## Why we have updated the *John Muir, Earth – Planet, Universe* resources

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## Introduction

Since launching the *John Muir, Earth – Planet, Universe* graphic novel in 2014, we have made two updates to the learning resources:

* 2022: An update to reflect John Muir’s writing about indigenous people and people of colour.
* 2025: An update to pull the learning resources into two downloadable documents, as well as updating some of the activities and hyperlinks

This document provides more context as to these updates.

2022 update  
John Muir was a conservationist born in Scotland in 1838. His legacy is celebrated as part of Scottish cultural history. In 2014 Scottish Book Trust undertook a commission from Creative Scotland, Natural Heritage Scotland (Now Nature Scot) and the John Muir Trust, to work with Julie Bertagna, William Goldsmith and secondary school pupils to create an autobiographical piece about John Muir and his legacy of environmentalism. These resources were published in 2014 to accompany the gifting of the [*John Muir Earth - Planet, Universe*](https://www.scottishbooktrust.com/learning-resources/john-muir-earth-planet-universe) graphic novel to schools in Scotland.  
  
Committed to ensuring that equality, diversity and inclusion are embedded in our programmes, organisational structure and culture, Scottish Book Trust established an EDI group in 2020. The group has reviewed these resources and we have made changes in order to reflect and contextualise John Muir's work in relation to how he treated and spoke about indigenous Americans and African Americans. We hope that new and updated resources will mean that this can continue to be a useful learning tool for schools.

John Muir in his own writing said unacceptable things about indigenous Americans and African Americans he encountered in his travels, both dehumanising them and using racist tropes and language to describe people he met. Looking at John Muir's work we feel uncomfortable presenting it without encouraging further discussion and contextualisation in the classroom.

We have made the decision to keep these resources online because they are a valuable resource for exploring the natural world. However, in 2022, we:

* created additional activities to support teachers to explore the complicated legacy between American national parks and the oppression of indigenous people
* updated existing resources and activities to add more context and nuance
* removed resources or activities that didn't represent the range of people and groups that have historically been involved in conservation

There are two key aspects of John Muir's life and work that we wanted to draw attention to in these resources:

* John Muir co-founded The Sierra Club to protect and advocate for the American landscape. Muir started The Sierra Club with friends who were advocates for race based eugenics and theories of racial superiority which were adopted by the Nazis and still inform white supremacist thinking. Consequently the Sierra Club, and many wider environmentalist and conservation movements, have frequently excluded people of colour from their understanding of who the natural environment is being preserved for, whether explicitly or implicitly. The impact of this is still very much in evidence today.
* John Muir's idea of 'wilderness' was in fact land that was managed by indigenous people. During John Muir's lifetime, indigenous Americans were forcibly removed from their land. While Muir's advocacy and the legacy of his work has protected large parts of the American landscape and influenced global thinking on environmental protection, it is necessary to recognise that indigenous peoples' rights and claims to their ancestral lands are still being ignored and denied around the world and have rarely been considered in conservation.

The review of these resources is part of ongoing work by our EDI group and the wider organisation. To find out more about this work please read our [statement of intent](https://www.scottishbooktrust.com/about/equality-diversity-and-inclusion-statement-of-intent).

2025 update  
At Scottish Book Trust, we regularly audit and update our learning resources to ensure that their format, language and activities are up to date. In 2025, we updated the *John Muir, Earth – Planet, Universe* learning resources as part of these routine updates. The main changes were:

* Pulling all the activities into two downloadable documents
* Updating the activities to ensure they are up to date
* Removing any broken hyperlinks