

FROM BLUESTEM AND BISON TO CORN AND CATTLE

Objective: Through a classroom demonstration, students will discover the dramatic change that took place in the Illinois prairie landscape.

Illinois State Goals: 16.E., 17.D.

Top Book Hits:

If You're Not From The Prairie by David Bouchard;

ISBN-13: 978-0689820359

The Prairie Builders by Collard B. Sneed III; **ISBN-13:** 978-0547014418

Materials Needed:

- 8.5"x 11" sheet of copy paper

Procedure:

In the early 1800's, almost sixty percent of Illinois was covered by prairie. In fact, well over 21,000,000 acres of Illinois was covered in Big Bluestem. When early settlers realized the richness of these soils, much of the prairie was converted to agricultural land. Today, less than 2,100 acres of native Illinois prairie exists. The following can be used as a classroom demonstration to show how little native prairie exists in Illinois today.



1. Using a 8.5"x 11" sheet of copy paper, tell students that this sheet of paper represents the 21,000,000 acres of prairie that existed in Illinois in the early 1800s.
2. Fold the sheet of paper in half and tear. With each paper tear, tell students how many acres of prairie remain in Illinois from the chart on the next page.
3. Repeat this process until the paper has been reduced in size to represent the remaining 2,100 acres of native prairie. In all, the paper will be folded and torn thirteen (13) times.
4. When completed, only a "speck" of paper will be left.

Below are the numbers for the demonstration:

21,000,000 Acres (Early 1800's) (Round to 20,000,000)
10,000,000
5,000,000
2,500,000
1,250,000
625,000
312,500 (Round to 300,000)
150,000
75,000
37,500
18,750 (Round to 18,000)
9,000
4,500 (Round to 4,000)
2,000 (Number of native prairie acres that exist today)

Think about this: In Illinois, only 1/100th of 1 percent of native prairie still exists. Native tall grass prairie is the MOST ENDANGERED ecosystem in North America.

Explore More: IDNR's "Illinois Prairies Resource Trunk" dnr.teachkids@illinois.gov
Prairie lessons from the Illinois mAGic Kit available through local agricultural literacy coordinator.

Give credit where credit is due...adapted from U.S. Fish & Wildlife Prairie Resources