

The prairie is a natural ecosystem. Eco means house. An environment is a home. System is a word that comes from another word meaning place together. An ecosystem is a place where plants and animals fit together. The Tallgrass Prairie is a special kind of ecosystem. Read about ways three animals live in the Tallgrass Prairie to understand more about how things fit together there.

Above the prairie, you will see the skipper butterfly, a special butterfly. It depends on the plants here in the prairie throughout its entire life. Butterflies begin life as an egg. The female butterfly lays eggs on a plant; she lays them inside a shell in order to protect them. The larva of a butterfly then eats through that shell. Larva looks like a hairy worm. The outside of the larva is flexible, but very tough and it does not have any wings. Another name for it is a caterpillar. The larva eats the plant leaves and, as it eats, the larva grows very quickly. Afterwards the larva molts, which means it sheds its outer layer of skin. It does that because it needs to grow, and the old skin is too tight. After some time, the larva makes a pupa. A pupa is a kind of shell that turns into a butterfly with wings.

The butterfly starts out with wings that are damp from being inside the pupa. Since they have been crumpled inside the pupa, the first thing the butterfly does is spread its wings. It takes the butterfly about twenty minutes to spread its wings and let them dry. Then, approximately two hours later, the butterfly is ready to fly. The skipper flies away because it wants to find food in the Tallgrass prairie.

On the ground and below it, you will find ground squirrels. This animal is roughly one foot long and lives in large families. It has a brown coat in order to camouflage it when it moves along the ground. Animals use the color of their fur, hair, or scales to blend into the environment around them. This is called camouflage. It protects them because other animals can't see them very easily. The ground squirrel is an herbivore, which means it only eats plants. It has a lot of food on the prairie because it eats grass. Occasionally it also eats insects. In the winter, the ground squirrel sleeps in a hole in the ground to stay warm.

On the ground in the past you would have also seen bison. This big herbivore ate many plants. The bison was like a gardener for the prairie. It ate weeds—plants that are not native to an environment. When weeds would start to grow in the prairie, the bison would get rid of them. Without the bison, the weeds might take over the land that the prairie plants needed. The bison helped the prairie to maintain balance. A balanced environment is a place where both the plants and animals have what they need to survive.

## Summarize Nonfiction

Questions developed by Center for Urban Education for use by Chicago Public Schools 2010.

Choose the best answer for each question.

1. What information would you include in a summary of this passage?

- a. Prairies are pretty.
- b. Prairies are ecosystems.
- c. Prairies have worms.
- d. Prairies have many trees.

3. What kinds of information do you include in a summary of a passage?

- a. all the facts
- b. all the facts you didn't know
- c. facts that help make the ideas clear
- d. any facts you like

2. What is an important idea in the passage?

- a. The prairie is balanced.
- b. The butterfly is an insect.
- c. The squirrels eat insects.
- d. The plants need people.

4. How do you figure out what is most important in a passage?

- a. You read it quickly.
- b. You look at the first sentence.
- c. You think about it as you read.
- d. You read other books.

5. Write your own answer to this question.

List one important idea you would include in a summary of this passage.

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List one important fact you would include in a summary of this passage.

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### 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	b	a	c	c

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

The fact should be important to understanding the topic. The idea should be an idea not a fact.