



Third Graders Explore! Learn! Sing! As They Visit Yosemite National Park

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It's a perfect [Earth Day](#) story!

Earlier this week, 30 third graders from Anna Yates Elementary School in Emeryville, CA, visited Yosemite National Park through [NatureBridge's Yosemite Institute](#).

Diverse Third Graders Leave The City For The Mountains!

What's so special about that? First, although Yosemite is relatively close (a four-hour drive), most of these students had never hiked outside before, let alone visited a National Park.

Second, these youngsters are from a school where 56% of the students are African-American, 16% Hispanic, 9% Asian-American - in short, a very diverse school. And our National Parks have never seen such diversity. According to a study of visitors to Yosemite published in a [2009 New York Times article](#), only 1% of park visitors are black, while 77% are white.

Meet Shelton Johnson, Yosemite's Pioneering African-American Ranger

And these children had a blast! They learned about lichen and moss on trees, sniffed bark, turned

over rocks to examine what lay underneath, went for hikes, and finally sat in umachas, traditional bark houses, as they reflected on their visit and wrote in their field journals all the things they learnt with NatureBridge.

The highlight of their trip was a visit to Yosemite Falls, the majestic 2,425-foot tall waterfall, and the chance to meet Ranger Shelton Johnson, Yosemite's pioneering African-American park ranger. To the delight of the students, Ranger Johnson donned his uniform of a Buffalo soldier, the African-American regiment of the segregated U.S. Army who patrolled Yosemite in the early 1900's. (See photo above.)

NatureBridge Connects Children With Nature

All of this was thanks to [NatureBridge](#), which was founded in 1971, and is the largest residential education partner of the National Park Service. With the mission of inspiring personal connections to the natural world and responsible actions to sustain it, they serve more than 40,000 youth from diverse backgrounds every year through field science, youth leadership, and teacher training programs.

How did the kids respond? Asked what she felt about the whole trip, third grader Malinalli Cervantes was clear: "We got to see great things that a lot of people want to see, and be in a peaceful place, and have a great adventure."

Happy Earth Day, everyone!

<http://www.care2.com/causes/education/blog/third-graders-explore-learn-sing-as-they-visit-yosemite-national-park/>