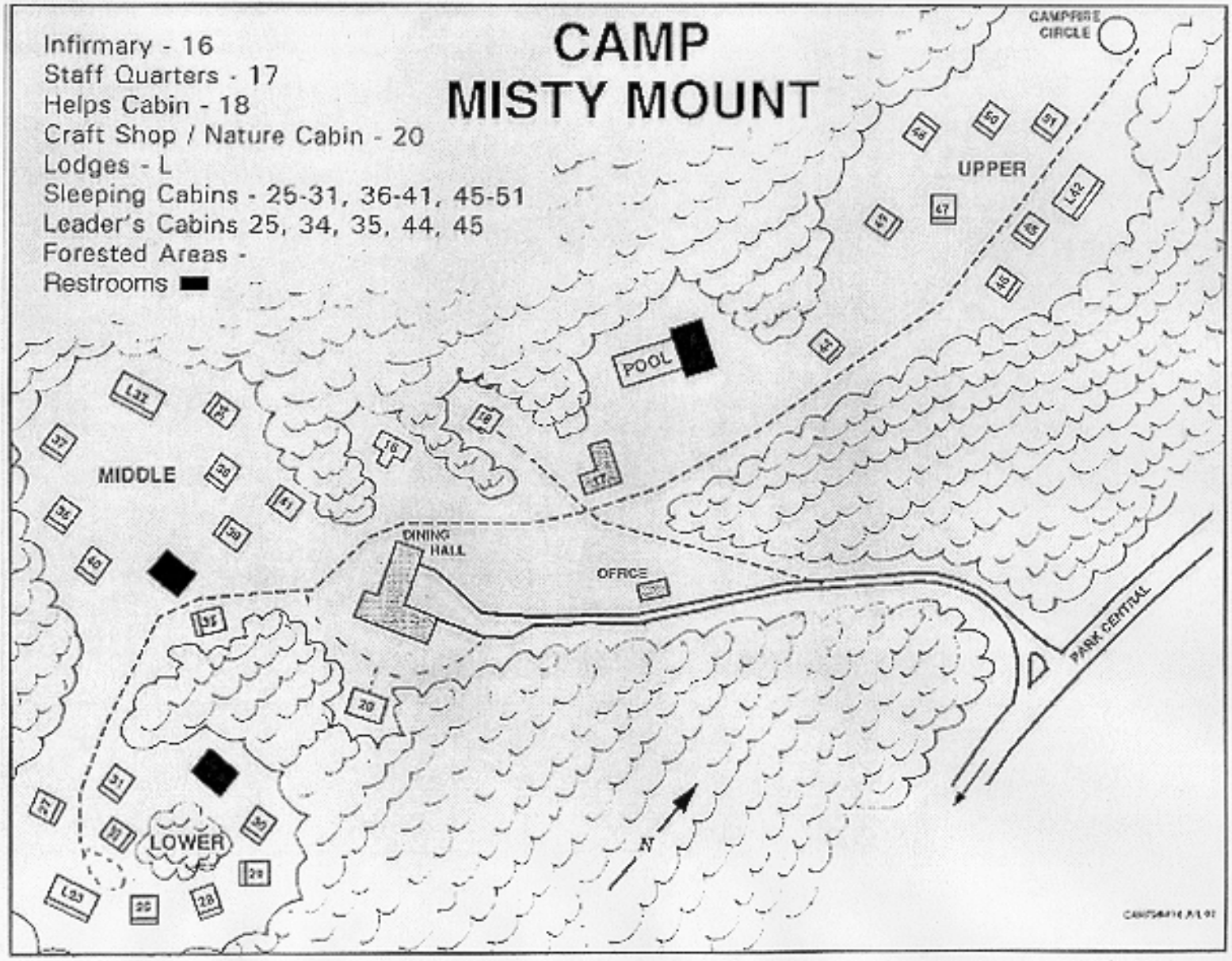
1. How did the original settlers make a living?

2. What factors caused the collapse of the economy of the region?

3. What do you think the National Park Service meant when it referred to the "debilitating effects" caused by "man's loss of contact with nature"?

4. What were the criteria for selection of RDA vacation sites? Why did they have to be close to cities? How might modern transportation methods have affected the criteria?

5. How did the 18th- and 19th-century industries on Catoctin Mountain contribute to the site's eligibility for the Recreational Demonstration Area program?

6. What were the WPA and CCC? How did workers in those programs contribute to meeting the goals of the RDAs?

Drawing 1 – Map of Camp Misty Mount