

Chapter 5
Cathedral of Brasilia
Oscar Niemeyer
God Creates with Curves

In this lesson students will reflect on how God has revealed himself in creation, creating as artist Oscar Niemeyer expressed with “free flowing, sensual curves” as he used in the Cathedral of Brasilia. Students will read the excerpt from John Muir’s The Mountains of California. As they read, students will highlight features of nature that stand out to them. They will then write down, what could this description reveal about the nature of God and of the mind behind creation? The goal is to guide students to some kind of realization such as, “In making the created world beautiful, I can see that God made humans to enjoy creation and that God wants us to be happy,” or “When John Muir says ‘glaciers are still at work in the shadows of the peaks, and thousands of lakes and meadows shine and bloom beneath them,’ this reminds me that God wants us to see big things in life that are beautiful like mountains, but he also wants us to see the beauty in little everyday things like lakes and meadows.” Have students share what they have reflected on with a classmate or with the whole class.

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God, as Creator, has left his fingerprints on the universe. In looking at the world around us, we can come to understand who God is. Artist Oscar Niemeyer understood the uniqueness of God and his creation and emulated this freedom in his creation of the Cathedral of Brasilia. Famous American naturalist John Muir also reveled in the wonders of creation. Read the following words of Muir, highlighting at least two of his depictions of creation that stand out to you. Then complete the exercise using the prompt that follows.

[Excerpt from John Muir's "The Mountains of California"](#)

The Sierra is about 500 miles long, 70 miles wide, and from 7000 to nearly 15,000 feet high. In general views no mark of man is visible on it, nor anything to suggest the richness of the life it cherishes, or the depth and grandeur of its sculpture. None of its magnificent forest-crowned ridges rises much above the general level to publish its wealth. No great valley or lake is seen, or river, or group of well-marked features of any kind, standing out in distinct pictures. Even the summit-peaks, so clear and high in the sky, seem comparatively smooth and featureless. Nevertheless, glaciers are still at work in the shadows of the peaks, and thousands of lakes and meadows shine and bloom beneath them, and the whole range is furrowed with cañons to a depth of from 2000 to 5000 feet, in which once flowed majestic glaciers, and in which now flow and sing a band of beautiful rivers.

Though of such stupendous depth, these famous cañons are not raw, gloomy, jagged-walled gorges, savage and inaccessible. With rough passages here and there they still make delightful pathways for the mountaineer, conducting from the fertile lowlands to the highest icy fountains, as a kind of mountain streets full of charming life and light, graded and sculptured by the ancient glaciers, and presenting, throughout all their courses, a rich variety of novel and attractive scenery, the most attractive that has yet been discovered in the mountain-ranges of the world.

In many places, especially in the middle region of the western flank of the range, the main cañons widen into spacious valleys or parks, diversified like artificial landscape-gardens, with charming groves and meadows, and thickets of blooming bushes, while the lofty, retiring walls, infinitely varied in form and sculpture, are fringed with ferns, flowering-plants of many species, oaks, and evergreens, which find anchorage on a thousand narrow steps and benches; while the whole is enlivened and made glorious with rejoicing streams that come dancing and foaming over the sunny brows of the cliffs to join the shining river that flows in tranquil beauty down the middle of each one of them.

Reflecting on what you highlighted, what could each description suggest about the nature of God or the mind behind creation? Write three examples.

1.

2.

3.

