

➔ American History Play

TEDDY ROOSEVELT

The First Environmental President

President Theodore Roosevelt loved the American wilderness—and worked to preserve it for future generations.

Characters

Theodore Roosevelt, 26th President of the United States

William Dutcher } noted
Frank Chapman } ornithologists

Quanah Parker, Chief of the Quahada Comanche tribe

Jack Abernathy, cowboy and coyote hunter

William Temple Hornaday, zoologist and conservationist

*Cabinet Members 1 & 2

Narrators A-E

*Fictitious characters; all others were real people.

➔ Words to Know

- **ornithologist** (*n*): a scientist who studies birds
- **poacher** (*n*): one who hunts or fishes illegally
- **proclamation** (*n*): a formal public statement
- **zoologist** (*n*): a scientist who studies animals and animal behavior

This play is based on information found in *The Wilderness Warrior: Theodore Roosevelt and the Crusade for America* by Douglas Brinkley.

PROLOGUE

Narrator A: Widely known as “Teddy” or “T.R.,” Theodore Roosevelt was a man of great energy and enthusiasm. Born in 1858 in New York City, he was a sickly child. But with determination—and the help of his father, who had a gym built for him—Teddy became strong and healthy in his teens. During those years, he took a trip across the untamed American West and fell in love with it. The trip changed his life.

Narrator B: Roosevelt dedicated his life to public service, racking up a series of remarkable achievements (see *chronology*, pp. 16-17). But his greatest legacy may be the many natural wonders that he helped preserve for generations to come.

SCENE 1

Narrator C: On September 6, 1901, an assassin shoots President William McKinley at the Pan-American Exposition in Buffalo, New York. Eight days later, McKinley dies. Theodore Roosevelt, who has been Vice President for only six months, takes the oath as President, becoming the youngest

person ever to serve in that office.

Narrator D: Roosevelt has his hands full running the country, but he considers protecting America’s natural beauty as important as his other duties. In March 1903, he meets with two noted **ornithologists**.

Theodore Roosevelt: Greetings, gentlemen. How are things in the bird world?

William Dutcher: Not good, I’m sorry to say. That’s why we’re here, Mr. President. For decades now, fashionable ladies have been decorating their hats and gowns with egret feathers and putting flamingo plumes in their hair. That elegance comes at a tragic cost—the deaths of millions of birds.

Frank Chapman: I once counted, in a single hour, the feathers of 40 different bird species in the hats of women who passed me on the street! Consider just one, the flamingo. Plume hunters in Florida are killing 5 million of them every year. At this rate, our beautiful Florida bird will soon be extinct—and it’s not the only species that’s in trouble.

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**“ Keep this
great wonder of
nature as it is. ”**



WILDERNESS WARRIOR

Roosevelt in Yosemite National Park during his “Great Loop” tour of 1903—a campaign to convince Americans of the importance of protecting natural wonders.

Roosevelt: This is an outrage! These bird butchers must be stopped. What can we do?

Dutcher: We'd like your help to protect Pelican Island in Florida.

Roosevelt: Pelican Island, you say? That's federal land, and home to a wide variety of bird species.

Chapman: Yes, and one of the few places where the brown pelican can still be found in the wild.

Roosevelt: Please excuse me for a moment.

Narrator E: Roosevelt calls one of his Cabinet members.

Roosevelt: Is there any law that prevents me from declaring Pelican Island a federal bird reservation? No? Very well then. I so declare it!

Narrator A: On March 14, 1903, Roosevelt issues an executive order, or official directive, that establishes five acres off Florida's Atlantic coast as the Pelican Island National Wildlife Refuge. It's the first time the U.S. government sets

aside land specifically for the protection of wildlife.

SCENE 2

Narrator B: Even as President, Roosevelt still enjoys "roughing it" in the wilderness. In April 1905, a month after he is sworn in for a second term, the President vacations in Oklahoma Territory. (It will become a state in 1907.)

While coyote hunting, he is mesmerized by the dusty trails that run through the tall prairie grass.

Roosevelt: An amazing sight!

Quanah Parker: Those trails were formed by herds of wild buffalo. The trails remain, but the buffalo are nearly gone.

Jack Abernathy: Sixty million buffalo once roamed the prairie, but only about 1,000 survive.

Parker: My people hunted them, but we killed only what we needed. Besides eating the meat, we used every bit of bone and hide for clothing and shelter, even tools.

Abernathy: Since then, settlers and other white men have been killing dozens at a time for sport—or because they block railroad tracks.

Roosevelt: Standing in the way of progress, eh? Well, progress needs to leave room for the buffalo.

Narrator C: Later, during dinner at Parker's house . . .

Roosevelt: I've been thinking about this buffalo problem for a while, Quanah. I want to bring buffalo back here where they belong, to roam wild and free.

Parker: You have a big heart, T.R., and you love the land like a Comanche. The prairie needs buffalo—but if you bring them back, hunters will just kill them.

Roosevelt: Not if I can help it. We're working to create a game preserve—a place where it'll be a crime to kill buffalo. Wardens will be able to arrest anyone who tries.

Parker: Our children will see the buffalo roam once again!

Narrator D: A few months later,

An Adventurous Life

Passionate about the outdoors—and public service—Theodore Roosevelt (1858-1919) packed a lot of living into just six decades. Here are a few of his achievements.



LAWMAN

1895-1897: As New York City's Police Commissioner, Roosevelt crusades against police corruption. Not one to leave a tough job to others, he often walks the streets at night, patrolling for crooked cops. That also exposes him to all classes of New Yorkers.



SOLDIER

1898: Roosevelt makes headlines during the Spanish-American War when he leads a cavalry (horseback) regiment of "Rough Riders" in a victorious charge against Spanish troops in Cuba.



WEB WATCH

Conservation: "No Greater Issue"
theodore-roosevelt.com/trenv.html

Roosevelt's Legacy: National Parks & Monuments 1902-1909



Roosevelt signs a presidential **proclamation** creating Wichita National Forest and Game Preserve in Oklahoma. Its 60,800 acres are to be a haven for birds, fish, and deer, as well as buffalo.

SCENE 3

Narrator E: In December 1905, Roosevelt visits the Bronx Zoo in New York City—an institution he

helped found a decade earlier. With him is a **zoologist** who has been working to protect the buffalo—also known as American bison—from extinction.

Roosevelt: Now that you and I have formed the American Bison Society, Bill, let's do some serious planning. Oklahoma Territory has a buffalo preserve without any buffalo. How's our Bronx herd doing?

William Temple Hornaday: Quite well. I've chosen 15 of the best breeding cows and bulls to send to Oklahoma.

Roosevelt: Wonderful. Congress has approved \$15,000 for fencing. That'll keep the beasts together until the herd grows.

Hornaday: But will it keep **poachers** out? What exactly happened at Pelican Island in Florida last summer?

Roosevelt: Poachers shot Guy Bradley, one of our best Pelican Island wardens. He caught the Smith gang red-handed, and they killed him.

Hornaday: Were they after plumes for hats?

Roosevelt: Not this time. They were killing cormorants—birds that are the best you ever saw at catching fish. Fishermen see them as pests and as competition.

Hornaday: If people are willing to

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TRUST BUSTER

1902: T.R. fights for the regulation of "trusts," or monopolies, groups of companies set up to eliminate competition. Successfully breaking up the powerful trust that controls the railroads is a major victory.



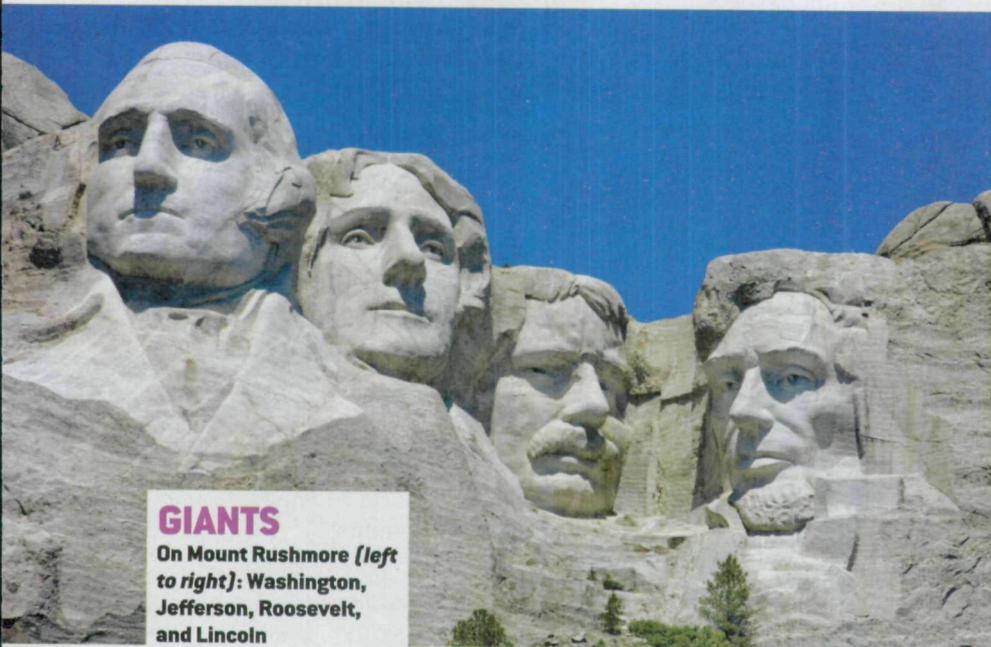
BUILDER

1904: Under Roosevelt, the U.S. begins construction on the Panama Canal. When it opens in 1914, it cuts 8,000 miles off the sea journey between the Atlantic and Pacific oceans.

PEACEMAKER

1906: Roosevelt is the first American to receive a Nobel Peace Prize, negotiating for an end to the war between Russia and Japan in 1905.





GIANTS

On Mount Rushmore (left to right): Washington, Jefferson, Roosevelt, and Lincoln

murder each other over hat plumes and fish, how can we hope to protect the buffalo?

Roosevelt: By cracking down on poachers. I increased the number of armed game wardens at Pelican Island, and we'll have them at the buffalo preserve. But I fear that Bradley won't be the last wildlife protector to die in the line of duty.

Narrator A: T.R. is right. In 1908, poachers kill a warden and another conservationist. Publicity over the murders and tough new laws help end the feathers fashion.

SCENE 4

Narrator B: In 1908, Roosevelt learns that Congress plans to allow mining in the Grand Canyon.

Roosevelt: Dash it! Back in 1903, I told Arizonans: In your own interest—and the interest of all the country—keep this great wonder of nature as it is.

Cabinet Member 1: It was a great speech, Mr. President. But people want to develop the land.

Roosevelt: Short-sighted nincompoops! The Grand Canyon is a

natural work of art carved by the Colorado River over millions of years. It's irreplaceable.

Cabinet Member 2: Senator Benjamin Harrison tried three times to protect it by making it a national park—in 1882, '83, and '86.

Congress never okayed it—not even when Harrison became President.

Roosevelt: But I have something he didn't—the American Antiquities Act of 1906. I'll declare the Grand Canyon a national monument!

Cabinet Member 1: How can a canyon be a monument?

Roosevelt: That law authorizes a President to protect objects “of historic or scientific interest.” France has the Eiffel Tower, Egypt has the Great Pyramids, and India the Taj Mahal. Our Grand Canyon is nothing less than a temple of nature. Every American should see it.

Cabinet Member 2: What about the folks who run farms, lumber mills, or other businesses there?

Roosevelt: They can keep doing it, just not in the canyon. They'll thank me one day—or their grandchildren will. So will yours!

Narrator C: On January 11, 1908, Roosevelt declares more than 800,000 acres in Arizona a national monument, ensuring that the Grand Canyon will be preserved forever.

EPILOGUE

Narrator D: Considered one of the greatest Presidents in U.S. history, Theodore Roosevelt has been enshrined with three others—George Washington, Thomas Jefferson, and Abraham Lincoln—on Mount Rushmore National Memorial in South Dakota.

Narrator E: Roosevelt's conservation triumphs during two terms as President include the creation of 5 national parks, 51 federal bird reservations, 4 national game preserves, 18 national monuments, and 150 national forests—a total of 230 million acres. Today only about 15,000 American buffalo roam wild, but the species is far from extinct. Hundreds of thousands are being raised on ranches or in conservation areas.

Narrator A: As Gifford Pinchot, who Roosevelt appointed as the first chief of the U.S. Forest Service, said: “The greatest work that Theodore Roosevelt did for the United States, the great fact which will give his influence vitality and power long after we shall all have gone, [is] that he changed the attitude of the American people toward conserving [our] natural resources.”

—Rachel Waugh & Kathy Wilmore

Write It

Write a brief essay describing Theodore Roosevelt's personality. Which of his qualities do you most admire? Why?