CLASSICS LIBRARY · STORY MAP

My First Summer in the Sierra

John Muir · *1911 · Muir's English*

In the great Central Valley of California there are only two seasons—spring and summer. By the end of May the flowers are dead and dry, as if every plant had been roasted in an oven. He was longing for the mountains, but money was scarce. Then Delaney, a sheep-owner, offered to send him with the flock to the headwaters of the Merced and Tuolumne. John Muir, 1911, Project Gutenberg #32540. For grades 6–12. Quote him, not a later park legend only.

THE CENTRAL QUESTION

How should a school read My First Summer in the Sierra as Muir begins it—two seasons in the Central Valley, a longing for the mountains, scarce money, and a sheep-owner's offer that will take him to the Merced and the Tuolumne?

"In the great Central Valley of California there are only two seasons—spring and summer. The spring"

Opening

He opens in the great Central Valley of California, where there are only two seasons—spring and summer. The spring begins with the first rainstorm, usually in November; by the end of May the flowery vegetation is dead and dry and crisp, as if every plant had been roasted in an oven. He was longing for the mountains, but money was scarce, and he could not see how a bread supply was to be kept up. Delaney, a sheep-owner, offered to engage him to go with his shepherd and flock to the headwaters of the Merced and Tuolumne—the very region he had most in mind, whose treasures he had tasted the summer before in the Yosemite region. Teach that beginning, for grades 6–12. The 1911 book is a first summer, a flock, and a range; quote Muir, not a later park legend only.

KEY CHARACTERS

John Muir
Who, longing for the mountains and short of money, goes with a flock to the Merced and the Tuolumne, and writes this first summer

Delaney
The sheep-owner who offers him the work that will take him up

The shepherd, and the flock
With whom he is engaged to travel the forest belts as the snow melts

The Sierra, the Merced, and the Tuolumne
The region he had most in mind, already tasted the summer before in Yosemite

HOW TO BEGIN THIS FIRST SUMMER

> *"In the great Central Valley of California there are only two seasons—spring and summer. The spring"*
>
> Opening

> *"Delaney, a sheep-owner, for whom I had worked a few weeks, called on me, and offered to engage me to go with his shepherd and flock to the headwaters of the Merced and Tuolumne rivers—the"*
>
> Opening

Grades 6–12
Read the full text free at classicslaunch.org.

01

Only Two Seasons

OPENING

In the great Central Valley of California there are only two seasons—spring and summer. The book begins with a climate, and a place, before a trail.

- Keep "great Central Valley of California" and the dash before "spring and summer," as printed.
- 6–12.
- Quote Muir, not a later digest.
- The Sierra is not yet; the Valley is first.

> *"In the great Central Valley of California there are only two seasons—spring and summer. The spring"*
>
> Opening

02

Roasted in an Oven

OPENING

In a few months the wonderful flowery vegetation is in full bloom, and by the end of May it is dead and dry and crisp, as if every plant had been roasted in an oven. Beauty, and then a withering, in one look.

- Keep "roasted in an oven."
- The first rainstorm, usually in November, begins the spring; if you teach that, quote it.
- 6–12.
- Exact seeing, not a vague rhapsody.

> *"In a few months the wonderful flowery vegetation is in full bloom, and by the end of May it is dead and dry and crisp, as if every plant had been roasted in an oven. Then"*
>
> Opening

03

Longing, and a Scarce Bread Supply

OPENING

He was longing for the mountains about this time, but money was scarce and he could not see how a bread supply was to be kept up. The first summer is also a practical problem.

- Keep "longing" and "bread supply."
- Poverty is part of the opening, not an aside.
- 6–12.
- The later raptures do not erase this.

> *"I was longing for the mountains about this time, but money was scarce and I couldn't see how a bread supply was to be kept up."*
>
> Opening

04

Delaney, the Merced, and the Tuolumne

OPENING

Delaney, a sheep-owner, for whom he had worked a few weeks, called on him, and offered to engage him to go with his shepherd and flock to the headwaters of the Merced and Tuolumne rivers—the very region he had most in mind.

- Keep Delaney, and both rivers.
- The flock is the means; the mountains are the desire.
- He had already tasted the Yosemite region the summer before; this book is the first summer in the high Sierra with the sheep.
- 6–12.

> *"Delaney, a sheep-owner, for whom I had worked a few weeks, called on me, and offered to engage me to go with his shepherd and flock to the headwaters of the Merced and Tuolumne rivers—the"*
>
> Opening

05

The 1911 Book, a First Summer

THE EDITION

Project Gutenberg #32540 is My First Summer in the Sierra, 1911. It is a first summer, a flock, and a range—not a later complete life, and not a park brochure. Quote Muir. For grades 6–12. Teach the seeing, the work, and the place-names as he writes them. One map cannot teach every camp of the summer.

- Name 1911, and "first summer."
- The sheep, and the fear that many would never return, belong later in the opening; if you teach that, quote it.
- Not a film.
- Wonder under a tight bread supply.

> *"In the great Central Valley of California there are only two seasons—spring and summer. The spring"*
>
> Opening

Two seasons, exactly seen

A longing for the mountains

A scarce bread supply

A flock as the means of going up

Rivers named, and remembered

What to watch for as you read

GRADES 6–12

1. Only two seasons in the great Central Valley: spring and summer. Keep his dash and his names.
2. By the end of May the flowers are dead and dry, "as if every plant had been roasted in an oven."
3. He longs for the mountains, but money is scarce; Delaney's offer takes him to the Merced and the Tuolumne with a flock.
4. The 1911 book, Project Gutenberg #32540, for grades 6–12. Quote Muir, not a later park legend only. This is a first summer, not a complete life.

Quotations are verbatim from the Muir's English, Project Gutenberg #32540, the public-domain text hosted at classicslaunch.org/works/my-first-summer-in-the-sierra/. Citations give book and chapter (or canto and line) so every line can be checked.