

TALLGRASS PRAIRIE: AN ENDANGERED SPACE

TIME: 2.5 HRS

Teachers: Please copy the enclosed booklet for each of your students. Students will need to bring a pencil, the booklet and a clipboard (if available) on the day of the program.

DESCRIPTION: The students are introduced to our endangered tallgrass prairie ecosystem. Students will learn about this unique and exciting area through an interactive slideshow and hike in the Ojibway Prairie Provincial Nature Reserve. Through gaining a deeper understanding of this ecosystem, relationships that occur within this space between biotic and abiotic factors, students will gain an appreciation for the need to protect this area. Students will learn how fire and humans have changed this landscape.

PRAIRIE PRESENTATION

Students are introduced to some of the fascinating plant and animal species that live in the tallgrass prairie through an interactive presentation. Students will examine the many food chains that occur within the prairie. There will be a special emphasis on some of the species at risk, such as slender bushclover, foxsnake and the massasauga rattlesnake. Students discuss why the tallgrass prairie is endangered, and what human intervention is occurring to protect it.

BREAK – A short break is scheduled for the students to use the washrooms and have a small snack and drink.

FIRE COMPONENT

The concept of prescribed burning is demonstrated through a short video presentation of a burn at Ojibway Prairie. Students witness through this video the extent of the fire, and the benefits it has on a prairie habitat.

EXPLORING THE PRAIRIE

Led by the naturalist and with the aid of their booklets (see copy enclosed) students explore and become familiar with the largest protected area of tallgrass prairie remaining in Ontario. This interpretive hike explores a portion of Ojibway Prairie Provincial Nature Reserve.

Students are encouraged to keep their eyes and ears open for any interesting natural features as they explore this prairie habitat. They should use as much detail as possible when filling out their booklets.

The naturalist will point out unique features along with plants and animals that inhabit the tallgrass prairie. Opportunities to see deer, chipmunks, raccoons, squirrels, birds, snakes, dragonflies, caterpillars, spiders, and many more insects, are part of this hike.

VISITING BAT HOUSES

The naturalist brings the group to the man-made bat houses located next to the Nature Centre. Students will learn why we have erected bat houses and why we like to have bats living nearby.

BIRD FEEDER WATCH

While inspecting the life in the wildlife feeding area, the naturalist helps the students discover the needs of animals and how they are met in this particular area.

VIEWING NATURE CENTRE EXHIBITS

A naturalist roams amongst the students, answering their questions as they view the Nature Centre's live animal displays and natural history exhibits. Students are encouraged to view and touch a variety of natural objects in the discovery centre.

Please note that the Nature Centre has a Nature Shop with bird seed, feeders, books and children's items for sale.

Teachers may choose one of the following to complete their Ojibway field study:

A. WILDFLOWER STUDY

The naturalist discusses with the students the importance of pollinators such as bees, butterflies and other insects in the lives of plants and therefore in the lives of animals that rely on plants for food. The students are brought to a wildflower area and draw at least four different species of prairie wildflowers and any pollinators they might find. The naturalist helps the students to identify the flowers and pollinators.

B. BUILD-A-BIRD ADAPTATION ACTIVITY

Students discuss how a species survives in a habitat. Then, in groups, students are given a make-believe habitat and are asked to create a bird that could live in the habitat that they are given. Students draw a picture, and write information about what the bird eats, where it builds its nest, what it builds its nest out of and how it survives. Students in their groups will present their creation to the rest of the class.

C. HANDS-ON SNAKE TALK

The students are introduced to one of the centre's resident snakes. The naturalist discusses characteristics, senses and habits of snakes and explains the concept of endangered, vulnerable and extinct species. Each person is given the opportunity to pet one of the Nature Centre's resident snakes.

D. DRAGONFLY POND DEVELOPMENT ACTIVITY

Students are divided into groups and assigned different points of interest in a reality based scenario. Each group prepares a development plan for the "Dragonfly Pond" area and presents their development proposal to the other interest groups. The conflicts and challenges that arise when natural spaces are faced with development are illustrated and discussed.

Tallgrass Prairie

1. In a 50 m x 50 m area of tallgrass prairie, how many trees are you likely to see:

< 10 trees _____ 10-15 trees _____ > 15 trees _____

2. Describe three prairie plants (include grasses):

Plant Name (if known)

Description

i. _____

ii. _____

iii. _____

Other Plant and Animal Sightings

3. List the other plants and animals you see:

a. Animals: _____

b. Plants: _____

Fire Management

4. Why does the Ministry of Natural Resources' fire squad burn the tallgrass prairie?

Ecosystem Components

Fill in the blanks using examples from the tallgrass prairie ecosystem.

producer

herbivore

omnivore

carnivore

carnivore

decomposer

Definitions:

Producer – plant

Herbivore – eats plants

Carnivore – eats animals

Omnivore – eats plants and animals

Decomposer – lives on decaying plants and animals