



## **PRAIRIE DOG BEHAVIOR OBSERVATION\*2012**

**Grade Level:** 4<sup>th</sup>

**Setting:** Prairie field trip

**Theme/Bottom line:** It is fun to observe Prairie Dogs' behavior and notice how much it is like our daily routine.

**Description:** Students learn how what they do everyday is like what prairie dogs do everyday.

**BIAS:** [Awareness](#)

**Recommended Time:** 45 min- 1 hour

**Recommended Group Size:** 15 students

**FOSS Kit:** Environments

**State Standards: Life Science:** Explain and illustrate with examples how living systems interact with the biotic and abiotic environment. There is interaction and interdependence between and among living and nonliving components of ecosystems.

### **Materials list**

- (Prairie Pie Journal handed out at beginning of the day) Worksheets, clipboards, pencils (one per student)
- Photos of prairie dog behaviors
- Binoculars (one per student)
- Background information about prairie dogs (in green binder in Resource Room)

### **Getting Ready:**

1. Look over materials
2. Read background information about prairie dogs.

### **Introduction:**

1. Welcome students and introduce yourself. Remind students that this Natural Area is a free place that they can return to with their friends and family. Invite them to bring someone back here and share what they learn today about these great little Prairie Dogs.
2. Ask students about their daily routine. How many of you usually sleep at night and wake up in the morning? (Repeat with other routine things) did you eat breakfast, brush your teeth, brush your hair, kiss someone goodbye, walk somewhere, wait for the bus to come, call someone or talk in the car? (*or make up your own, these all have parallels to prairie dog behavior*).
3. Ask students if they think that prairie dogs have the same behaviors or routines as people? Let's find out!

### **Body:**

1. We are going to watch the prairie dogs here and see what they do, how they are behaving. We will be using scientific tools, binoculars. Demonstrate how to take

out the binoculars carefully and adjust them BEFORE distributing the binocs to the students.

2. Next, distribute the binoculars to students- lead them through focusing them again. Once everyone has their binoculars ready, ask students to observe the prairie dogs to see what they are doing. Allow about 5 minutes for this free-form observation.

**Nat Note:** *Many students have limited experience using binoculars and this step may take more than 5 minutes to get all students settled using the binoculars.*

3. Call the students back together and ask what the prairie dogs were doing. Explain any behaviors that you can. Next show the prairie dog behavior photos- tell students about each behavior and connect it to something similar that people do, see below.

- a. Resting/ Lying Down- like us sleeping or napping
  - b. Running or walking- like us getting from place to place
  - c. Ran down hole- like us seeking shelter when its raining or snowing out.
  - d. Digging- we construct our homes by digging and building OR we do work such as going to school, parent's jobs.
  - e. Feeding- just like us having meals or snacks.
  - f. Alert/looking around- like us paying attention in school
  - g. Jump/yip- like us communicating with other people
  - h. Socializing-.just like talking to or being with friends
4. Now let's look more closely at what the prairie dogs are doing. Explain that students will be working in pairs and explain the role of the recorder and of the observer. Each student will have a chance to do each job. When they are the observer they may watch any dog in the whole colony. When they identify what the behavior is they say it to the recorder who then marks one tally in that behavior column on their sheet. The recorder is marking on their partner's sheet. After 2 minutes you will call time and the partners will switch jobs. If time permits do another round of turns, so that each partner gets 2 chances to observe and 2 to record.
5. Pass out clipboards, worksheets, pencils. Complete the hypothesis section of the worksheet. Ask the students to move to a trail position and begin the rotations.
6. When the observation turns are done, call the group back together. Ask the students to count up their tally marks for each behavior and record it on their own sheet. Then have them turn to the back page and look at the rank/order chart. Explain that they will draw lines from the left column to the right based on their own personal observation data. For example if eating was the behavior they counted most that would rank as 1<sup>st</sup> (most) on the chart and they should draw a line to connect the word "eating" with 1<sup>st</sup>.

### **Conclusion:**

1. Remind students of all the ways prairie dogs are like people. Ask them to give examples.
2. In their study of environments they have learned that there is an interaction and interdependence between and among living and nonliving components of

- ecosystems. Ask if they can give an example of this from their observations today.
3. Explain that here in Ft Collins we sometimes take these creatures for granted because there seem to be so many. However, the PD habitat is 98% gone from the US. That means 2 things; we are very lucky to have them as our neighbors; and we have a responsibility to appreciate and protect them.
  4. Invite the students to bring their families out to observe fascinating PD behavior in our Natural Areas.

This lesson was written by Sue Kenney, Zoe Whyman, Susan Schafer, and Dolores Daniels for the City of Fort Collins Natural Areas Department.



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