How does the natural environment affect us? How do we affect the environment? What is our responsibility to the environment? Buddy Bison can help your students become parks stewards through this National Parks Unit! The unit can run from 3 to 8 weeks, depending on your students. The unit can also be modified according to your curriculum.

This unit has the possibility to be used across the curriculum. There are very obvious connections to history, geography, art, writing, and literature. However, the Next Generation Science Standards includes standards based on the Earth and Human Activity, which could also be added into this unit.

Before you begin...
Create a poster for the quote below by Baba Dioum, Sengalese forestry engineer:
“In the end we will conserve only what we love. We will love only what we understand. We will understand only what we are taught.”
As the unit progresses, refer back to the quote.

Key Unit Vocabulary
conserve, boundary, sanctuary, conservation, Congress, latitude, longitude, preservation, parklands, national/state/local, environment

Day 1
Activity
Create a KWL chart. Ask students, “What do you know about parks? What would you like to learn about them?” As the students complete the activities, fill in the “Learn” section of the chart.
Show the Youtube video “What is a Park: Kindergarten Project”. Have students make a list of the items they would like to see in a park and explain their reasoning. Have students sketch their ideas as individuals or groups. Share out.
Extension
Have students discuss the constraints of certain choices: space, money, resources.

Day 2
Activity
Introduce symbols (shapes that can represent things like trees, lakes, mountains). Encourage the class to come up with a set of symbols the whole class can use. Using the symbols and a grid, have the students re-draw their ideas for park features based on changes they would make. Incorporate measurement into the drawing.
Extension
Include topography into the lesson for students learning to read more complex land features. Ask a park designer or landscape architect to talk about symbols used in their design plans.
Elementary National Parks Unit

Day 3
Activity
Show the trailer on Youtube for *The Camping Trip that Changed America*. Read *The Camping Trip That Changed America*. Ask students to create a timeline (use a template if necessary) of the events of the book that culminated in the creation of the first national park.

Extension
There are more lesson ideas at the author’s website: barbrosenstock.com

Day 4–6
Activity
Show students photographs of unique national parks. Include parks that have historical or cultural significance. Model for students how to investigate the National Park Service websites to identify and map parks. Model how to find pictures and create a PowerPoint presentation. Direct students to identify 5 national parks, create 5 slides with their name, location, and picture, and present the information to their peers.

Extension
National Park Service website: www.nps.gov/
Get a large US map and mark with stickers which parks kids have visited, would like to visit, and included in their research.

Day 7
Activity
As a whole class or in small groups, have students compare one of the national parks they researched to a neighborhood park. Use a VENN diagram to organize the information. Share out.

Extension
If students are unsure of where to place the information, encourage them to develop a question to ask to find out more. Make a list of the questions on a separate chart.

Day 8
Activity
Divide the class into small groups. Provide the students with a list of national parks and a list of things to find, using online and library sources. Students will look for the location, geography, tourist attractions, plant and animal life, and 3-5 interesting facts they found about their park. Using note-taking skills, kids will locate the answers to these questions. Give students a blank map of the state where their national park is located and have students label the national park, as well as some larger cities, lakes, rivers, mountains, etc. using a resource you provide.
Day 9–14

Activity
Students take the information from their notes and provide that information in a creative way, such as a game, report, skit, song, movie, or poster. Provide students with a rubric to guide their projects. Share out the information.

Extension
Ask each student visit pbs.org in order to choose a picture representing their studied park to send to a friend, relative, or family member. The message should detail what they would like to do when they visit.
To find the post cards, visit www.pbs.org/nationalparks. Click “Get Involved” and find to “Send Postcards”.

Day 15–16

Activity
Using a large US map, have kids find the key to tell them where a national park is located. Have them use the key to tell them about the geography as well. Use this to teach them the difference between latitude and longitude. Teach how to use these to locate features. Then call out certain coordinates and have them tell you what they found. You can also name a park and have them tell you the coordinates.

Extension
Pass out smaller version of the maps and dividers. Break the students into small groups or pairs and play “Battleship” using the maps.
Day 17–20

Activity
There are many options for this culminating activity; however the focus should remain on the relationship between the public and the environment. Mix-and-match these activities, or take one and focus on it for several days. Either way, encourage students to have as much input as possible into their final project.

- Plan for a community service project at a local park; trail cleaning, planting, etc. Take the kids for a walk around your school. Bring trash bags.
- Ask students, “Why should we protect our parks?” Create a chart and have students add ideas using post-its.
- Have a debate about why each of us has to help take care of our environment. What happens if we don’t? What is the difference between a state, local, or national park? Although the government is involved, do we still need to be?
- Arrange for a visitor from the park service (see in-class visits page 13)
- Have the kids visit the “Buddy Bison” website. Discuss what they learned about Buddy’s mission. Assign rotating conservation jobs in the classroom.
- Illustrate one of the Buddy Bison books with the class. Read the book as a read-aloud at first.
- Involve your art and music teacher. Put on the Get Out! - Buddy Bison Musical. Create a park diorama with a “Buddy” clay sculpture to put inside the box.
- Take Buddy with you to parks and take photos. Have kids borrow “Buddy” and write about his adventures with you at the park you visited.
- Introduce the Kids to Parks Day National School Contest. Get children involved in researching a local park they would want to visit. Have them enter the contest, using as many persuasive ways as possible.
- Return to the quote and discuss its meaning. Continue to encourage stewardship.
- Have the class speak at an assembly during Earth Week about responsibility and the future.
- Plan Earth Day activities. Relays for recycling, no trash lunch picnics, found nature collages, collected materials to make instruments from a nature walk, etc.