



# Can Art Save the Environment?

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# CAN LITERATURE SAVE THE ENVIRONMENT?

SSP 100 Section 16 Fall 2020// M: 1:00-1:55,  
TR 1:10-2:30




## A Short Case Study





# The power of the written word

- ▶ “First consciousness then conscience—a passage we all know as single spirits. Stirring the spirit, poetry could prompt new ventures, anything from a thrifty household, frugal vehicle, recycling drive, communal garden or local business going green, to an active concern for global warming.”
  - ▶ *Can Poetry Save the Earth*, John Felstiner
- 

# John Muir, 1838-1914



Wilderness explorer


Geologist

Writer

Friend to United States  
Presidents

Father of the National Parks  
System


President of the Sierra Club



# Poetry or Policy?

## The Poetry

- ▶ “Now came the solemn, silent evening. Long, blue, spiky shadows crept out across the snow-fields, while a rosy glow, at first scarce discernible, gradually deepened and suffused every mountain-top, flushing the glaciers and the harsh crags above them. This was the alpenglow, to me one of the most impressive of all the terrestrial manifestations of God. At the touch of this divine light, the mountains seemed to kindle to a rapt, religious consciousness, and stood hushed and waiting like devout worshipers. Just before the alpenglow began to fade, two crimson clouds came streaming across the summit like wings of flame, rendering the sublime scene yet more impressive; then came darkness and the stars.”
- ▶ John Muir. “A Near View of the High Sierra.”



# Poetry or Policy?

## The Poetry

- ▶ “THE mountain winds, like the dew and rain, sunshine and snow, are measured and bestowed with love on the forests to develop their strength and beauty. However restricted the scope of other forest influences, that of the winds is universal. The snow bends and trims the upper forests every winter, the lightning strikes a single tree here and there, while avalanches mow down thousands at a swoop as a gardener trims out a bed of flowers. But the winds go to every tree, fingering every leaf and branch and furrowed bole; not one is forgotten; the Mountain Pine towering with outstretched arms on the rugged buttresses of the icy peaks, the lowliest and most retiring tenant of the dells; they seek and find them all, caressing them tenderly, bending them in lusty exercise, stimulating their growth, plucking off a leaf or limb as required, or removing an entire tree or grove, now whispering and cooing through the branches like a sleepy child, now roaring like the ocean; the winds blessing the forests, the forests the winds, with ineffable beauty and harmony as the sure result.
- ▶ John Muir. “A Windstorm in the Forests.”

# Hetch Hetchy: Preservation of Conservation?



“It appears, therefore, that Hetch Hetchy Valley, far from being a plain, common, rock-bound meadow, as many who have not seen it seem to suppose, is a grand landscape garden, one of Nature's rarest and most precious mountain temples. As in Yosemite, the sublime rocks of its walls seem to glow with life, whether leaning back in repose or standing erect in thoughtful attitudes, giving welcome to storms and calms alike, their brows in the sky, their feet set in the groves and gay flowery meadows, while birds, bees, and butterflies help the river and waterfalls to stir all the air into music--things frail and fleeting and types of permanence meeting here and blending, just as they do in Yosemite, to draw her lovers into close and confiding communion with her.

“Sad to say, this most precious and sublime feature of the Yosemite National Park, one of the greatest of all our natural resources for the uplifting joy and peace and health of the people, is in danger of being dammed and made into a reservoir to help supply San Francisco with water and light, thus flooding it from wall to wall and burying its gardens and groves one or two hundred feet deep.”

John Muir. “Hetch Hetchy Valley.”



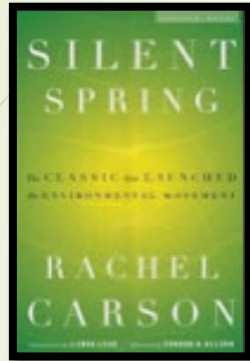
# Hetch Hetchy: Poetry confronts Politics

- ▶ “Now, the fundamental principle of the whole conservation policy is that of use, to take every part of the land and its resources and put it to that use in which it will best serve the most people, and I think there can be no question at all but that in this case we have an instance in which all weighty considerations demand the passage of the bill. There are, of course, a very large number of incidental changes that will arise after the passage of the bill. The construction of roads, trails, and telephone systems which will follow the passage of this bill will be a very important help in the park and forest reserves. The national forest telephone system and the roads and trails to which this bill will lead will form an important additional help in fighting fire in the forest reserves. As has already been set forth by the two Secretaries, the presence of these additional means of communication will mean that the national forest and the national park will be visited by very large numbers of people who cannot visit them now. I think that the men who assert that it is better to leave a piece of natural scenery in its natural condition have rather the better of the argument, and I believe if we had nothing else to consider than the delight of the few men and women who would yearly go into the Hetch Hetchy Valley, then it should be left in its natural condition. But the considerations on the other side of the question to my mind are simply overwhelming, and so much so that I have never been able to see that there was any reasonable argument against the use of this water supply by the city of San Francisco. . . .”
- ▶ Gifford Pinchot. Testimony to Congress



# Can Literature Save the Environment?

## Other Case Studies



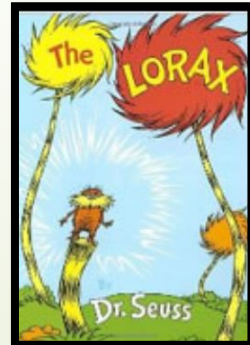
### **Rachel Carson. *Silent Spring.***

Ecosystems and the environment  
Chemical pesticides  
DDT  
The EPA



### **Edward Abbey. *The Monkey Wrench Gang.***

Keeping it as it was.  
Ecoterrorism  
Earth First!



### **Dr. Suess. *The Lorax.***

The greening of a new generation  
Unless. . .