

There is a change in nature called succession. That means filling the place of another. In many environments, these changes take place over time. One kind of plant starts to grow. Then they get bigger. Then woody plants come. The woody plants take over. Woody plants are trees. The environment becomes a forest. That is the last stage of succession. That happens in many places.

But fires burn trees. So Illinois environments used to stay the same. They would stay grassland. In summer the grass would get dry. Lightning would cause fires. Any trees would burn. The grass had roots under the ground. The grass would grow back. So for a long time much of Illinois stayed a prairie.

The animals that live in the prairie needed all that prairie to live. You can understand that when you look at one bird. The meadowlark is bird that nests in the prairie. It gets its food there, too. In summer, it eats insects. In winter, it eats seeds. To stay alive, the meadowlark needs at least 20 acres of prairie land. If 100 meadowlarks live in one prairie, they need a 2,000 acre prairie.

That's just one bird. The Henslow sparrow needs 80 acres to live. It needs all that grass. It needs that big a habitat. Some small farms are 80 acres. They grow a lot of food for the farm family. The family sells food to people in other places. What if the family buys another 80 acres of prairie to make their farm bigger. They will grow more food. At least one sparrow and four meadowlarks will lose their habitat.

After the invention of the steel plow, farmers turned more prairie into cornfields. People built more homes and roads. Over time, what was left of the natural prairies were small. Birds could not nest there. The seeds that the wind blew from the prairie plants fell on highways, in backyards, and in cornfields. Weeds began to move in.

What was left of the prairie was in small patches, called remnants. People use the word remnant to talk about leftover pieces of cloth. When people make clothing, some cloth is left. People may use that cloth to patch clothing. But it's big good enough to make clothes. Each year, there were fewer and fewer acres of prairie. In time only remnants of prairie remained in Illinois, the prairie state. Today, only tiny pieces of the Illinois prairie are left.

Directions: Choose the best answer for each question

1. Which of these do you see at the end of succession?

- a. many flowers
- b. much rain
- c. many trees
- d. a lot of grass

2. What is a plow?

- a. a big stick
- b. a tool
- c. a way to cut trees
- d. a weed

3. What is a prairie?

- a. a place
- b. a forest
- c. an environment
- d. a farm

4. Which of these is a natural habitat?

- a. a large farm
- b. Illinois
- c. a remnant
- d. part of a prairie

5. *Write your own answer to this question.*
List three things you would see in a prairie.

TEACHER NOTES: Develop Students' Skills: Exercise Thinking

These questions have not been validated, so decisions about student's achievement should not be made based on their responses. They are intended to exercise skills. Recommended activities include: students work in pairs to choose the best response; give students the questions without the responses so they generate their own answers; students make up additional questions; students make up questions like these for another passage.

Answers: *You can remove this answer key and then give it to students and ask them to figure out the basis for the correct response.*

Item	1	2	3	4
Answer	d	b	c	d

Question 5 is open-ended. Here is a suggested response.

5. Birds; insects.

Skill: Locate and classify information 4th Grade Assessment

FICTION: The Prairie Project Center for Urban Education ©2007

The fourth grade class had learned about the prairie. They learned it had disappeared from Illinois. They saw pictures of what it had looked like. The grass was very tall. It was more than six feet high.

They read about the prairie animals. They learned that some animals, like bison, would not be able to live again in Illinois except in the zoos. They needed many acres of land to have the grass they needed. They learned about birds that had lived there. They learned about butterflies that lived there. But they were gone. People had built farms. They herded cows. They raised chickens and pigs.

Still, the fourth grade students wanted to do something. They knew they could not get the bison to live in Illinois again. But they wanted to do what they could for the prairie. They wanted to help people see how wonderful it was. They thought they would take photos of a real prairie. But they needed to find one.

In March, they went on a field trip to the Botanic Garden. That is a place where there are many plants. They asked the field trip leader about prairies. They learned where they could get seeds to grow prairie plants. Then, just as they were getting on the bus, the leader came out to their teacher. She gave their teacher a bag. It was full of seeds. It was full of prairie plant seeds.

Back at school, they planted the seeds. They started them out in cups in their classroom. As they started to grow then the students took them outside. Their principal had said they could put the prairie garden next to the playground. So they planted there.

Soon the plants were growing higher and higher. By June, the plants were two feet tall. Some had bright flowers. Birds came and sat in the plants. When it rained, it smelled like flowers and grass. The principal said that some of the birds had been making nests in the plants. The students were proud of what they had done.

Then, when they came back to school in August, there was a great surprise. The plants were six feet high. They had brought back the prairie. They took photos. They showed them to people. They said, "See how tall the grass is. You can't see it, but birds live here. So do insects. It is a natural habitat."

Directions: Choose the best answer for each question

6. What are two animals that lived in the prairie?

- a. chickens and pigs
- b. birds and chickens
- c. ducks and chickens
- d. butterflies and bison

7. Which of these would you see in a prairie?

- a. lots of grass
- b. many people
- c. many farms
- d. lots of cows

8. What do you see in a natural habitat?

- a. gardeners
- b. farmers
- c. plants
- d. rain

9. What do you find in a botanic garden?

- a. guides and buses
- b. plants and seeds
- c. animals and people
- d. farms and prairies

10. *Write your own answer to this question.*

What did the students need to make their habitat?

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Answers: *You can remove this answer key and then give it to students and ask them to figure out the basis for the correct response.*

Item	6	7	8	9
Answer	d	a	c	b

Question 10 is open-ended. Here is a suggested response.

10. Land, plant seeds, water.