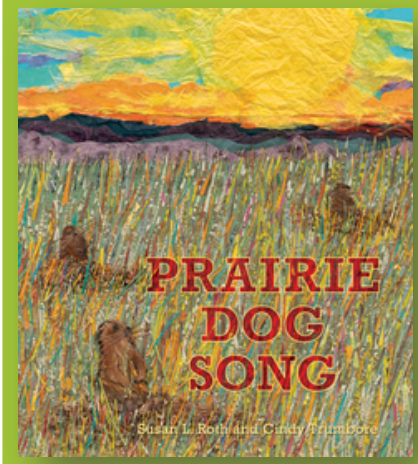
TEACHER'S GUIDE



LEE & LOW BOOKS

Prairie Dog Song: The Key to Saving North America's Grasslands

written by Susan L. Roth and Cindy Trumbore
illustrated by Susan L. Roth

About the Book

Genre: Poetry/Nonfiction

*Reading Level: Grade 4–5

Interest Level: Grades 1–5

Guided Reading: S

Lexile™: AD1050L

Accelerated Reader® Level/Points: 5.7/0.5

* Reading level based on the Spache Readability Formula

Themes: Animals (prairie dogs, ferrets, bison, and other animals once native to North American grasslands), Endangered Ecosystems, Wildlife Recovery, Environment, United States and Mexican History, Latino/Latin American Interest

SYNOPSIS

The prairie dogs built

Their homes in the ground.

And the grasses waved

All around, all around,

And the grasses waved all around.

For thousands of years, green and gold grasses covered North America from Canada to Mexico. The prairie and desert grasslands were home to a variety of animals, from small prairie dogs to huge bison. But in the nineteenth century, ranching and farming took hold in the grasslands, and over time many of the animals and plants vanished.

Then, in the late 1980s, scientists discovered a region in Mexico where green and gold grasses still waved and prairie dogs still barked. The scientists understood the importance of this grassland ecosystem and the prairie dogs' key role in it. Could they now preserve the area and bring back its lost animals and plants?

As they have done in their award-winning *Parrots Over Puerto Rico* and *The Mangrove Tree*, Susan L. Roth and Cindy Trumbore tell two compelling stories. Cumulative song text plus prose passages combine to celebrate North America's grasslands, their iconic prairie dogs, and the dedicated scientists who work to make the grasslands healthy again.

BACKGROUND

NOTE: Explore the backmatter of the book for prairie dog facts, a timeline of the Janos Grasslands, and an extensive glossary and pronunciation guide.

Keystone Species: A plant or animal species that is important to the balance and survival of an ecosystem. If a keystone species is removed from an ecosystem, all species are affected and many might disappear. A keystone species plays a critical role in how an ecosystem functions. For more information, check out National Geographic's Encyclopedia http://nationalgeographic.org/encyclopedia/keystone-species/.

Grasslands: Lands dominated by grasses and grass-like plants that grow low and close to the soil. There are two main divisions of grasslands: tropical grasslands (savannas) and temperate grasslands (prairies and steppes). There are grasslands located on every continent except Antarctica, but they are one of the most threatened ecosystems in the world due to human conversion of grasslands into agricultural lands. According to The Nature Conservancy, only five percent of grasslands are protected worldwide (http://www.nature.org/ourinitiatives/habitats/grasslands/). The temperate grasslands, called a *prairie,* is characterized by tall grass, rich soil, and few or no trees. Grasses are the dominant vegetation and trees and large shrubs are absent. The average annual rainfall ranges between 10 and 35 inches per year (https://www.nps.gov/tapr/learn/nature/a-complex-prairie-ecosystem.htm).

The Nature Conservancy: Founded in 1951, it is an international nonprofit organization that works to conserve and protect the lands and waters around the world. The conservation efforts of their more than 600 scientists are seen in 69 countries, and in the 199 million acres of land and thousands of miles of rivers protected worldwide. Learn more at http://www.nature.org/about-us/.

Janos Biosphere Reserve: JBR is grassland ecosystem in northern Mexico that is protected by the Mexican government. In 2009, the 1.3 million-acre grassland area was formally declared the JBR by the Mexican federal government (http://www.nature.org/ourinitiatives/regions/northamerica/unitedstates/newmexico/placesweprotect/conservancy-purchase-protects-worlds-largest-prairie-dog-complex.xml).

"*Prairie Dog Song*": The tune and form of the song in this book are based on a very old folk song known as "The Green Grass Grows All Around" or "The Green Grass Grew All Around." There are several versions of this song. The earliest is probably an Irish song called "The Rattling Bog," which has been dated to 1877. A version called "The Everlasting Circle" was collected in Cornwall, England, in 1905. A 1909 publication describes the song as using the "piling up" method of songwriting. As each new idea is introduced, the singer repeats the ideas that went before, making them "pile up" on one another.

Additional titles to teach about wildlife, ecosystems, and conservation

Parrots Over Puerto Rico written by Susan L. Roth and Cindy Trumbore, illustrated by Susan L. Roth
https://www.leeandlow.com/books/2835

Puffling Patrol written and illustrated by Ted Lewin and Betsy Lewin
https://www.leeandlow.com/books/2766

Gorilla Walk written and illustrated by Ted Lewn and Betsy Lewin
https://www.leeandlow.com/books/2869

Elephant Quest written and illustrated by Ted Lewin and Betsy Lewin
https://www.leeandlow.com/books/2870

Buffalo Song written by Joseph Bruchac, illustrated by Bill Farnsworth
https://www.leeandlow.com/books/2511

Everglades Forever: Restoring America's Great Wetland written by Trish Marx, photographed by Cindy Karp
https://www.leeandlow.com/books/2390

VOCABULARY

(Language Standards, Vocabulary Acquisition & Use, Strands 4–6)

Encourage a variety of strategies to support students' vocabulary acquisition: look up and record word definitions from a dictionary, write the meaning of the word or phrase in their own words, draw a picture of the meaning of the word, create a specific action for each word, list synonyms and antonyms, and write a meaningful sentence that demonstrates the definition of the word.

Content Specific

jump-yipping, burrow, mound, grasslands, North America, glaciers, Mexico, bark, Rocky Mountains, prairies, nitrogen, hooves, black-tailed prairie dog, desert, claws, golden eagles, federal government, pups, waste, bison, environmental scientist, tunnels, rooms, manure, burrowing owls, earthworms, owlets, wingspan, The Nature Conservancy, settlers, back-footed ferrets, Janos, Reserva Rancho El Uno, keystone species, Native peoples, mesquite, captive breeding program, Janos Biosphere Reserve (JBR)

Academic

crept, rich(soil), nibble, complex, gold-colored, feathers, alongside, fertile, graze, snaky, disappear, species, modern, perching, soaring, barking, old-fashioned, prey, preserve, restore, disturbed, balance, released, fertile, curious, protect, declared, dedicated, alert, nonliving, scan, hunt, precious, survive, ecosystem, horizon, threatened, predators, continent, enemies

BEFORE READING

Prereading Focus Questions

(Reading Standards, Craft & Structure, Strand 5 and Integration of Knowledge & Ideas, Strand 7)

Before introducing this book to students, you may wish to develop background and promote anticipation by posing questions such as the following:

1. Take a look at the front and back covers. Take a picture walk. Ask students to make a prediction. Do you think this book will be fiction or nonfiction? What makes you think so? What evidence do you see in the pictures and text that supports your claim?
2. What do you know about texts that are nonfiction? What are some genres and features of nonfiction? Why do you think authors write nonfiction?
3. What is an ecosystem? What does an ecosystem include? Who or what lives there? Why are ecosystems important to the environment?
4. What do you know about grasslands? Where are the grasslands located in the United States? What is the climate and environment like? What types of plants or animals do you think live there?
5. What is a scientist? What do you think an environmental scientist does? Why do you think environmental scientists are important?
6. Why do scientists and conservationists work hard to protect and manage different species of plants and animals? What makes a species important to an ecosystem?
7. Do you know the song "The Green Grass Grows All Around" or "The Green Grass Grew All Around"? Share or model the tune and form of this song with students, as the song in *Prairie Dog Song* follows this model.
8. Locate Mexico on a map. Explain that the Janos prairie dog complex that they will learn about today is located in Northern Mexico near the southern border of New Mexico. Also point out the part of the United States where your students live.
9. Why do you think I chose this book for us to read today?

Exploring the Book

(Reading Standards, Key Ideas & Details, Strand 1, Craft & Structure, Strand 5, and Integration of Knowledge & Ideas, Strand 7)

Read and talk about the title of the book. Ask students what they think the title, *Prairie Dog Song: The Key to Saving North America's Grasslands*, means. Then ask students what and who they think this book will most

likely be about. What places or situations might be talked about in the text? What do you think might happen? What information do you think you might learn? What makes you think that?

Take students on a book walk and draw attention to the following parts of the book: front and back covers, title page with title and subtitle, dedications, acknowledgments, introduction, two part song-text, illustrations, "Prairie Dog Song information and musical score," additional information and photographs in the backmatter, timeline, glossary and pronunciation guide, and authors' sources.

Setting a Purpose for Reading

(Reading Standards, Key Ideas & Details, Strands 1–3)

Have students read to find out:

- the characteristics of prairie dogs
- the needs and signs of a healthy grassland ecosystem
- why and how prairie dogs are a keystone species
- how The Nature Conservancy and Janos Biosphere Reserve protect the grasslands
- about the human impact (positive and negative) on the prairie dogs and the grassland ecosystem overall

Encourage students to consider why the authors, Susan L. Roth and Cindy Trumbore, structured the text and information as a song plus prose passages. Encourage students also to reflect on why the authors would want to share this story with young people.

AFTER READING

Discussion Questions

After students have read the book, use these or similar questions to generate discussion, enhance comprehension, and develop appreciation for the content. Encourage students to refer to passages and/or illustrations in the book to support their responses. **To build skills in close reading of a text, students should cite evidence with their answers.**

Literal Comprehension

(Reading Standards, Key Ideas & Details, Strands 1–3 and Craft & Structure, Strand 4)
(Language Standards, Vocabulary Acquisition & Use, Strand 4)

1. What are grasslands? How did grasslands form? What environmental conditions allowed the grasslands to develop?
2. How far did the North American grasslands stretch ten thousand years ago?
3. What are prairie dogs? What do they look like? What do they eat? Where are their natural habitats? Where do they live?
4. How many different species of prairie dogs are there? What is the most common species of prairie dog? What family do they belong to?
5. Why do prairie dogs dig tunnels? What do the tunnels connect to? For what are the rooms in prairie dog tunnels used?
6. What is the connection between prairie dog claws and rich soil?
7. What types of animals share prairie dog burrows?
8. Why do burrowing owls build their nests out of dried manure?
9. How do bison and prairie dogs help one another survive? How do prairie dogs and bison help the grass grow?
10. What is nitrogen? Why is it important to plants?
11. Why do prairie dogs need low grass?
12. What are the common predators of prairie dogs? How do prairie dogs defend themselves against predators?
13. What is the complex warning system used by prairie dogs? What does it sound like? How does it work?
14. What are the physical characteristics of golden eagles? What do they look like? How big are they? How fast?
15. What are black-footed ferrets? What do they eat?
16. What is the relationship between the Native peoples of the grasslands and the prairie dogs?

★ "The ongoing tale is uplifting. . . . [T]he entire book is a worthy work of science-and-arts integration. An inspiration."

–*Kirkus Reviews*, Starred Review

★ "Roth's meticulously crafted collages create sweeping, gorgeously detailed panoramas of a delicate landscape in flux."

–*Publishers Weekly*, Starred Review

★ "VERDICT: This heartening success story is entertaining to sing along to and a valuable, beautiful resource."

–*School Library Journal*, Starred Review

17. How did the Native peoples of the grasslands survive? How did they use the grasslands? What did they eat?
18. What causes prairie dogs to disappear? What is the impact of prairie dogs' disappearance on the grasslands?
19. Why did farmers and ranchers want to kill the prairie dogs?
20. What is mesquite?
21. How do prairie dogs keep grasslands from becoming desert land?
22. What is a prairie dog town? A prairie dog complex?
23. Who is Gerardo Ceballos? How does he help preserve the Janos grasslands?
24. What is a keystone species? What happens when a keystone species disappears from an ecosystem? How does it affect the ecosystem?
25. What is The Nature Conservancy? What role does this organization play in preserving the Janos grasslands?
26. What is Reserva Rancho El Uno? Why is it important?
27. What pattern does the "Prairie Dog Song" follow throughout the story?

Extension/Higher Level Thinking

(Reading Standards, Key Ideas & Details, Strands 1 and 3, Craft & Structure, Strands 4–6, & Integration of Knowledge & Ideas, Strand 7)

1. Describe the physical and behavioral adaptations of prairie dogs. How do these adaptations help prairie dogs survive in their grassland environment?
2. How do you think the prairie dog got its name? What physical or behavioral traits do they have that might have influenced their naming?
3. All animals communicate, but not all animals have language. Do you think prairie dogs or other species in this book have language? Why or why not?
4. Why do you think prairie dogs adapted to sharing their burrows with other animals, such as burrowing owls? How do you think prairie dogs benefit? How do you think burrowing owls benefit?
5. Explain the prairie dog's role as a keystone species. How would the removal of prairie dogs from the grassland ecosystem affect each of the following species: burrowing owls, bison, black-footed ferrets, and golden eagles? What makes prairie dogs a keystone species compared to the other species in the grasslands ecosystem? Put another way, why do you think scientists chose to focus on the restoration and conservation of prairie dogs as opposed to other species in the grasslands?
6. Describe the grasslands habitat. What makes the grasslands unique from other habitats?
7. Why did the United States government forcibly take the grasslands from Native peoples in the 1800s? How did this action affect the grasslands? How did the Native peoples and the settlers (ranchers and farmers) interact or use the grasslands differently?

8. Why do you think farmers and ranchers overlooked the prairie dogs as an essential keystone species? What were they more concerned about instead?
9. Why do you think the authors chose to use the form of the song "The Green Grass Grows All Around All Around" for this story? How does the pattern and "piling up" method of the song support the story and help readers understand the information?
10. How is a keystone species critical to the balance of an ecosystem?
11. Why do you think the Janos prairie dog complex was once the largest in North America? What factors played a role in helping preserve this land?
12. Why do the scientists begin the Janos restoration project by releasing black-footed ferrets? What role do the black-footed ferrets play in the grassland ecosystem?
13. How do cattle ranchers and farmers benefit from restoring and protecting the black-tailed prairie dog?
14. Why do you think conservation scientists focus on conserving species rather than entire ecosystems? Why might conservation scientists pursue this strategy? Do you think it is possible to protect a species without a strategy for protecting the larger ecosystem? Why or why not?
15. Do you think Dr. Ceballos, the other scientists, The Nature Conservancy, and other groups involved in the restoration and conservation of the grasslands and prairie dogs are motivated by the needs of the prairie dogs or the needs of humans? Or both? Why?
16. How are ecosystems important for human survival? How do humans benefit from the sustainability of different ecosystems?
17. Why do the protection of prairie dogs and the grasslands need so many organizations, scientists, and governments to get involved? Could one of these groups have solved this problem on its own? Why or why not? How does this story demonstrate of the value or necessity of collaboration?
18. What can future scientists learn from this experience of protecting a species? What character trait(s) does a scientist who hopes to protect a species or habitat need? Why do you think so?
19. Why is it significant that the president of Mexico declared the grasslands as the Janos Biosphere Reserve (JBR)? What do you think led to this declaration from the president?
20. How does Reserva Rancho El Uno protect the grassland ecosystem and benefit the local ranchers too?
21. What is the main idea of this book? What do you think the authors want you to learn about the history of prairie dogs?
22. What does this book teach about preservation and the impact of humans on restoration practices and efforts?
23. The book has a song and narrative prose in the main text and expository prose with a timeline at the end of the book. How is each of these an example of nonfiction writing? Which type of writing do you think is more effective in explaining complex information? Which is more enjoyable to read? Which type helps a reader retain information better? Why do you think the authors, Susan L. Roth and Cindy Trumbore, chose to employ several nonfiction writing styles to present the history and science of the North American grasslands?
24. Do you think it is important for communities and governments to save threatened or endangered species? Why do you think so? What might happen if we don't promote children's education programs or create safe places for wildlife?

Reader's Response

(Writing Standards, Text Types & Purposes, Strands 1 and 2 and Production & Distribution of Writing, Strands 4–6)
(Speaking & Listening Standards, Comprehension & Collaboration, Strand 1 and Presentation of Knowledge & Ideas, Strand 4)

Use the following questions and writing activities to help students practice active reading and personalize their responses to the book. Suggest that students respond in reader's response journals, essays, or oral discussion. You may also want to set aside time for students to share and discuss their written work.

1. Keystone species play a critical role in the survival of an ecosystem, and the removal of a keystone species has a negative cumulative reaction in the ecosystem. Can you think of a real-world example that has a similar impact or effect? How does one event or change affect all the other factors involved?
2. How would you define the word respectful? Who do you think is respectful in your life and why? Do you think the scientists working for The Nature Conservancy and Reserva Rancho El Uno are respectful? Why or why not? Do you think humans should be respectful of nature? Why or why not? What are some ways humans can show respect toward nature?
3. Humans can negatively affect ecosystems. Do you think it's important that we care about preserving and protecting ecosystems? Why or why not?
4. Describe a time when you or someone you know did something to take care of the environment. What was causing harm and how did you or the other person solve that problem? In a letter to a friend, share a time you took care of the environment. Additionally, include advice that you would give to improve how your school affects the environment. What can people do at home to help take care of the environment?
5. Sometimes people make decisions without thinking about the long-term effects or consequences. Have you ever made a decision that led to an unfavorable outcome you did not expect? How did you feel? What did you do to try and rectify the situation?
6. If you were offered a job as a scientist at The Nature Conservancy or Reserva Rancho El Uno, would you take it? Why or why not? What skills would you need to be successful there? In a letter to one of the organizations, persuade the lead scientist why he or she should hire you for his or her team. What skills or ideas could you provide?
7. Earth Day is celebrated each year on April 22. It is a day on which events are held worldwide to demonstrate support for environmental protection. What parts of *Prairie Dog Song* make this book a leading example for an Earth Day read aloud? In a letter to your principal, persuade him or her that *Prairie Dog Song* would make an excellent read aloud for the school.

ELL/ESL Teaching Strategies

(Speaking & Listening Standards, Comprehension & Collaboration, Strands 1–3 and Presentation of Knowledge & Ideas, Strands 4–6)
(Language Standards, Vocabulary Acquisition & Use, Strands 4–6)

These strategies might be helpful to use with students who are English Language Learners.

1. Assign ELL students to partner-read the book with strong English readers/speakers. Students can alternate reading between pages, repeat passages after one another, or listen to the more fluent reader.
2. Have each student write three questions about the text. Then let students pair up and discuss the answers to the questions.
3. Depending on students' level of English proficiency, after the first reading:
   • Review the illustrations in order and have students summarize what is happening on each page, first orally, then in writing.
   • Have students work in pairs to retell either the plot of the book or key details. Then ask students to write a short summary, synopsis, or opinion about what they have read.

4. Have students give a short talk about how the prairie dog is a keystone species in the grassland ecosystem or what they admire about Dr. Ceballos and the other scientists involved in the project.

5. The story contains some content-specific words that may be unfamiliar to students. Based on students' prior knowledge, review some or all of the vocabulary. Expose English Language Learners to multiple vocabulary strategies. Have students make predictions about word meanings, look up and record word definitions from a dictionary, write the meaning of the word or phrase in their own words, draw a picture of the meaning of the word, list synonyms and antonyms, create an action for each word, and write a meaningful sentence that demonstrates the definition of the word.

INTERDISCIPLINARY ACTIVITIES

(Introduction to the Standards, page 7: Students who are college and career ready must be able to build strong content knowledge, value evidence, and use technology and digital media strategically and capably)

Use some of the following activities to help students integrate their reading experiences with other curriculum areas. These can also be used for extension activities, for advanced readers, and for building a home-school connection.

Science/STEM

(Reading Standards, Integration of Knowledge & Ideas, Strands 7–9 and Range of Reading & Level of Text Complexity, Strand 10)
(Writing Standards, Text Types & Purposes, Strands 1–2 and Research to Build & Present Knowledge, Strands 7–9)
(Speaking & Listening Standards, Comprehension & Collaboration, Strands 1–3 and Presentation of Knowledge & Ideas, Strands 4–5)

1. Encourage students to research a threatened or an endangered animal species in your state or area. Describe this species' habitat and how it cares for its young. What does it eat? What are its predators? What impact have humans had on it? What is being done to restore the population?

2. Bring the grasslands to life for students with the live Bison and Prairie Dog Cam (http://explore.org/live-cams/player/plains-bison-grasslands-national-park-cam-2) or the Bison Watering Hole (http://explore.org/live-cams/player/plains-bison-grasslands-national-park-cam-1) from Explore.org and have students listen to what Prairie Dog Alarms (http://video.nationalgeographic.com/video/prairiedog_alarm) sound like from National Geographic.

3. Encourage students to think about the prairie dog communication system heard in Science/STEM activity 2. Do all the calls sound the same? What do they sound like? Ask students to imagine they are scientists tasked with testing the hypothesis that prairie dogs have a language. Then have students brainstorm and design a scientific experiment that would test this hypothesis and differentiate among the different prairie dog calls. What qualities do we associate with language? How can we determine these qualities in animals, such as prairie dogs?

4. Ask students to read the prairie dog facts and timeline of the Janos Grasslands in the backmatter of *Prairie Dog Song*. Using this information and additional research, have students create an informational poster about the prairie dog species. Encourage students to use photographs, diagrams, and informative captions. What does a prairie dog look like? Where does it live? What does it eat? What physical and behavioral adaptations help it to survive? What are the prairie dog's predators? Based on what students learn, have them write an essay answering the question: Would the prairie dog make a good pet? Why or why not?

5. Using the information about animal and plant species in *Prairie Dog Song*, ask students to show how these species (producers and consumers) rely on one another for energy and illustrate both a food chain and a food web for the grassland ecosystem (prairie).

6. Nitrogen is an important nutrient that helps the grasses grow in the grasslands. Have students research nitrogen and the nitrogen cycle. Then ask students to illustrate and describe the nitrogen cycle in a visual diagram. What is nitrogen? Where can you find it? How is the nitrogen used? How does nitrogen return to the soil?

7. Ask students to research the grassland ecosystem and create an informational brochure with relevant photos, captions, and diagrams. In this brochure, encourage students to highlight important facts and describe the following about the grasslands: geographic location, climate and weather, native animal and plant species, threats, and conservation and preservation efforts.

8. Organize students into groups and assign each group a different terrestrial or aquatic ecosystem to research: tropical forest (evergreen and deciduous), temperate forest (evergreen and deciduous), taiga, desert, grassland (tropical and temperate), mountain, marine, and freshwater ecosystems. Then have different ecosystem groups meet to discuss their findings. Students should be prepared to ask discussion questions and take notes.

9. Have students research the role of climate change on North America's grasslands. What unique challenges does climate change create for grasslands? How are grasslands changing, including where they are found? In small teams, students should investigate different organizations as well as federal and state departments in the United States working on this issue. Groups should present to their classmates their organization or department and the work it has done so far on protecting grasslands from climate change. In an essay, students should select which strategy or organization is most effective and why.

10. Using a Venn diagram, have students compare and contrast two types of grassland ecosystems: savanna and prairie. How are they similar and how are they different in terms of climate, weather, vegetation, and wildlife? On a world map, have students identify and mark where each type of ecosystem is located.

11. Explore and create your own classroom wildlife habitats with the Schoolyard Habitat Program from the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service (www.fws.gov/cno/conservation/schoolyard.html).

12. Have students research the causes of desertification and how it negatively impacts the environment, including wildlife and humans. What are the causes and consequences of desertification? Then have students examine different types of environmental-action solutions to prevent or reverse these negative effects. Have them present their findings using a graphic organizer.

13. Using a Venn diagram, have students compare and contrast threatened vs. endangered species. How are they similar? How are they different? What criteria is involved? How are species identified as eligible for listing? Ask students to include current examples of threatened or endangered species.

14. Celebrate Endangered Species Day and learn more about threatened and endangered species with resources (www.nwf.org/Eco-Schools-USA/Become-an-Eco-School/Pathways/Biodiversity/Endangered-Species-Day.aspx) from the National Wildlife Foundation or plan an Endangered Species Day event with the activity toolkit (www.endangered.org/campaigns/endangered-species-day/toolkit/) from the Endangered Species Coalition.

Social Studies/Geography

(Reading Standards, Integration of Knowledge & Ideas, Strands 7 and 9)
(Writing Standards, Text Types & Purposes, Strands 1 and 2, Production & Distribution of Writing, Strand 4, and Research to Build & Present Knowledge, Strands 7–9)
(Speaking & Listening Standards, Comprehension & Collaboration, Strands 1 and 3 and Presentation of Knowledge & Ideas, Strand 4)

1. Using a map of North America, have students identify and mark the location of the grasslands ten thousand years ago, and using a different colored marker have students mark the current location of the North American grasslands today. How have the grasslands area changed over time? What factors contributed to this change in size?
2. Ask students to research the nationally designated protected areas in the United States and Mexico. How many nationally protected areas do the United States and Mexico have? What types of areas are they? How do these terrestrial or aquatic areas become nationally protected? What factors or criteria are considered? Have students present their findings using a graphic organizer.
3. Have students watch the Endangered Species Act (ESA) 101 Video and write a research paper on ESA and its effects (www.fws.gov/endangered/laws-policies/). What is the purpose of this law? What does the ESA protect? What does it mean when a species is given ESA protection? Who decides which species receive ESA protection? How does a species get on the ESA list? What criteria are evaluated? How many plants and animal species are currently listed as threatened or endangered? How many protected plant and animal species have successfully recovered? Ask students to present their papers to the class. In a class debate, have teams argue whether the Endangered Species Act is valuable for humans, as well as the animals it protects.

English Language Arts/Writing

(Writing Standards, Text Types & Purposes, Strands 1–3, Production & Distribution of Writing, Strand 4, and Research to Build & Present Knowledge, Strands 7–9)
(Reading Standards, Integration of Knowledge & Ideas, Strands 7–9)

1. Ask students to imagine that the United States nature reserves were in danger of no longer being protected by the government. Have students select a nationally protected area in the U.S. and write a persuasive letter to the president of the United States about why it is important to preserve this location.
2. Have students read *Parrots Over Puerto Rico* (www.leeandlow.com/books/2835), also written by Susan L. Roth and Cindy Trumbore, and *Puffling Patrol* (www.leeandlow.com/books/2766), written by Ted and Betsy Lewin. Ask students to compare and contrast each book to *Prairie Dog Song*. What is the central idea of each book? How are the books connected? What themes or ideas do they share?
3. Have students write a friendly letter from the perspective of one of the Janos grassland animals to The Nature Conservancy thanking them for their restoration and conservation efforts. What might the animal say? How might the animal feel? For what might the animal be grateful? Why? Alternatively, encourage students to write a persuasive letter to The Nature Conservancy about a species or habitat it should protect next. Why should this species or habitat be protected?
4. Have students research the school or school district's environmental and sustainability policy. What role can students play in improving the environment? Encourage students to draft a proposal with ideas to improve the policy and on how to better share this policy with students, families, and the school community. If the school or school district does not have an explicit policy, students can research neighboring schools or school districts' environmental policies for inspiration. Then students can draft a proposal to present to the principal or superintendent.
5. Ask students to imagine that they are going to interview both authors of *Prairie Dog Song*. Students should write a list questions they would ask the creators of the book as if they were on a talk show, news show, or radio show. What do students want to learn more about in terms of the writing process, the illustration process, prairie dogs, the grasslands, or conservation efforts, or something else covered in the book?

6. Have students write a persuasive essay in response to the question: Can prairie dogs survive and thrive in your area of the country? Have students list the conditions necessary for prairie dogs to survive and thrive. Students should also examine the prairie dogs' behavioral and physical adaptations. Then encourage students to investigate whether or not those conditions exist in your area. If not, have students find out where in the United States prairie dogs could (and do) live. Additionally, ask students to take opposing sides in a class debate presenting their opinions with evidence.

Music/Art/Media

(Reading Standards, Integration of Knowledge & Ideas, Strands 7 and 9)
(Speaking & Listening Standards, Comprehension & Collaboration, Strands 1–3)

1. Have students download "Prairie Dog Song" from the Lee & Low Books website and follow along with the lyrics in the back of the book (www.leeandlow.com/books/2925). The song is based on the tune and repetition model of the folk song "The Green Grass Grows All Around." Teach students a physical movement or gesture for each idea newly added and eventually repeated in the song. For example, have students dig in the air with their hands while they sing "And the prairie dogs built their homes in the ground." Then practice and sing the song together as a class with the addition of the newly learned movements.

2. The illustrator, Susan L. Roth, used the highly visual and technical art form of collage to illustrate the book. Have students examine the book. What materials does it look like the illustrator used to make her collages? Invite students to make their own collages with construction paper, newspaper, and recycled materials. Have students reflect on the materials, time involved, and process of making a collage. After the discussion, ask students to write up their reflection, including an answer to: Why might the illustrator, Susan L. Roth, choose to depict a nonfiction story in collage rather than photographs? What makes collage a powerful tool for learning?

Home-School Connection

(Speaking & Listening Standards, Comprehension & Collaboration, Strands 1–3)
(Writing Standards, Text Types & Purposes, Strand 2, Production & Distribution of Writing, Strand 4, and Research to Build & Present Knowledge, Strand 7)

1. The scientists working with The Nature Conservancy and the Janos Biosphere Reserve demonstrate a lot of persistence and commitment. Ask students to interview their parents or caregivers about a time when they had to persevere in the face of a significant obstacle. How did they overcome the obstacle? What made them persist in reaching for their goal? What advice do they have for someone who must tackle a challenge? Why is persistence important? Students should write the answers from the interview and be prepared to share them in class.

2. If possible, plan a field trip with families to a nearby national or state park, nature reserve, or wildlife preserve. Ask students to take field notes while they explore and observe their surroundings, and think about why this place is important to both the environment and humans. What do you see, hear, smell, and/or feel? Encourage students to write a poem about the place and include sensory words to capture how special it is.

3. Explore Find Your Park from the National Park Service and National Park Foundation to find events and activities happening at local national parks (http://findyourpark.com/). Encourage students to volunteer or support their local national parks through different opportunities (http://findyourpark.com/support).

ABOUT THE CO-AUTHOR/ILLUSTRATOR

Susan L. Roth's unique and acclaimed mixed-media collage illustrations have appeared in numerous award-winning children's books, many of which she also wrote. This is the third nonfiction book on which Roth and her friend, Cindy Trumbore, have collaborated, the other two being *The Mangrove Tree: Planting Trees to Feed Families* and *Parrots Over Puerto Rico*. About the illustrations for *Prairie Dog Song* Roth says, "I cut blade after blade of grass to fill the prairies. I guess I cut about fifty billion!" Roth lives in New York. Her website is susanlroth.com.

ABOUT THE CO-AUTHOR

Cindy Trumbore has been involved with young people's literature for most of her career. A former editor in children's book publishing, she now writes children's books, edits books for classrooms, and teaches writing. "You know you are a real nonfiction writer when you've been chased away from a prairie dog town by an angry cow," says Trumbore. Her past titles also include *The Genie in the Book* and *Discovering the Titanic*. She lives in New Jersey. You can find her online at cindykane.net.

Awards and honors for *Prairie Dog Song* include:

- **Junior Library Guild Selection**
- **Starred review**, *Publishers Weekly*
- **Starred review**, *Kirkus Reviews*
- **Starred review**, *School Library Journal*

ABOUT LEE & LOW BOOKS

LEE & LOW BOOKS is the largest children's book publisher specializing in diversity and multiculturalism. Our motto, "about everyone, for everyone," is as urgent today as it was when we started in 1991. It is the company's goal to meet the need for stories that children of color can identify with and that all children can enjoy. The right book can foster empathy, dispel stereotypes, prompt discussion about race and ethnicity, and inspire children to imagine not only a world that includes them, but also a world where they are the heroes of their own stories. Discover more at leeandlow.com.

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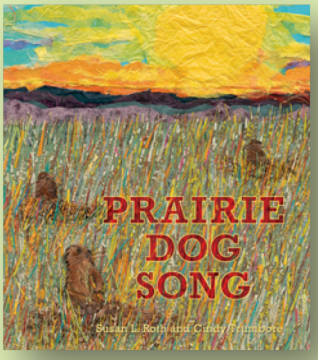
www.leeandlow.com/contact/ordering (general order information)
www.leeandlow.com/books/2925 (secure online ordering)
By Phone: 212-779-4400 ext. 25
By Fax: 212-683-1894
By Mail: Lee & Low Books, 95 Madison Avenue, New York, NY 10016

Book Information for *Prairie Dog Song*



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*Reading Level: Grades 4–5
*Reading level based on the Spache Readability Formula
Interest Level: Grades 1–5
Guided Reading Level: S
Lexile™: AD1050L
Accelerated Reader®
Level/Points: 5.7/0.5

THEMES: Animals (prairie dogs, ferrets, bison, and others once native to North American grasslands), Endangered Ecosystems, Wildlife Recovery, Environment, United States and Mexican History, Latino/Latin American Interest

RESOURCES ON THE WEB:
Learn more about ***Prairie Dog Song*** at:
https://www.leeandlow.com/books/2925

All guided reading level placements may vary and are subject to revision. Teachers may adjust the assigned levels in accordance with their own evaluations.