

JOHN MUIR LEARNS TO SWIM
A Play
By Carole L. Cooney

Setting: A river in Scotland

Characters:

Narrator

Father

John

Narrator: John Muir was born in Scotland. As John grew, he loved doing brave things like climbing trees and scaling brick walls, but there was one thing that frightened John. That was swimming. One day, John's father led him and his brothers to a nearby river to learn how to swim.

Father: Boys, today we shall learn a very important swimming lesson from a frog.

John: (puzzled) From a frog, Father?

Father: Yes, John and *you* are going to help your brothers learn how to swim.

John: (terrified) Me! (shyly) Father, I don't know how to swim.

Father: Yes, yes. I know that. That's why we need a frog. John, I want you to catch a frog.

John: (jumping up and down with excitement) Father, I don't see any! Where am I going to find a frog?

Father: (forcefully) John, stop jumping! You are scaring the frogs away. Be very quiet and stand still. Look very carefully on the top of those large green leaves at the water's edge.

John: (loudly) Over there, Father?

Father: (sternly) John, whisper! Do you hear me? Whisper!

John: (whispering) Yes, Father. (louder) Oh, there goes a frog!

Father: (whispering) John! Shhh! Do you see that frog over there by that dead tree branch? Creep over slowly and catch that frog with your hands.

John: (whispering) All right! Here I go. I'm almost there. (shouting) I've – almost - got – it! Oh! No!

Narrator: John slipped as he stretched forward to get the frog. He fell into the cold water and started splashing and laughing.

John: (laughing) Sorry, Father. (whispering) but, I think I can reach a frog better from here.

Father: (trying to control his temper) Yes, John.

Narrator: John waded through the water very slowly. When he was close to a frog, he stretched out his arms and caught it in his hands.

John: (whispering loudly) I've caught a frog, Father.

Father: Yes, John. Keep your hands tightly together.

John: (holding a little green frog) Father! Oh! This frog is very slippery. (giggling) I'm afraid it's going to jump away.

Father: (sternly) Hold – it – still, John! Now boys, come close by so you can see the frog and learn how to swim. John, slowly lower the frog into the water. Boys, look at the frog and the way it swims.

John: (very excited) Father, I think I know how the frog swims. The little frog moves its arms and legs in circles. Just like this! (showing the frog movements)

Father: Yes! That's it.

Narrator: John starts running around making wide circles with his arms. When he tries to make circles with his legs, he loses his balance and falls into the water again.

Father: John, that – is – enough! Stop moving around and being silly. Boys, jump into the water! I want you to practice moving in the water just like that frog.

Narrator: John's brothers were swimming and frolicking in the water in no time at all, but every time John tried to swim, he panicked and nearly drowned. However, John had great determination. To conquer his fear of the water and teach himself how to swim, he decided one night to take a boat out into the middle of the dark, deep river while the family was asleep.

John: I've got to stop being afraid! I've just got to! I'm going to dive into this icy water and swim back to the boat. I'm going to do it just like the frog! I'm going to do it again and again and again until I'm no longer scared.

Narrator: And that's exactly what John did. Several days later, John and his brothers showed their father how well they could swim.

John: Father, I hope you are pleased with our swimming.

Father: John, your brothers have been telling me how much you have helped them learn how to swim. That's exactly what an older brother should do. Boys, let us kneel down and thank God for helping you learn how to swim.