



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

6 - 8

Estimated Time

20 – 30 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 you and 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. Have each group of students select one or two items they found interesting while visiting the exhibition. Find out more information about each and prepare a report to share with their classmates.
2. 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. For a more advanced activity, have students choose one (or more) of these five principles and explore how it might apply to their home or school. 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.

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

- A. Find five (5) sunflowers throughout the exhibit? Note where you find them. Name three (3) products made from sunflowers.
- B. Look in the shopping cart at the beginning of the exhibit and select two (2) products by touching the screen. Find the sources (what they are made from) of these products elsewhere in the exhibit, but **not** from that panel. Note what each product is and where it is found in the prairie.
- C. Sketch an animal that lives underground in the prairie.
- D. Find the five “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?

Name _____

Activity Sheet A

F. In the exhibition find the dollar and answer the following questions:

1. What percent (%) of your food dollar goes to the farmer?
2. Name five (5) other places where your food dollar goes.

G. Find two (2) types of grasses and write something about each grass.

Grass #1

Grass #2

H. Find two (2) types of grains and write something about each grain.

Grain #1

Grain #2

I. Why is the farmer burning the grasses on the prairie?

What would happen if the farmers did not burn the grasses?

J. What can farmers do to keep crops from being destroyed by grasshoppers? (Hint! Listen to the narrator talk about prairie ecosystem.)