

Illinois: Pioneers and Prairies

CCSSR2—support important ideas with examples.

Illinois is called the prairie state. Long ago, most of the land was prairie --a prairie is a kind of grassland. The grass in a prairie grows to be very high. It can get to be six feet tall in summer.

Pioneers are people who do something for the first time. Although Native Americans lived in Illinois for a long time, the people who came to build houses here were called pioneers. They were the first people to come to build towns and stay there all year. The Native Americans had moved from place to place in different seasons.

The pioneers were called settlers because they came to settle, to stay. They had to struggle to make a home in Illinois. First, it was hard to get to Illinois. The pioneers had to bring most of what they needed to live with them in big wagons. Horses or oxen pulled the wagons, and they traveled for days.

The pioneers came to Illinois to find a good place to live, and they wanted to stay. Many were farmers who came to farm in Illinois because the land here was good. They brought tools to farm, and they brought axes and other tools to build their homes.

The first thing the pioneers did after they built their homes was make the land ready to farm. They cut down the prairie grass so that they could plant crops. Then they dug in the soil. They would plant corn, wheat, and vegetables. They raised animals, too—pigs and chickens. It was hard work for everyone, including the children.. The children planted crops and helped in the home.

Pioneers were glad to be in Illinois, it was a good place to settle. They had good land, they could get water from lakes, creeks and rivers. They could go fishing and get food that way. In winter it would snow and the weather was cold, so the pioneers had to store food for winter.

As soon as more pioneers came, they would make a town, a small community. They would make rules for the community, elect leaders, and work together. If you look at the names of communities in Illinois you'll see that some of them have Native American names, like Skokie, which means "marsh". In fact, the state's name—Illinois—is based on the name of the Native Americans who used to live here.

THINK MORE

- What challenges did pioneers face?
- How did they use natural resources?
- What happened to the Native Americans?