



Sometimes called “America’s greatest classroom,” national parks can help people of all ages learn not just about the natural and cultural heritage of the parks themselves, but also how what they have learned in parks can inform and relate to a larger environmental and historical context. Park educational experiences can provide people with new information, skills, and perspectives that they can apply in their own communities and in their everyday lives. Paul H. Douglas Center for Environmental Education at Indiana Dunes National Lakeshore (Indiana).

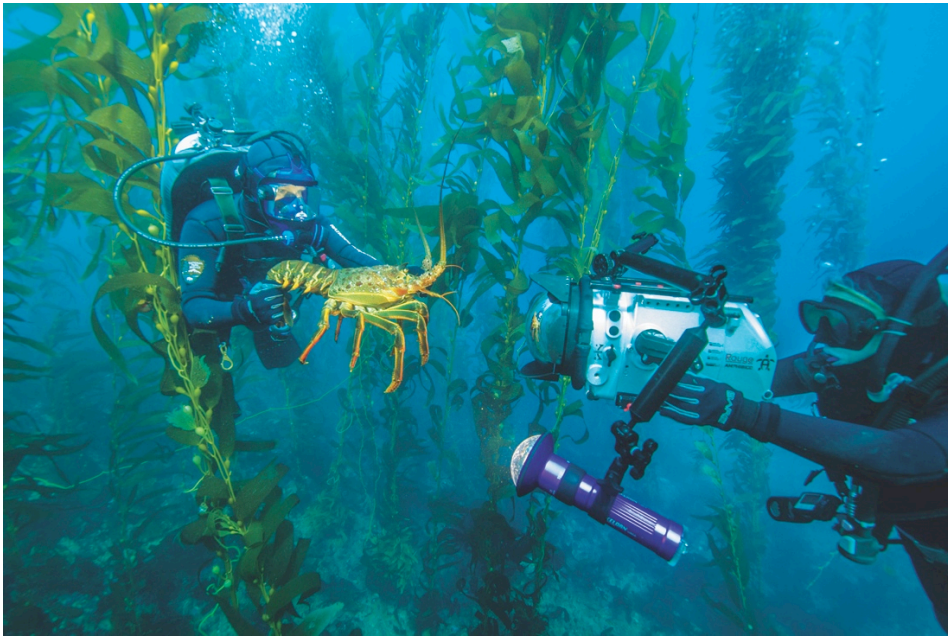


The Liberty Bell at Independence National Historical Park (Pennsylvania) is a tangible object that connects people with intangible concepts: freedom, justice, and love of country.

Learning in the parks happens in many different ways, but all of it shares one characteristic: it is place-based.



(clockwise) Nez Perce high school students, Big Hole National Battlefield (Montana); Volunteers helping with school program, Chiricahua National Monument (Arizona); Ranger in period clothing teaching visitor how to split rails, Lincoln Boyhood National Memorial (Indiana); Visitors learning about totem pole, Sitka National Historical Park (Alaska); Linking Hispanic Heritage Through Archaeology program, Tuzigoot National Monument (Arizona); Ranger leading guided bicycle tour, Stones River National Battlefield (Tennessee); Science camp for high schoolers, Kobuk Valley National Park (Alaska).



Technology helps visitors experience places that they may not be able to visit. (above) The Live Dive program at Channel Islands National Park (California) interprets the undersea kelp forest to land-based visitors through an interactive underwater broadcast. (below) Distance learning center, Grand Canyon National Park (Arizona).





Even in parks where people can easily access the main features, digital technology is changing the way people “travel” through them, permitting “virtual” visits to hitherto inaccessible features. Carlsbad Caverns National Park (New Mexico).



Park educators also use the power of place to connect the past — here, the reconstructed sailing vessel, *Friendship*, part of the seafaring history of Salem Maritime National Historical Park (Massachusetts) — with current events and contemporary interests.



Schoolteachers have for decades worked as park interpreters during the summer school vacation. The National Park Service's Teacher-Ranger-Teacher program is an extended professional development opportunity for educators from K-12 schools to learn about the resources and educational materials available through the National Park Service. Here, A Teacher-Ranger-Teacher works with children in a school near Arches and Canyonlands national parks (Utah).

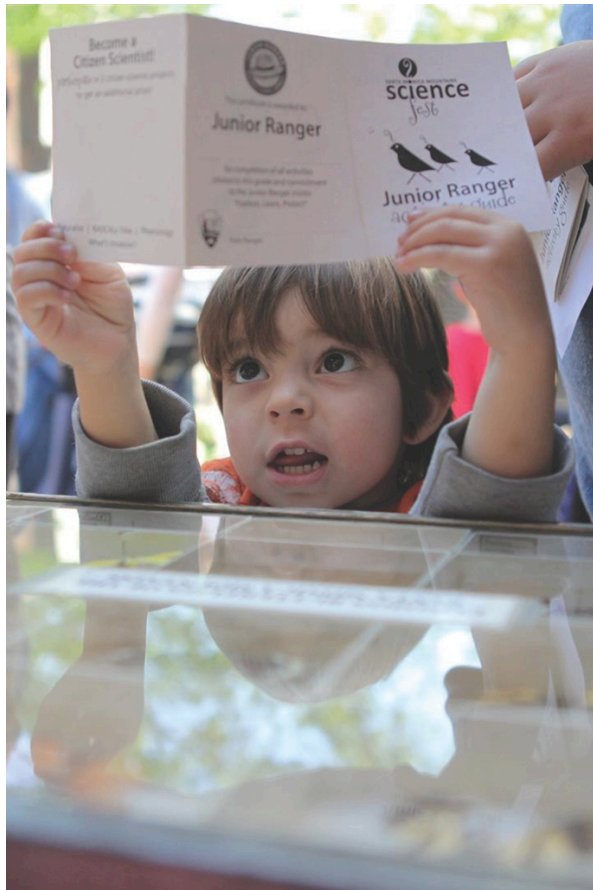


For retaining information about a new topic, nothing beats seeing an interesting object in its original context. At Dinosaur National Monument (Colorado, Utah) visitors can encounter fossils in place because the exhibit hall is built right over the hillside where they were discovered.





Education in the national park system is changing to meet the needs of a diverse audience. Crissy Field Center, Golden Gate National Recreation Area (California).



Kids from across the country and around the world have had unforgettable positive learning experiences through the Park Service's popular Junior Ranger program. Santa Monica Mountains National Recreation Area (California), Shenandoah National Park (Virginia), Fort Vancouver National Historic Site (Washington, Oregon), Rocky Mountain National Park (Colorado).