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EXPLORING THE GRASSLANDS: UNDERSTANDING AN ECOSYSTEM

KAY WILLSON, illustrated by Elaine Muth. 1994. Saskatchewan Environmental Society, Saskatoon. 144 pp., coil bound, soft cover \$10.00

In the last 100 years Saskatchewan has lost 80% of its short-grass prairie and 75% of its mixed-grass prairie thus earning the dubious distinction of being the most altered ecosystem in Canada. As education is one of the keys to conserving the remaining grasslands, the writing of this teaching guide for educators is welcome and long overdue.

This resource book is a complete teaching unit on ecosystems. It is designed to be used as part of the grade six curriculum, and it meets the core curriculum requirements on ecosystems. This unit can also be adapted as a grade 5 optional science unit. The usefulness of this book extends beyond the classroom. Many activities could be used by non-school groups interested in grassland ecology and conservation, keeping in mind they are developed for children around 12 years of age. Although the text is written using Saskatchewan examples, educators from other prairie provinces or states will find the material useful in their classrooms, too.

The book's main focus is to teach ecological concepts using the grassland ecosystem. There are ten lessons: The Grasslands Ecosystem, The Grassland Community, The Nutrient Cycle, A Day in the Grasslands, Creating a Grassland Mural, From Bison to Cattle, From Prairie to

Wheat Fields, Protecting Native Grasslands, The Future of the Grasslands and Grasslands of the World. The lessons also cover issues about rangeland, cropland, threatened species and historical land use by humans.

Included in the lessons are background information for the teacher, an explanation of the activity, reproducible material for students, student questions, ideas for extended study, ideas for integrating other subject areas, student evaluation, lists of suitable resources and lists of supplies needed. Common Essential Learnings, Factors of Scientific Literacy and Objectives are included. There are listings of audio-visual and print resources and organizations providing these resources.

Lessons use a variety of strategies including class and small group discussions, role-playing, drama, journal writing, developing portfolios, using audio-visual materials, worksheets, study cards, research topics, writing prose and poetry, puppet shows, visualizations, demonstrations and hands-on activities. Student materials are written at an appropriate reading level and are reproducible for educational purposes.

Not only will this book provide lessons to teach ecological concepts, but it will also provide lessons and activities that show uniqueness of grasslands while stressing the need to conserve them. I hope that this book becomes a standard resource in classrooms throughout the prairies.

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