

Seasons on the Prairie

Common Core Anchor Reading Standard 1. Read closely to determine what the text says explicitly and to make logical inferences from it; cite specific textual evidence when writing or speaking to support conclusions drawn from the text.

The prairie is a place where plants have lived for hundreds of years. If you see a natural prairie in different seasons, you see bright flowers and tall grasses. In early spring you see shooting stars and violets, and the spring grasses begin to grow. The prairie is very wet then since winter snows melt and leave ponds. There are two kinds of prairie grasses, one that grows a lot in spring, another that grows a lot in summer.

In summer the grasses are so tall you can't see low-growing flowers, but you do see the tall black-eyed Susan. Summer was the prairie's biggest season. In summer, there was so much tall grass that people called it a sea of grass that grew as tall as people. When pioneers were in the prairie, sometimes they got lost and would use a very tall plant called the compass plant to find their way. The compass plant's leaves turned during the day to follow the sunlight. Thousands of animals lived in this grassy area, including bison that grazed on the plants.

In autumn, more flowers bloom—the asters brighten the prairie. The leaves of many prairie plants turn gold in autumn as the grasses dry. In autumn, when the grasses are dry, natural fires take place. Those fires start by lightning. Acres and acres of prairie can burn in one natural fire. When the grasses burn, the native prairie plants do not die. In fact, the fires help the grasses keep the prairie for themselves. Most plants, especially trees, depend on their tips to grow. You'll see that trees have new buds in spring, and that is where they grow. If a tree loses its branches, it will not grow again. But grasses do not need their leaves to grow back. They grow from their roots, and the fires do not burn those roots. So every year, the lightning fires are like gardeners weeding the prairie of plants that do not grow there. The prairie plants were like gardeners, too, because as their leaves died they fertilized the soil.

Some prairie animals migrate in winter to warmer places where they will find food. Some stay in the prairie through winter. And some hibernate. For example, some frogs dig holes under the ground and sleep through the cold prairie winter. Thousands of bison and hundreds of birds and other animals that used to live in this area are gone, but they did not migrate. They left because their habitat was destroyed. There is hope for the prairie, those animals will be able to live in this area again. People are restoring the prairie at Midewin National Tallgrass prairie. One day that area will look as it did when the bison lived there and the Potawatomi hunted here.

ISAT Connection

Make multiple-choice questions based on this reading.
Give your questions to another student.

Vocabulary Connection

Choose five words that are important in this reading and write what they mean.

Seasons on the Prairie QUESTIONS

Read the questions. Re-read the text. Then think through the answers.

Choose the **best** answer for each item. After you answer the questions, check with another student to learn and why they chose their answers.

1. When do violets bloom in the prairie? a. winter b. spring c. summer d. autumn	2. Why did pioneers call one plant the compass plant? a. it had pointed leaves b. its leaves followed the sun c. its leaves pointed a direction d. it has four leaves
3. What would you see a frog doing at the end of winter? a. hibernating b. eating plants c. leaving its winter home d. returning from the south	4. How is a prairie like a rainforest? a. It is warm much of the time. b. There are many trees. c. Much of it has been destroyed. d. There are fires every year.
5. Why are there two kinds of grasses in prairies? a. One is short, one is tall. b. They grow more in different seasons. c. People planted new grass. d. The fires burn one kind.	6. What keeps trees from growing in the prairie? a. There is not enough rain. b. There is too much grass. c. There are too many fires. d. There is too much corn.
7. If you were looking for a bison, in which season would you see it in a prairie? a. winter b. spring c. summer d. never	8. Which of these is the most important part of the prairie? a. fires b. black-eyed Susans c. bison d. birds

Charting Connections

On the back of this page, make a prairie season chart. Use this format.

In each column, list or draw what you would see in a prairie in 1800.

	Autumn	Winter	Spring	Summer
Plants				
Animals				