



Prairie Scavenger Hunt

Overview

While visiting the *Listening to the Prairie* exhibition, students will search for a variety of items located throughout the exhibition. This activity will encourage students to slow down, carefully observe, interact with, and “listen to” the contents of the exhibit.

Suggested Grade Level

9 - 12

Estimated Time

30 - 40 minutes

Objectives

Students will be able to:

1. identify common plants and animals found on the prairie.
2. ask questions, develop hypotheses, and draw conclusions.
3. work in teams, and practice written, illustration and observation skills.

Materials

Activity Sheet A

Background

Listening to the Prairie; Farming in Nature's Image is about agriculture in the North American prairie and the forces of change that turned vast grasslands into one of the most productive agricultural lands on earth. It reveals the relationship between prairie ecology and new ways to grow food.

The Fruitful Prairie – More than 25 percent of America’s productive cropland, pastureland, and range land are located in the North American prairie.

The Prairie Ecosystem – In its natural state, the prairie is a complex, fragile, and dynamic ecosystem that has sustained a diversity of plant and animal life for thousands of years.

From Native Grasses to Cultivated Grains – Deep fertile soils and a favorable growing climatic influenced 19th and 20th century farmers to cultivate the prairie

by replacing native grasses with profitable grains and legumes such as wheat, corn, barley, rice, and soybeans.

Forces of Change – Natural forces, such as wind and fire, and human forces, including agriculture and technology, have altered much of the prairie ecosystem.

Sustainable Agricultural Practices – By listening to and observing nature, some farmers and ranchers have adopted practices that keep their operations productive and profitable, while protecting a diverse prairie ecosystem for future generations. If history is our guide, some of today's alternatives will be tomorrow's accepted practices. Explore how they affect your community.

Activity

1. Divide class into teams or small groups of two or three.
2. Distribute Activity Sheet A to each group.
3. Have each group search for the items and record answers and observations.
4. Walk back through the exhibit together as a class and have students share their observations with their classmates.

Extensions

1. Five “Cues from Nature” (found on the exhibition panel entitled *An Ear to the Ground* and summarized below) can be applied in nearly every eco-region around the country. Have students choose one (or more) of these five principles and explore how it might apply to their home, school, or region. Have them share their ideas with their classmates.

“Cues from Nature”

- a. Keep it covered... farmers keep fields planted year-round to enrich soil and prevent erosion.
 - b. Make it diverse... farmers raise a variety of crops and animals to hedge against pest outbreaks, severe weather, and market changes.
 - c. Keep it dynamic... farmers frequently rotate crops and grazing animals to keep the land fertile.
 - d. Keep it recycling... farmers re-use plant/animal wastes to fertilize crops.
 - e. Work with natives... farmers and ranchers plant pastures with native plant species to nourish livestock and wildlife.
2. Significant forces of change to the North American prairie are explicitly presented throughout the exhibition. Have each group of students further research other explicit and/or implicit forces of change. Use participating library, school resource center, or Internet to prepare a presentation for class or for another group (seniors/adults) visiting the exhibition at a later date.

Prairie Scavenger Hunt

Directions: Find the answers to all of the questions by looking and listening to the exhibit. Record your answers and observations below.

- A. Find three (3) grains throughout the exhibit. Note where you find them. Name two (2) products made from each grain.



Grain #1

Grain #2

Grain #3

- B. Look in the shopping cart at the beginning of the exhibit and select three (3) products by touching the screen. Find the source of these products elsewhere in the exhibit, but **not** from that panel. Note what the products are and where they are found in the prairie.

1.

2.

3.



- C. Sketch an example of a significant change that has occurred on the prairie within the last 100 years.

- D. Find the “Cues from Nature,” that some farmers and ranchers use when growing plants and animals.

1.

2.

3.

4.

5.

- E. Recycling is a way of returning energy to the ecosystem. Find an example in the exhibit where a farmer or rancher uses recycling and describe what they are doing?
- F. Vegetative cover keeps soils from eroding. Find an example in the exhibit and briefly explain why keeping soil covered helps to prevent soil erosion.
- G. In the exhibition, find the dollar and answer the following questions:
1. What percent (%) of your food dollar goes to the farmer?
 2. Where else does your food dollar go?
 3. How can you, as a consumer, spend your food dollar so that a larger percentage goes to the farmer?
- H. Find two (2) types of grasses and write something about each grass.
- Grass #1
- Grass #2
- I. Find two (2) types of grains and write something about each grain.
- Grain #1
- Grain #2
- J. Listen to the narrator tell the story of the prairie. What is considered the most important force that shapes the prairie ecosystem? Why is it so essential?