

Plants have lived for hundreds of years on the prairie. In different seasons, the plants look very different. You can see bright flowers and tall grasses at different times of year. In spring, you see shooting stars and violets. The spring grasses begin to grow. The prairie is very wet in the spring because the snow from the winter melts and leaves big ponds.

In summer, the grasses are so tall that you cannot even see flowers that grow low and close to the ground. There are tall flowers too. You can see a flower that is called 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. It sometimes even grew as tall as the people did. When pioneers were in the prairie, sometimes they got lost. They 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 also lived in this grassy area, including bison that ate the plants.

In autumn, more flowers bloom—the asters make the prairie look brighter. The leaves of many prairie plants turn gold in autumn and the grasses start to dry. In autumn, when the grasses are dry, natural fires take place. Those fires start when there is a lightning strike. 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 actually help the grasses to grow bigger. Most plants, especially trees, depend on their tips to grow. You can see that in the spring trees have new buds. Those buds are where the trees grow from. If a tree loses its branches, it will not grow anymore. Grasses are not like trees and they do not need their leaves to grow back. They grow from their roots. The fires do not burn the roots because the roots are underground. The lightning fires are a little bit like gardeners. They weed the prairie of plants that are not supposed to grow there.

Some prairie animals move in the winter to warmer places where they can find more food. Some stay in the prairie through winter. Some stay but they hibernate, or sleep, through the winter. 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 now. They left the prairie because the places where they lived were destroyed. There is hope for the prairie to grow again. Maybe those animals will be able to live in this area again. People are restoring the prairie at Midewin National Tallgrass prairie. One day this area will look as it did when the bison lived here and the Potawatomi hunted here.

Compare and Contrast Nonfiction

Questions developed by Center for Urban Education for use by Chicago Public Schools 2008-2009.

Choose the best answer for each question.

1. How is autumn on the prairie different from spring?

- a. Autumn is dry; spring is wet.
- b. More plants grow in autumn than spring.
- c. Pioneers would get lost in autumn.
- d. More animals live there in spring.

3. How is the compass plant like a map?

- a. People use them when they visit the prairie.
- b. The plant grows in the north.
- c. They both show directions.
- d. People use them in daylight.

2. How is a prairie fire like a gardener?

- a. The fire cuts things down.
- b. The fire helps prairie plants grow.
- c. The fire burns trees.
- d. The fire burns animals' homes.

4. How is the prairie today different from the prairie of the past?

- a. It is the same.
- b. It is like a rainforest.
- c. The prairie has many different plants.
- d. Many plants and animals are gone.

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

How is the prairie like a park?

How is the prairie different from a park?

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.*

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| Item | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |
| Answer | a | b | c | d |

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

The prairie and park both have many plants. The park is man-made, the prairie is natural.