

Seasons on the Prairie

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.

Seasons on the Prairie Quiz

1. 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

2. What is the author's purpose of the reading passage?
 - a. Persuade
 - b. Inform
 - c. Entertain

3. Why did pioneers call one plant the compass plant?
 - a. The plant looks like a compass.
 - b. The compass plant is very tall and its leaves adjust to face the sunlight.
 - c. It provided the prairie with a means of shade.

4. 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.

5. The main idea of the passage focuses on the prairie being a place where plants and animals have lived for hundreds of years and a place to see nature in different seasons. List three pieces of textual evidence to support this main idea.
 - a. _____
 - b. _____
 - c. _____

6. According to the passage, the word "prairie" means:
 - a. a dry, desert-like area
 - b. a forest where animals roam
 - c. flat land of mostly high grasses
 - d. tall grasses and flowers



Forum (in-person, remote, etc.) Students will respond to each question and respond to two other peers' responses.

This discussion forum will have questions for you to respond. Read the posted questions, and respond to each in complete sentences.

- 1. “They left the prairie...” The author states, “They left the prairie because the places where they lived were destroyed.” What do you think happened to the prairie? What do you think the author is trying to imply with this statement?**
- 2. “Describe what you...” Describe what you are likely to see during each season on the prairie.**
- 3. Compare and contrast grasses and trees.**