

## When Place Becomes a Main Character

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### Abstract

Place or setting of a non-fiction or fiction story can become a main character with its own supporting cast. Field education students should consider this possibility when evaluating the impact of place in their experience and story. The context of a national park provides an example of this potential.

**Keywords:** Place, Context, Story, Main character, A Christian Ministry in the National Parks, National Park Service

Field education students have an opportunity, and perhaps a duty, to explore and test a wide variety of places in which to practice ministry. Even if the location seems commonplace, which it never is, the community will unfailingly bring the drama inspired by its need to explore the connection between its identity and spiritual potential. It is within these living environments, made rich by the combination of people and place, that extraordinary transformation can flourish. The reflective, caring, alert, and self-aware field education student will step into these contexts with a confidence born of humility and calling to reach toward impactful interactions with both the people and the place. People and place are linked together, each informing and molding the other.

Places as lovely as national and state parks attract millions of visitors each year. This combination of place and people can be explosive, as when introducing uninformed tourists to a bison herd, or as tranquil as a flowered meadow void of human-produced sound. Generally, the result falls somewhere between these two extremes, but still with memorable effect. A Christian Ministry in the National Parks (ACMNP) provides this simple equation of people plus national parks to the menu of field education experiences available to seminary and graduate students.

As often happens, ACMNP's storied history began by meeting a need. Warren Ost, a Princeton Theological Seminary student, was working as a bellhop at Old Faithful Inn in Yellowstone National Park in 1951. Because park visitors and coworkers

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regularly inquired about a local church to attend on Sundays, Warren made a request that probably sounded a lot like, “Do you have a place available where I can host a worship service?” The answer was, “No one is using the bar on Sunday morning.” ACMNP was born, and its team members continue to answer God’s call to live and work in a national park, becoming part of the local community. It is in this exceptional context that work, ministry, worship, and relational impact take place.

In fulfillment of its mission to “equip team members to share Christ’s love through work, worship, and service in the national parks,” ACMNP encourages team members to cultivate impactful interactions, which often lead to memorable stories. Invariably, these budding relationships develop into human connection and even epic adventures. Actor Robert Redford reminisced, “When I was about fifteen, I went to work at Yosemite National Park. It changed me forever. Nature had carved its own sculpture, and I was part of it, not the other way around.”<sup>1</sup>

As ACMNP’s team members become part of the day-to-day life of the park community, they offer ministry through their work, their life in the concessionaire employee dormitories, and interactions with the park and its visitors. As park residents, team members must navigate the nuances of varied relationships. They immediately meet roommates, co-workers, and managers. They interact with other concessionaire employees, National Park Service (NPS) employees, and park visitors. Team members are assigned to a team they did not choose and follow a leader they did not appoint. They make new friends and work to keep track of family and friends at home on devices that may not work due to a lack of internet and cell phone access. Seminarians interact with their field education mentors on a regular basis. Team members sometimes report feeling overwhelmed as they absorb the sensory overload of a national park, a main character in their developing story.

These relational challenges are compounded by the duties associated with starting a unique ministry effort in an unfamiliar place while learning a new job alongside individuals whose work ethic and worldview are likely different from their own. Resilience is key. Even so, this is the crucible where character and leadership attributes are formed. It is also the genesis of inspiring stories of spiritual growth and transformation.

As team members pursue and engage with others in impactful interactions, they give attention to building relationships which often inspire significant stories complete with life drama, challenges, and personal growth. Impactful interactions imply caring enough to proceed toward relational opportunities that go beyond the superficial trading of casual greetings and to seek interaction that impacts each participant in a substantive way. Heartfelt, Christ-like attention to others that is not contingent on a particular agenda or outcome is nurtured. Team members resist the temptation to see someone as a project and, worse yet, to categorize or make judgments about whether an individual belongs to one of two camps, saved or unsaved. An impactful interaction

reflects an open-hearted perspective that everyone has value, as they present themselves in a particular place and at a specific time. The effort informs the attitude, “Let’s see where this potential friendship goes for its own sake” instead of, “How can I direct this friendship toward my agenda?” The simple concept of leaning into an impactful interaction strives to influence another’s life in such a way that both parties are blessed, to whatever degree is possible for them in that moment and stage of their lives. Beyond these human connections, team members experience the intrusion of another main character into their story, the Place<sup>2</sup> where field education happens, the national park itself.

As Enos Mills wrote, “Within national parks is room, glorious room, room in which to find ourselves, in which to think and hope, to dream and plan, to rest and resolve.”<sup>3</sup> Everyone who visits a national park, for even a brief stay of several hours, will likely have a story to tell—their impressions of the animals they encountered and the landscapes or seascapes they saw. They will relate their adventure, complete with quirky characters, a verbal and descriptive painting of a stunning view, and perhaps dialogue as the storyteller recounts their unique experience shaped by new friends, unexpected twists, and redirected expectations.

Visitors may talk about trails, spontaneously jumping off a tall rock into a sparkling lake, or climbing a challenging slope. If the storytelling continues, added details may include character development of travel companions and people they met. Perhaps an antagonist will make an appearance. Surprise endings should be hoped for. If the tale is complete, the national park itself will take their<sup>4</sup> rightful place as a main character in the drama, featuring its personality, attributes, and values and bringing its own companions along for the adventure.

National park locations have always been a rich source of compelling story development. Oral traditions featuring places that eventually became protected through the Organic Act on August 25, 1916, which established the NPS, predate written history.<sup>5</sup> Petroglyphs and pictographs tell ancient stories and reveal fascinating history of nearly forgotten inhabitants: humans, plants, beasts, and shifting geological features. The NPS website offers, “From national parks to local spaces in your community, the National Park Service protects places that connect us to our past, to ourselves, and to one another through preserving nature, history, and experiences. Each person has their own special connections with certain park places that are very meaningful to them.”<sup>6</sup> The NPS is staffed by dedicated women and men who serve to educate visitors and guests. The NPS uniform may seem imposing to some, but it is a signpost, a living cairn, of storytelling, information, assistance, and education for park guests. As NPS Ranger James Marks wrote, the unique Stetson hat rangers wear, complete with the iconic sequoia cone, communicates “I’m here to help.”<sup>7</sup>

“How can I help?” In a seventy-four-year echo from ACMNP’s first worship service, Princeton Theological Seminary student Samantha Mittmann accepted the call

to serve during the summer of 2025. Thoughtful, theologically insightful, and relationally gifted, Samantha followed Warren Ost's example and started a fresh, impactful story of her own in America's first national park. She quickly developed Christ-like appreciation for the power of human connectedness and need in the parks. She shares co-authorship of this reflection and writes of the rich relationship she experienced with the park, her Place, and its band of companions, a vibrant, diverse, and rich community. Samantha recognized the innate power of the place we know as Yellowstone National Park.

#### DEEPLY CONNECTED (BY SAMANTHA MITTMANN)

When we speak of the importance of "place" in relation to Christian ministry, we are talking about not only the physical location but so much more. A physical location takes on meaning through the relationships that are built. The relationships between the land, animals, plants, and humans are all interconnected through the grace of God. A place can feel safe based on relationships of trust and warmth. When you walk into a room and you hear laughter from people that you love and cherish, the physical space can take on these characteristics of belonging even when the people are not there. But while many people in the United States make it a point to build strong, insulated spaces separating themselves from the dangers of nature, they cannot keep themselves from nature. National parks serve as relatively accessible spaces for people to disrupt their everyday lives of separation and become open to nature. National parks are a wonderful place of ministry where human beings can better understand the interconnectedness of all of creation and how it brings us closer to God's presence.

The focus of Christian ministry is most often on the relationships between humans and God. But what about the other relationships? Human beings are not only influenced and connected to other humans and God but also to animals, plants, and land. The Bible contains passages highlighting the importance of working with God to care for all of creation. Genesis 1 and 2 highlight our role as coworkers with God, tending to animals and plants. Proverbs 12:10 upholds just relationships between human beings and animals. There are also passages highlighting the interconnected nature of human action with the environment. Genesis 2-3 shows the intimate connectedness between the ground and Adam, from life to death in sin. Romans 8 discusses the groaning and waiting of all creation for God's liberating power. Not only are humans subject to sin; all of creation is subject to its effects. This, then, is a part of Christian ministry. Due to our interconnected nature, all of creation is impacted by sin, and so we are in turn called to partner with God to bring God's justice here on earth as we await God's final liberation.

Christian ministry, therefore, is rooted in our relationship to all organisms and habitats. Our connectedness is what grounds us in God's mission and activity. Sin perpetuates a worldview of separateness and confinement. Often people enter national

park lands with a focus on their own desires. Blinded by their desires, people often come to fulfill their own passions while negatively impacting others, even at the cost of the very beauty they paid to see. When people travel into the park, they are not traveling into barren communities but into active communities that will either accept them into their circle of connection or reject them. Deepening our awareness of our sin is one way that we can realize how God is working not only in us but around us. If we, as humans, can discover how connected we are to other beings, we are better able to become the people that God has created us to be. We are better able to minister to others and live in communities of peace, justice, and love. National parks can serve as a reminder of how Christian ministry can be deeply rooted in its interconnected invitation.

One of the many features Yellowstone is known for is its hydrothermal activity. As you look around, the ground is alive and active. Mammoth Hot Springs contains a variety of features, including mud pots, geysers, and hot springs. Visitors may look at the alkaline pools and be in wonder at what they see, but there is a whole world that they cannot see. Within the pools that you see to the right, there are many tiny microorganisms called thermophiles.<sup>8</sup> This world, unseeable by the naked eye, contains a plethora of activity, from cyanobacteria producing oxygen that create the changing colors to so much more that scientists are actively studying.<sup>9</sup> So, when we ask about Christian ministry, we must pay attention to our responsibility to all of creation because we are inextricably tied to the land, plants, and animals.



When considering the theme of place within the larger scope of Christian ministry, relationships should always be at the center. The land around us is filled with different layers of “community,” from the unseen habitat of microorganisms in the pools to the larger habitat of elk, bears, and bison. We are all dependent upon one another. The concept of place within ministry is a focus not only on how we can bring God into a foreign and deserted place but also on how we can enter a new space and discern how God is already actively present. This notion of community needs to be expanded to include all plants, animals, and land, not just human beings.

When I first came to Mammoth Hot Springs to embark on a summer of ministry, I was overcome by this new and mysterious community. My neighbors were not only visitors and other park employees but also elk, bison, owls, cougars, bears, coyotes, foxes, pine trees, and so many more. Every time I opened the door, I now had to make sure no unsuspecting elk were sleeping or grazing nearby. Walking around the terraces, I learned to stay on the path so that I did not disrupt or destroy the vulnerable habitats that I could not see. The greatest area of growth was in humility, recognizing that my presence had both a positive and negative impact on the community around me. My goal was to grow into a deeper awareness of my interconnected relationships and to leave Yellowstone with the intention of giving back instead of only taking. To move away from viewing nature as serving us, we need to build awareness around how we are influencing the community that we are a part of.

There are many challenges around protection and who has the power to make decisions about the stewardship of national park lands. Followers of Christ have a unique role to play when contributing to these challenges. If we take Romans 8 seriously, then not only are people groaning for the restoration of God's world, but so too are the animals, plants, and lands. Do they not groan for life in the midst of the loss of their habitats and ecosystems? God hears the cries of injustice from all of creation as sin chokes the life out of creation at the hands of human injustice. Let us develop an expanded notion of community to urgently participate in the restoration of all creation while we still can.

#### PLACE BECOMES A CHARACTER (BY DAVID DEGLER)

Samantha's experience illustrates the interconnectedness we have with the diverse world of every park, including geological formations, vistas, plants, animals, and humans. In her field education experience, she excelled at developing impactful interactions with her co-workers and park visitors. She also enjoyed such interactions with the park itself and learned rich lessons about the abundant life teeming within its boundaries. The park became a character in her story. It would be tempting to think of a national park as an elaborate backdrop in our personal stories. Perhaps it is common to have a limited appreciation for the power of Place and the rich texture and depth field education locations provide. Let's not pretend the hospital chaplain field education experience is the same everywhere because we think, mistakenly, that all hospitals are the same. While they may all share their basic function of healing, they have a host of attributes that would make a field education experience in one facility vastly different from another. Even "healing" moves in a broad spectrum of capacity and competency. Field education students in a hospital context find they need to calibrate the work of assisting individuals as they heal or die to the attributes, challenges, and strengths of their hospital, their Place. To demote a location, where spiritual and eternal issues are a

constant part of the story, to the functional attributes of a prop seems dismissive to the unique and potential power of the Place as a main character in the experience.

Storytellers often make a Place a significant character in their story. The lonely and desolate, swampy home of Kya in *Where the Crawdads Sing* became her protector, mentor, educator, provider, and trusted holder of secrets.<sup>10</sup> *A Discovery of Witches*, the bestselling novel written by historian Deborah Harkness, includes an old family home with a mind of its own that dispenses help, warnings, and information at will.<sup>11</sup> Fija Callaghan, an award winning poet and storyteller, reminds us of the critical importance of the natural world as a character, saying, "Nature has a way of sinking into the human experience, even in the most sterile cities."<sup>12</sup>

However, field education and vocational formation final reports are not fiction. Students do not create a plot, literary climax, and unexpected conclusions. Visceral, raw, and unexpected stories unfold spontaneously, sometimes over several months, many times within the span of an hour. These stories do not need the crutch of an interesting place to carry the freight. Field education locations barge in, claim their part of the spotlight, and, in many cases, frame the narrative. Their band of supporting characters traipses behind, filling out and enhancing critical events. Field education students are well advised to embrace their impactful interactions with the Place they serve. To understand the Place and their pervasive and enduring impact is to gain greater insight into the promise and foibles of every other human character, including themselves.

The most intriguing park stories include the drama one might expect when you combine people of all ages, different backgrounds, and diverse cultures in such a unique Place. Sometimes the dialogue is intense and worldly and vulgar, foreign to many team members, especially those whose experience has been protected. The beliefs, values, and goals of their new friends may counter or be vastly different from their own. Worldviews collide and threaten to hijack their hope of having an impactful interaction. The stories are compelling and include antagonists, protagonists, peripheral characters, heroines, heroes, hapless jesters, and even villains. These are visceral, raw stories and are typically memorable. ACMNP values the stories our team members share through their park experiences. We curate and retell the stories. For many, impactful interactions are so common that they take them for granted. Their narratives are inspiring, often filled with amazing outcomes and all the human drama, unlikely outcomes, and unexpected twists of an afternoon soap opera.

As a field education context, each location has its own distinctive character, making it extraordinary. Parks most assuredly have their own quirky and winsome attributes and tend to attract individuals and groups, like hearty companions selected for a quest, with qualities in tune with what the park offers. Some prefer towering mountains, rushing rivers, or an orange sunset descending past a vast ocean. Others enjoy tranquil streams and casual hikes through verdant, ancient forests. Still others

dream of desert heat, sand, and arid landscapes. It seems fair to conclude that the average park visitor drawn to remote Wrangell-St. Elias National Park in Alaska may have different interests from those who adore Acadia National Park in Maine. Because of the nature of the park and the people who are drawn to it, the distinctive complexion of a park will influence the flow, content, and conclusions of the stories it inspires.

There is a Place in the national park system for nearly everyone's distinctive interests and tastes. Visitors are attracted to and belong to their own tribe, with the park serving as a self-appointed leader. As the cast of characters spend a measure of life together, their oral tradition begins to take shape. Tales and memories add dimension and personal insight to their experiences. Field education students are well positioned to understand, perhaps long before others, that characters in the Place they are called to serve are of primary importance and that the Place itself is a character who brings its own diverse and powerful companions along for the drama. Those drawn to the challenge often accept the park's persuasive invitation to join the rare adventure and eclectic cast of characters.

Field education students join millions of others—the individuals, companions, and families who make their pilgrimages to North American national parks. These explorers expect to experience wonder, animals, stunning views, and adventure. Some even crave, and are attracted to, the promise of potential danger and substantial risk. There are as many ambitions for park visits as there are park visitors. Those with a flair for the arts are inspired to pen poems or create paintings en plein air. A current fad, which should never fade, is to carry a small, portable watercolor kit that fits easily into a jacket pocket or backpack. Nearly everyone is transformed into a photographer thanks to their high-resolution phone cameras. One never knows when inspiration will strike and a story will be recorded.

Some embrace the experience to worship God in the cathedral of nature. This is a good place to attach an obligatory John Muir quote: "I'd rather be in the mountains thinking of God, than in church thinking about the mountains."<sup>13</sup> We know worship in these locations is not mutually exclusive, but we understand the inspirational meaning of Muir's words. Park guests with an interest in science will find a lifetime of pursuits in the parks and through the educational efforts of the NPS. The parks tell incredible stories as they reflect scientific insights, evidence, and theories. Remote locations, shielded from human-made light pollution, offer heightened dark sky experiences with vivid, astronomical, starry shows as visitors plan their trips around moon phase calendars. Geologists are drawn to Grand Canyon, Badlands, and Death Valley National Parks. Biologists are busy in every park. Curiosity about archaeology, paleontology, and meteorology can be satisfied in all sixty-three national parks. Science fair projects seem to indicate grade school students gravitate to volcanology. Hawai'i Volcanoes National Park and Yellowstone National Park are Places that feed that interest.

If a visitor is drawn to walk in the tracks of ancient North American cultures, Mesa Verde National Park is a thoughtful monument to the Ancestral Pueblo people who lived long ago in today's Four Corners region. If remote, harsh areas with inspiring history animate a visitor, they should go "North to Alaska."<sup>14</sup> If reptiles are of interest, step gingerly through Guadalupe National Park (rattlesnakes are common there). Fisheries biologists may choose between the freshwater of Isle Royale National Park or the saltwater of Everglades or Dry Tortugas National Parks.

Many prefer, with a degree of prudent wisdom, the relative safety of roadways, visitor centers, and spectacular vistas from paved pull-offs. Though writing in an earlier and more rugged time, President Theodore Roosevelt foreshadowed today's park roads: "The beauty and charm of the wilderness are his for the asking, for the edges of the wilderness lie close beside the beaten roads of the present travel."<sup>15</sup> A travel writer reports she once heard that 90 percent of park visitors do not venture far from park roads.<sup>16</sup> Conversely, there are intrepid adventurers whose first planned stop in a park is the Wilderness Office to secure their wilderness permit and, often, bear-proof food canisters. As a main character, the Place, powerful and ever-present, is often forgotten, unseen because they remain, even in their natural glory, just a place to some. With nearly 332 million recreation-related visits to all NPS units recorded in 2024,<sup>17</sup> it is astounding how many stories are being created, stored, and told. Is it too much to guess that there are hundreds of millions of stories animated by as many inspirational and memorable characters? There are, however, two main characters common to all; God, who created these beautiful Places, and the national parks themselves. Samantha Mittmann suggests doing the work to distinguish the meaning of "being" and "non-being" in the consideration of Place as a character in the field education assignment. It is an intriguing bit of mental gymnastics to consider a Place, conventionally considered a non-being, as a being. Perhaps this effort makes more sense in the world of a poet than a scholar.

Acknowledging the possibility that a Place can be a metaphorical "being" may not be enough to claim they have their own "personality." Perhaps we can think in a more nuanced way. It is not adequate to think of a park anthropomorphically, assigning human characteristics to a traditionally non-living thing. In doing so, we press too hard on our own observations and may draw shallow conclusions about a park based on our limited experience. Park areas possess characteristics not because we observe them and identify something that reminds us of a living being but because they are, in some sense, living. The combined dynamic attributes of every living park resident (animal, plant, and human), geological features, and moving water make the park alive and self-sustaining. The park does not require the outside influence of humanity to thrive.

When seen as a character, parks seem to possess attributes with which we can relate. For instance, parks are just and sometimes merciful. Left alone, a park will reproduce and thrive. It adapts and is under constant transformation as it absorbs the

stress and benefits applied by external forces. Each park does have its own distinctive personality, different from other parks in terms of biology, climate, geology, and resilience.

Because a park is, in this way, living and dominant, it has the innate power to force itself into every park-related story. The park is so powerful it makes routine experiences memorable, a story worth retelling. A sermon judged to be “average” may be forgettable in a familiar church worship setting. When heard in a campground amphitheater surrounded by towering peaks, with the addition of rain, an animal sighting, or whatever else the park may throw at the senses, an otherwise unremarkable sermon is often pressed deeply into the spirit and mind. God creates vibrant Places and uses them to become part of the message and even its delivery.

Parks have the capacity to express their innate values such as accountability and mercy. One notorious attribute of the Parks is that they are inherently dangerous. This is part of their appeal. Unfortunately, far too many visitors willfully disregard their own safety and the best interests of the animals by ignoring common sense and the best efforts of the NPS to educate the public by getting too close to large wild animals, including elk, moose, bear, and bison. Most of the time, the park is merciful and overlooks the foolhardy behavior of individuals. At other times, as difficult as it is to consider, the Place allows a form of accountability to prevail when the beasts resist human pressure and seriously injure or kill the visitor who willfully ignores safety protocols, putting themselves and others at risk. This is a regrettable outcome, but it is a harsh reality that there are sometimes ramifications associated with our actions that are inflicted by the Place.

Main characters recruit or bring companions to the drama as part of the story’s *dramatis personae*. This band of followers is usually in flux as the story matures, reaches its climax, and settles into its conclusion. Some characters move along, die, or are so minor they drop from view. New voices and acquaintances and even old enemies are added. Emma Woodhouse, Frodo, Snow White, Harry Potter, and, of course, Jesus have their companions who cultivate their own drama but also support and help to inform the development of the main character and advance the tale. A national park, the Place, when considered a main character, brings their companions, disciples, heroes, and treacherous villains as important additions. Those who desire to have an impactful relationship with the park have no option but to accept this rich auxiliary community.

For the student embracing field education, it would be easy to unwittingly ignore the power of Place as antagonist or protagonist and sometimes both. When considering their field education context, the student should embrace impactful interactions not only with the hundreds of humans they will encounter but also with the Place, enriching their experience and understanding of the whole. People are no longer simply routes to their ambitions or objectives. A new friend or acquaintance becomes part of the story as God blesses two people with a fresh, mutually beneficial relationship. It is

in this context that authentic conversations about the eternal take root in an atmosphere of trust. The perspective of an impactful interaction makes it easier to understand the heart behind 1 Corinthians 3:6–8, “I planted the seed, Apollos watered it, but God has been making it grow. So neither the one who plants nor the one who waters is anything, but only God, who makes things grow. The one who plants and the one who waters have one purpose, and they will each be rewarded according to their own labour” (NIV).

There is a major relationship, a kinship, that is unconsidered or at least largely discounted by many who experience the parks. The park itself is a main character in every story created in a national park. Can it also be claimed that in the world of field education, every “Place” hosting a student is a main character in that student’s story?

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## NOTES

<sup>1</sup> Robert Redford, as cited in The Park Catalog, “Park Quotes From Writers and Celebrities to Commemorate National Park and Recreation Month,” July 7, 2017, <http://www.theparkcatalog.com/blog/park-quotes-national-park-recreation-month/>.

<sup>2</sup> The non-conventional capitalization of Place, here and in the balance of the reflection, is intended to support the premise that “place” can become a legitimate being or character in a story.

<sup>3</sup> Enos Mills was an American naturalist and was instrumental in the creation of Rocky Mountain National Park. Enos A. Mills, *Your National Parks* (1917).

<sup>4</sup> In support of the premise that “Place” has the potential to be a main character in a story, “their” is used as a non-gender-specific pronoun in reference to “Place.”

<sup>5</sup> Great Basin National Park, “Organic Act of 1916,” n.d., <http://www.nps.gov/grba/learn/management/organic-act-of-1916.htm>.

<sup>6</sup> National Park Service, “Your Park Story,” n.d., <https://www.nps.gov/subjects/npscelebrates/your-park-story.htm>.

<sup>7</sup> Ryan Curran White, “What’s the Story of the Iconic National Park Service Ranger ‘Flat Hat’?” Golden Gate National Parks Conservancy, June 21, 2019, <https://www.parksconservancy.org/gateways-article/what-is-the-story-iconic-nps-ranger-flat-hat>.

<sup>8</sup> Yellowstone National Park, “Life in Extreme Heat,” n.d., accessed October 20, 2025, <https://www.nps.gov/yell/learn/nature/life-in-extreme-heat.htm>.

<sup>9</sup> Yellowstone National Park, “Life in Extreme Heat.”

<sup>10</sup> Delia Owens, *Where the Crawdads Sing* (G. P. Putnam’s Sons, 2018).

<sup>11</sup> Deborah Harkness, *A Discovery of Witches* (Penguin Books, 2011).

<sup>12</sup> Fija Callaghan, “Place in Fiction: The Power of Setting as Character,” Scribophile, n.d., <http://scribophile.com/academy/place-in-fiction>.

<sup>13</sup> John Muir, *Meditations of John Muir: Nature’s Temple*, ed. Chris Highland (Wilderness Press, 2001).

<sup>14</sup> “North to Alaska” is the title of a song written and composed by Tillman Franks and Johnny Horton in 1960.

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<sup>15</sup> Theodore Roosevelt, *Ranch Life and the Hunting Trail* (1888).

<sup>16</sup> Mary Hone, "90 Percent of National Park Visitors Never Leave the Road," <https://talesfromthebackroad.com/90-percent-of-national-park-visitors-never-leave-road/>.

<sup>17</sup> National Park Service. "2024 Visitation At-A-Glance," last updated September 22, 2025, <http://www.nps.gov/subjects/socialscience/visitor-use-statistics-dashboard.htm>.