

Contrast and Evaluate Fact and Opinion

Changing the Ecosystem

8th Grade Nonfiction

Center for Urban Education at DePaul University © 2008

A food chain is a series of links between plants and animals. It starts with a plant. The next part of the link is a plant eater. When the prairie plants started to die or be replaced with houses and roads, the animals that depended on them lost their food source. So while the farmers produced more food for people, they broke the animals' food chain and the animals died or had to move. This was a great mistake. We are paying for that mistake today. And, unfortunately, people still keep making that mistake. They keep breaking the food chains.

A food chain is part of a bigger system called a food web. That web links the living things in an ecosystem. The herbivores in that system depend on the plants. If the plants are removed, the herbivores cannot survive. Then the carnivores, the animals that eat other animals, lose their food, too. Remove just one kind of plant from an environment and you disrupt the food web. Plow up the land and you destroy the whole system. The problem was there were more and more people and less and less natural habitats. The timeline shows how the population of Chicago people changed.

1880	Population of the city is 503,185; farms continue to expand
1890	Population of the city is 1,099,850
1900	Population is 1,698,676
1910	Factories expand in the city; population is 2,185,283
1920	City population has grown to 2,701,705
1930	City population is 3,376,438

By 1900, Illinois and other Midwestern states were becoming known as the nation's breadbasket. This was because millions of acres of land had been turned from prairie into farms. Those farms could grow corn and wheat and other grains. Those grains were used to make bread and other food for people. This was not progress for everyone.

That agricultural progress benefited many people. The farmers and businesses that processed the grains prospered. Chicago became a transportation center. It became an industrial center, too. More and more homes, businesses, and roads were built. But many of the animals and plants that were native to this area were destroyed. So was the natural system called the prairie.

Today, people are trying to restore the prairie, but it's a great challenge. Suburban housing is expanding. Pollution is increasing. What's next? People need to decide which is more important. Should we keep building roads and homes or should we fix the housing we have and leave land free of construction so that what's left of the natural habitat can survive?

Directions: Choose the best answer for each question.

1. Which word in the first paragraph tells you it is the writer's opinion?

- a. lost
- b. broke
- c. unfortunately
- d. replaced

2. Which of these is an opinion?

- a. By 1900, Illinois and other Midwestern states were becoming known as the nation's breadbasket.
- b. This was not progress for everyone.
- c. Chicago became a transportation center.
- d. More and more homes, businesses, and roads were built.

3. How do you know if a statement is an opinion?

- a. It includes information.
- b. It uses adjectives.
- c. It tells what someone feels.
- d. It asks you a question.

4. How do you know if a statement is a fact?

- a. It tells you information you can check.
- b. It gives you a new idea about a topic.
- c. It makes you feel differently about the topic.
- d. It includes historical information.

5. Write your own answer to this question.

Choose a sentence from the passage that is a statement of fact. Change it so it is an opinion. Rewrite it here as 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	c	b	c	a

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

5. Students should identify a statement of opinion and explain that it is not a fact.