

## My Life with Nature Activities

Here is a small sample of activities from the book *John Muir: My Life With Nature* by Joseph Cornell, used here with kind permission from the author. Find out more about the book and buy your copy [here](#).

### Close to nature – pages74-75

John Muir wanted others to go out and see nature’s loveliness so that they, too, could have the same thrilling experiences. In this activity, you’ll have the chance to do some of Muir’s favourite activities to help you observe nature better. To begin, look for a place outdoors that feels special to you, one that you enjoy and want to explore.

- A. Muir always carried a journal and wrote about the things that interested him. Writing enabled him to share his discoveries with others. He saved his journals and referred to them years later, when he wrote his many books.

When you find your special place, write in your journal some of the first things you notice. Describe any special moments you have in your spot. Examples: seeing an animal, or leaves falling on a crisp autumn day.

- B. Muir also regularly drew in his journal. Besides making a record of his observations, drawing helped him see things clearly.

Find something you really like and draw it. It can be a tree, rock, or a stunning view of the landscape – whatever you wish. Don’t worry about how good your drawing is. It is more important to let your drawing help you observe your subject better and see it in greater detail. What new things did you discover while you were drawing?

- C. Muir enjoyed writing and reading poetry. Many people say his written descriptions of nature are so beautiful that they, too, are like poetry. Create your own poem using the following easy-to-use acrostic formula which uses each letter of a word as the beginning of a new line. You will be surprised by how much fun and simple these poems are. Muir did not use this particular form of poetry, but it will help you observe nature closely, as Muir did.

Spend a few minutes watching and enjoying everything around you. Then choose a word that captures the feeling or essence of something you think is especially beautiful. Next, use each letter of the word to begin a line of your poem. For example, while I was walking on Mount Subasio near Assisi, Italy, the flower-covered hillsides conveyed a feeling of excitement as the shadows of the clouds raced over them. I wrote a poem to the word “spring” to express this feeling.

**S**un-made cloud shadows

**P**laced on the earth

**R**unning across its surface

**I**n and out of the sun I sit

**N**ot long does the cloud’s twin stay

**G**oing, going on its way.

Now write the word you have chosen, placing one letter on each line. Then use each letter to begin a line of your poem.

## **Joy in the midst of hardship** – page 66

Muir never let cold or wet weather ruin his fun outdoors. When the weather became challenging, Muir said he didn't notice any real discomfort because he was too busy gazing in wonder at the scenery. The following journal entry of Muir's beautifully describes this:

*I was as wet as if I had been swimming after crossing raging torrents and fighting my way through the Alaskan jungle. But everything was deliciously fresh, and I found new and old plant friends, and glacier lessons that made everything bright and light. I saw Calypso borealis, one of my little plant darlings, worth any amount of hardship. And the mosses were indescribably beautiful, so fresh, so bright, and so cheery green. In the evening I managed to make a small fire out of wet twigs, got a cup of tea, stripped off my dripping clothing, wrapped myself in a blanket and lay thinking on the gains of the day. I was glad, rich and almost comfortable.*

Describe a time when you made a challenging situation fun by keeping a positive attitude. What happened?

*Additional activity suggestions (adapted from the book by the John Muir Award):*

Next time the weather is unfavourable, wear suitable clothes, don a pair of wellies and go jumping in puddles, try to catch raindrops in your mouth and feel the rain on your face. How does it make you feel?

Become aware of the way the rain makes the surroundings look and if it changes the behaviour of any animals. Reflect on thoughts and feelings afterwards, individually or as a group. Can anyone relate to what Muir was referring to in his journal entry? Did your experiences reflect those of Muir?

## **True Wealth** – page 71

Muir said of one of the wealthiest men in the United States, "I am richer than he is, because I have all the money I want – and he doesn't". Several times, Muir could have become quite wealthy. As a young man, he could have made a fortune from his labour-saving factory machines. Later, during the Alaskan Gold Rush, because of his geology training, Muir knew where gold was likely to be found. While camping on Douglas Island, near Juneau, Muir said, "If I were hunting gold, I would stop here". A year later, two rich gold strikes were discovered nearby. For John Muir, though, having enough time for wild beauty, family, and public service was his true wealth. He remarked, "A little money we all need nowadays, but there is nothing about the getting of it that should rob us of our wits."

What does true wealth mean to you? Can you think of ways to simplify your life, so you can have more time for what you value most?

*Additional activity suggestions (adapted from the book by the John Muir Award):*

Discuss what experiences Muir had with nature that made him feel rich. Consider the meaning of wealth when wandering through and engaging with a natural place. Do your experiences and thoughts relate with Muir's?

**What is the secret of it all?** – page 72

Muir saw the central principles of all life as harmony and unity. He believed nature evolves less by competition than by cooperation. To make this point, Muir said, “When you try to pick out anything by itself, you find it hitched to everything else in the universe.” He noted how the Earth whirls, the winds wander, and the rain falls, all just to feed one humble violet.

Whenever Muir looked at the beautiful symmetry of an island, or the harmony in the colours of flowers, he felt that they were visible signs of divine intelligence. What do you feel when you're outdoors? What word would you use to describe your experience of nature?

Find a quiet place in nature. In your journal, think about and answer these questions.

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***The Sky and Earth Touched Me* available 31<sup>st</sup> May 2014. Pre-order [here](#).**

