



Video/English/Subject Lesson Plan and Guide

Turn our videos into exciting and informative ENGLISH as well as subject experiences using our lesson plan below.

Where does the video go when it's not on the home screen? New and recent videos appear on the home screen. But then they always go to and stay in the subject areas. So this one lives in Victorians and Georgians under History. So it is always accessible when you want it, provided you have a membership.

Reproduction permission: You may extract whatever you want to make up your own personal worksheet provided that material stays within your school and is not put in a public online space.

The life of a prairie dog

This Lesson Plan and Guide matches the video *Prairie dogs in Habitats* science section (and in search), as well as *Caring for our environment and adaptation to climate*.

So

If you want to cover

- habitats in science,
- climate types in geography
- conservation
- saving our planet

and also fit them into the time you have allocated to English, here is a way to do it using our video *Prairie Dogs*.

Prairie dogs are rodents that have become adapted to live in semi-arid environment (habitat) that has been hugely changed by the interference of farmers.

Prairie dogs are chubby rodents that scuttle around on the ground in what is left of the prairies. Their behaviour makes them interesting animals for students to watch, and draws them in to discussing fundamental ideas of saving the planet.

The video is a very good example of how to use an interesting animal in order to study food chains and how animals are adapted to the environment and how they have nearly been exterminated for no good reason.

1. Play the video right through.

2. Give out the worksheet below. Tell students they have to use the video as a primary source in order to answer the questions. The questions are designed to extract facts, summarise and finally to provide a challenge for discussion and development. Keep them all in, or select as you feel appropriate.

Keep in mind that this is also a good opportunity to get students to re-search background knowledge.

Here are places on our website they can do that

a. Specific: Grassland life (part of our eavesdrop series) They can listen to what a prairie dog might say and make up their own version of a conversation between prairie dogs

b. General: Habitats (science book 4B) gives the chance to see how animals and plants are parts of a food chain and food web in general.

Please focus on food chains in your discussion.

From these three simple questions they will have understood

(a) That animals live together for a purpose: often those in the middle of food chains need to worry about those higher up

(b) that animals are adapted to their environment (habitat) and their position in it (food chain). make sure they use the words environment and habitat. Remind students that they are looking at the animals in summer, so you cannot draw all the inferences you need about lifestyle from just one short observation. Ask: why are we not taking these videos in winter? (because the animals are 3m below the surface, and in any case the land is covered with snow)

(c) That people often do not always see the value of other living things because they have not taken the trouble to understand them properly. So farmers saw a pest without realising they were a keystone species. This is an important conservation and stewardship idea that you should discuss further with your class.

Related source books: Creative topic: Grassland life
Science at school 4B Habitats

1. Watch the video right through. Tell students that on a second run through they will need to find some facts and write them down. That is, familiarity with information will allow you to get more from it. Students should always see the point of reading, listening or watching something containing information more than once. That is good research technique. They may very well use that skill in the jobs in later life.

During the video students should listen and watch carefully and write down answers to these questions, or you can get them to read the supplied text and find the answers that way.



Life 3 metres underground. Is it for you?

1. What kind of animal is a prairie dog? R,..
2. Why do prairie dogs live together?
3. Why do they live in burrows as deep as 3m from the surface?
4. Why don't prairie dog burrows get flooded?
5. Name all of the climate challenges that prairie dogs have to cope with.
6. What did farmers misunderstand about prairie dogs when they thought they were a pest?
7. Why would you find it difficult to live in a burrow?

8. Can you turn the way a prairie dog behaves into a song?
Here is a suggested starting line.

“Oh, I am a chubby prairie dog,”

Can you think of music to match?

9. What would be an alternative word to ‘burrow’?

10. Where would you find people in artificial burrows in a city!?

11. What is a pest?

12. Is it right to kill so many animals of one kind that they are nearly exterminated?

13. Write a postcard to a hedgehog written from a prairie dog town telling of what life is like for them.

And here are some generic gps questions you could add yourself:

14. Find and copy an example of a _____ from the video. (Noun, verb, fronted adverbial, adjective, conjunction)

15. Why do the words _____ have capital letters?

16. Write down a sentence from the text that contains punctuation. What is this punctuation used for?

17. The word _____ is a compound word. Write down the two root words it is made from.

18. Make a list of synonyms for the word _____

19. Write down any word that has a prefix in the text. Then think of two other words that have the same prefix.

20. Choose any word from the text and add a suffix.

21. Find a sentence that contains a subordinate clause. Write out the sentence and underline the clause.

22. Write down three words that come from the same word family as _____

23. Write the word _____ as a noun.

24. Write down all the compound words that have the word _____ in them that you can think of (ex: way)

25. Write down three adjectives from the text. Describe what each of them means.

26. Are there any modal verbs in the text (verbs that help to modify other verbs).

Text to read and work from

Prairie dogs are chubby, mainly plant-eating burrowing rodents. Prairie dogs mainly feed on grasses and small seeds, although they will also eat small insects. They live on the North American Prairies and Great Plains to the east of the Rocky Mountains.

They got the name 'prairie dog' because their warning call is similar to a dog's bark.

To understand the life of prairie dogs, you need to know that this part of North America is very dry for much of the year, very hot in summer, and bitterly cold in winter. There is also the threat of prairie fires, floods, hailstorms and blizzards. It is also a land at high altitude (1000 to 3000m above sea level). All in all, it is one of the most challenging environments for any animal to live in.

It would be very difficult for small animals like this to survive out in the open in the heat of summer or the frost of winter especially, to say nothing of escaping fast hunters like eagles, and that is why they are found in deep burrows.

Prairie dogs live in large colonies or "towns" and groups of prairie dog families can have burrows covering hundreds of hectares.

Each prairie dog town would normally be around 20 family groups.

Prairie dog burrows can be 10m long and are about 3m below the surface. They are so deep because the soil is frozen in winter right down to this depth. The mounds they sometimes create at the burrow entrances serve as watchtowers against hunters and also keep out floodwaters.

Prairie dogs can spot hunting animals far away. When one is sighted, prairie dogs give a high-pitched warning call.

Although prairie dogs are small (under 40 cm long including tail), and look as though they could not have much of an effect on the place here they live, in fact, they are vitally important to the balance of life (ecology) of the prairies. Species that are vital like this are called 'keystone' species.

Their digging not only makes a good home, but also keeps the soil well broken up and so helps to allow rainwater to seep into the soil.

Prairie dogs are important food for ferrets, fox, golden eagle and other hawks, badgers and coyote. Many birds, for example owls, rely on disused burrows as nests. Bison and other grazing animals are helped by prairie dogs because their soil churning makes the soil fertile and helps grasses to grow.

Unfortunately, in the past, when prairie dog numbers were very high, they were seen as pests and nearly exterminated. But once the prairie dogs have been removed from an area, the dry brush plants that were kept in check by the prairie dog activities take over from the nutritious grasses, making the land able to support fewer cattle. So getting rid of them has almost certainly done more harm than good for cattle ranchers.