

Lesson Plan: Teeming with Life - Amazing Grassland Creatures



Activity: Habitat Classifieds

Students write "classified" ads describing several grassland habitats, and they identify potential residents of the habitats.

Academic Areas:

Language arts, Science

Grade Levels:

Grades 4–6

Learning Objectives:

After participating in the activity that follows, students will be able to do the following:

- List several different grassland habitats.
- Name species that live in the different habitats.
- Understand the importance of protecting grassland habitats.

Standards Met:

Language Arts

- Demonstrates competence in the general skills and strategies of the writing process
- Gathers and uses information for research purposes

Science

- Understands structure and function in living systems
- Learns about diversity and adaptations of organisms

Materials for the class:

Blades, paper, pens

Background:

Grasslands are incredibly diverse habitats. Grassland habitats support communities of life that are adapted especially for their conditions. Following is a brief description of five grassland habitats and the plants and animals they support. Your students can use these summaries as a basis for writing their classified ads.

African Savanna. The African continent is dominated by tropical grasslands called savannas. These tropical regions, with their plentiful food source, attract millions of large herbivores such as zebras, antelopes, and giraffes. The large number of herbivores attracts large numbers of carnivores such as lions, cheetahs and hyenas. All of these animals have adapted to the long dry season by being highly mobile. These animals will travel thousands of miles each year in search of food and water.

South American savanna. The savannas of South America differ from other savannas in that they are flooded most of the year. The standing water does the same job as fire does in other savannas, it prevents tree growth. Life here flourishes in a semi-aquatic existence. Many of the larger animals, such as deer, anteaters, armadillos and tapirs migrate to the flooded areas during the day to eat. The large number of rivers, marshes and streams allow these savannas to foster species adapted to the water, such as capybaras and giant anaconda snakes.

Prairie. Found mostly in North America, prairies are flat, open areas with deep, fertile soil. Ranging from Canada to Texas and the Rocky Mountains to mountains of the eastern United States, prairies once covered 1.4 million square miles. Before its conversion to farmland, the prairie was home to buffalo, deer, elk and other grazing animals. Today, this grassland area still supports many burrowing animals such as badgers, mice and prairie dogs.

Pampas. The pampas is a temperate grassland area found in South America. This grassland is home to many endemic creatures such as the greater rhea, maned wolf, geoffroy's cat, and guanacos. These animals have adapted to the tall grasses common to this area.

Velds. The velds of South Africa are a temperate grassland region separated by elevation. There are three distinct zones, a lowveld, a middleveld and a highveld. These zones are separated by elevation, with the Highveld above 4000 feet, the low veld below 2000 feet and the middle veld in between. The lowveld is known for its

large game such as elephants, hippos, rhinos, zebras and lions. Some of the largest wildlife preserves in the world are located in the lowveld.

What to Do:

1. Ask your class how people go about finding a place to live. One way is to read classified ads in a newspaper that describe features of different homes. Grassland animals don't read ads, but they do look for homes that are right for them-homes called habitats. Ask students if they can name several types of habitats (rainforest, desert, prairie, etc.). Now, can they name any grassland habitats? Explain that grassland habitats provide all the elements needed for a community of grassland plants and animals to survive.
2. Explain that the students work for the Grassland Gazette a newspaper that publishes classified ads for grassland dwellers. Students are to write classified ads tailored for plants and animals living in different grassland habitats. Use the habitats described in the background to get started, but encourage the class to come up with others. Divide the class into teams of four or five, and assign each team a different habitat. Team member must use research materials to learn about their habitats and the plants and animals that live in them. Then each student should write a classified ad describing the habitat as an ideal place for a different plant or animal that would call it home. For example, an ad directed at a cheetah might read: "Perfect place if you live in the fast lane! With lenient traffic laws and plenty of Sunday drivers, you'll find plenty to fill your tummy!"
3. After everyone has written the ads, compile them into a classified page. Divide the page into a section for each habitat, and list the appropriate ads under each. Students should try to match the ads with the creatures or plants they describe.
4. Expand the idea of habitats to explore grassland sanctuaries and reserves-areas that are protected because of their unique habitat, inhabitants, or other special qualities.

Resources

"Savanna Biomes." Blue Planet Biomes. N.p., n.d. Web. 17 Mar. 2013.
<http://www.blueplanetbiomes.org/savanna.htm>.

"WWF – Grasslands." WWF – species, habitats, climate change, sustainability. N.p., n.d. Web. 26 June 2013.
http://wwf.panda.org/about_our_earth/ecoregions/about/habitat_types/habitats/gras

slands/.

"WWF - Northern Prairie." WWF - WWF. N.p., n.d. Web. 17 Mar. 2013.

http://wwf.panda.org/about_our_earth/ecoregions/northern_prairie.cfm.

"Llanos grasslands | The Nature Conservancy." Nature Conservancy | Protecting Nature, Preserving Life. N.p., n.d. Web. 4 July 2013.

<http://www.nature.org/ourinitiatives/regions/southamerica/colombia/placesweprotect/llanos-grasslands.xml>.

"Prairie Quick Facts." Welcome to the CampSilos Home Page. N.p., n.d. Web. 3 July 2013. <http://www.campsilos.org/mod1/students/index.shtml>.

"North American Prairie." Blue Planet Biomes. N.p., n.d. Web. 28 Jan. 2013.

<http://www.blueplanetbiomes.org/prairie.htm>.