

The prairie is a beautiful 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 why those are so important—and you should never cut those buds, that would be a problem. Look at the tips and you will see that trees have new buds in spring, and that is where they grow.

Here is the special way the prairie has survived despite challenges. If a tree loses its branches, it will not grow again. That's a sad ending for that tree. 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. Thoughtful 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.

Contrast and Evaluate Fact and Opinion – Nonfiction

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

Choose the best answer for each question

1. Which of these words tells you this is an opinion? “The prairie is a beautiful place where plants have lived and bloomed for centuries.”

- a. prairie
- b. beautiful
- c. centuries
- d. bloomed

3. Which of these is a fact?

- a. That’s a sad ending for the tree.
- b. Look at the buds.
- c. Grasses do not need their leaves.
- d. Thoughtful people are restoring the prairie.

2. Which of these words tells you this is an opinion? “Here is the special way the prairie has survived despite challenges.”

- a. special
- b. prairie
- c. despite
- d. challenges

4. Which of these phrases tells you it is an opinion?

- a. a special place
- b. restoring the prairie
- c. one day
- d. the bison lived here

5. *Choose a sentence that tells an opinion in this passage.*

How do you know it tells an opinion?

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	a

Question 5 is open-ended. Here is a suggested response.
Students should identify a statement of opinion and explain that it is not a fact.