

# Boyhood and Youth

by Theodore Roosevelt *from* Theodore Roosevelt: An Autobiography

*Theodore Roosevelt (1858-1919) was the 26th President of the United States. Part of a wealthy and political New York family, Roosevelt is best known for his courage in the Spanish-American War, his devotion to nature, and his establishment of the National Park Service. In this passage from his autobiography written in 1913, he tells of the beginning of his interest in natural history.*

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While still a small boy I began to take an interest in natural history. I remember distinctly the first day that I started on my career as zoologist. I was walking up Broadway, and as I passed the market to which I used sometimes to be sent before breakfast to get strawberries I suddenly saw a dead seal laid out on a slab of wood. That seal filled me with every possible feeling of romance and adventure. I asked where it was killed, and was informed in the harbor. I had already begun to read some of Mayne Reid's books and other boys' books of adventure, and I felt that this seal brought all these adventures in realistic fashion before me. As long as that seal remained there I haunted the neighborhood of the market day after day. I measured it, and I recall that, not having a tape measure, I had to do my best to get its girth with a folding pocket foot-rule, a difficult undertaking. I carefully made a record of the utterly useless measurements, and at once began to write a natural history of my own, on the strength of that seal. This, and subsequent natural histories, were written down in blank books in simplified spelling, wholly unpremeditated and unscientific. I had vague aspirations of in some way or another owning and preserving that seal, but they never got beyond the purely formless stage. I think, however, I did get the seal's skull, and with two of my cousins promptly started what we ambitiously called the "Roosevelt Museum of Natural History." The collections were at first kept in my room, until a rebellion on the part of the chambermaid received the approval of the higher authorities of the household and the collection was moved up to a kind of bookcase in the back hall upstairs. It was the ordinary small boy's collection of curios, quite incongruous and entirely valueless except from the standpoint of the boy himself. My father and mother encouraged me warmly in this, as they always did in anything that could give me wholesome pleasure or help to develop me.

## Questions

Write what you think each of the underlined words and phrases mean.

1. "I measured it, and I recall that, not having a tape measure, I had to do my best to get its girth with a folding pocket foot-rule, a difficult undertaking."

2. "I had vague aspirations of in some way or another owning and preserving that seal..."

3. "This, and subsequent natural histories, were written down in blank books in simplified spelling, wholly unpremeditated and unscientific."

4. "It was the ordinary small boy's collection of curios, quite incongruous and entirely valueless except from the standpoint of the boy himself."