



Dear Parents of 8th Grade Students,

The great naturalist John Muir called Yosemite "Nature's greatest creation." What he couldn't foresee was that it would become nature's greatest classroom as well. Yosemite National Park is the site of the Yosemite Institute, an acclaimed outdoor education school that our students will attend from September 11-16. As mentioned at the May 19 parent meeting, the trip this fall will be spent entirely in the backcountry, allowing students to experience the very best of the Sierra wilderness first hand. The week in Yosemite will be a busy one, filled with daylong hikes, field activities, writing and sketching, group games, evening programs, and visits to places of natural and historical interest. The week will also be a challenging one, both academically and physically, and it is important for our students to be as prepared as possible. There are two things I am asking they do during the summer months to get ready for the trip.

We will be on our feet all day, everyday, while in Yosemite, in all types of weather and over all kinds of terrain. It has been my experience with previous student groups that proper and comfortable footwear is perhaps the most important equipment item they need. **Properly fitted, lightweight, high-top hiking boots are a necessity** and should be purchased this summer so they can be broken in prior to the trip. Heavy, all-leather boots should be avoided, as they are expensive, difficult to break in, and unnecessary.

Several types of lightweight, hightop hiking boots are available at outdoor equipment and sporting goods shops throughout Marin and the Bay Area. They are often no more expensive than a pair of tennis shoes but offer much better support and traction while carrying a pack on the trail. If possible, the boots should be waterproofed with a silicone sealer before the trip. Also, refer to the gear and equipment list that was distributed at the parent information meeting, and remember to make arrangements during the summer months for a warm sleeping bag and suitably sized backpack.

The second request is that students complete their assigned summer reading before school resumes in September. Prior to the end of school in June, we discussed as a class the two assigned reading books and students know what is expected of them. Handouts that described how to approach the reading were distributed, we began some of the reading together, and engaged in related discussion. Two books have been assigned. The first book is *My First Summer in the Sierra*, John Muir's personal account of his early experiences in the high country meadows near Tuolumne. This journal will serve as a model for our students as they keep their own journals in Yosemite and later prepare an anthology of selected entries for publication. Students will need to purchase this book, and copies are available at bookstores throughout Marin County, at local libraries, or can be purchased over the Internet.

The second book is *Yosemite* by Margaret Sanborn. This book, while lengthy and quite detailed, is an excellent resource of the human and natural history of Yosemite. The school has loaned a copy of this book to each student and these books will be collected when our study and discussions are completed in the fall. These texts are **required reading**, and students will be expected to participate in discussion and refer to them while preparing related writing assignments prior to the trip.

Additional information about the Yosemite trip will be distributed to students and parents the first week of school. Until then, have a relaxing and enjoyable summer.

Sincerely,

Eric Kielich

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