



Ferret Activities



Primary Activity #1

The Story of Noir, the Black-footed Ferret

Description:

Students will learn about the habitat and life of a black-footed ferret as they read the story of Noir, the black-footed ferret. Questions, a maze, and the “What’s for Dinner?” exercises will underscore the facts discussed in the story.

Procedure:

1. As a class, read the story “The Story of Noir, the Black-footed Ferret”.
2. Hand out the story and corresponding questions (found on page 53-54) to each student.
Students will answer the questions to reinforce the key facts about ferret life, their predators, their food and how they use their senses to stay safe.
3. As a supplemental activity, distribute copies of the maze (page 55) and the “What’s for Dinner?” worksheet (page 56) to each student.
4. The teacher will review with the class the responses to all activities, reinforcing the way ferrets use their senses to stay safe from predators and to find their main food source, prairie dogs.



Student Page

The Story of Noir, the Black-footed Ferret

It is early spring and the moon is shining brightly in the Saskatchewan night sky. The wind gently blows the tall grasses. A little head with big ears pops out of a hole in the ground. It's Noir, the black-footed ferret. She has brownish-yellow fur with black around her eyes, black feet and black at the tip of her tail. As her long thin body emerges from the hole, Noir uses her big ears and strong sense of hearing to *listen* for predators. She uses her strong sense of *smell* to test the air for predators and she uses her strong eyesight to *look* for predators. When she knows it is safe, she runs through the grasslands in search of her dinner. Noir and other black-footed ferrets like to eat prairie dogs. Sometimes if Noir can't find a prairie dog, she will eat small animals like birds and squirrels. But tonight Noir is in luck, she has spotted a burrow where a prairie dog family lives. She slinks down the burrow and snatches a sleeping prairie dog. After she finishes her dinner, Noir feels tired and she bounds back to her home. Her home helps keep her safe from predators like hawks, badgers, and coyotes. Noir's home is like that of all black-footed ferrets, it is an underground tunnel called a burrow, which is the perfect shape for her long slinky body. Noir crawls into her burrow and falls fast asleep.

As the sun starts to set in the sky and many other animals are going to sleep, Noir is just waking up. Noir is enjoying the cool evening in the grasslands when she sees another black-footed ferret. He looks friendly so Noir approaches him. They dance around with each other before they mate. Noir doesn't get to see her new friend again, but six weeks later Noir is in her burrow with four baby black-footed ferret kits. Noir now spends all her time caring for her babies.

On a warm summer's evening the kits emerge from the burrow for the first time. They are scared at first but their mom encourages them to leave the burrow and soon they are playing in the grass with Noir watching over them.



The Story of Noir, the Black-footed Ferret

Questions:

1. What does Noir look like?

Noir has _____ coloured fur on her feet, tail and around her eyes.

The rest of her fur is _____ coloured.

She is _____ (**tall** or small) and she has a _____

(l o n g or ~~shot~~) body.



2. What senses does Noir use when checking for predators?

Noir uses her sense of _____ to listen, her sense of _____ to sniff the air and she uses her sense of _____ to look for predators.

3. What do Noir and other black-footed ferrets like to eat?

4. What do you call baby black-footed ferrets?



5. When do the black-footed ferrets like to go out and play?





Help Noir, the Black-footed ferret find her way home!

Draw a line through the maze to get the Black-footed ferret to its home.

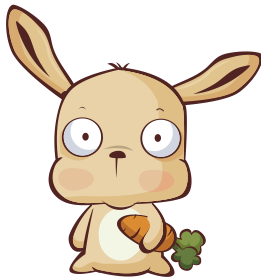
Make sure you go to the right *home!*





What's For Dinner?

Noir, the Black-footed ferret is very hungry. Draw lines from the black-footed ferret to the food items that it would eat in the wild.



An animal that eats meat is called a _____



Primary Activity #2

Art Project: Create a Black-footed Ferret Mask

Description:

Black-footed ferrets have distinctive colouration to help them camouflage in their grassland habitat. They are brownish-yellow with black fur around their eyes, black feet and black fur on the tip of their tail. Students will colour and create a mask so they can pretend to be black-footed ferrets, out in the grasslands.

Materials:

- Scissors
- Coloured pencil crayons, crayons or markers
- String
- Mask template
- White pipe cleaners
- Glue stick

Procedure:

1. Hand out one mask template (page 58) to each student.
2. Have the students colour the template with the brown, yellow, white and black to correspond to the ferret's colouration.
3. Cut out the template along the dashed lines outlining the face and eyes.
4. Punch a hole along the sides and thread string through the holes.
5. Use small pieces of pipe cleaner to make the whiskers. Glue onto the mask.



You too can become a Black-footed ferret!

Use the picture below to trace out the face of a black-footed ferret. Colour the face and remember to use black around the eyes! Cut out the face and eyes by cutting along the outline. Punch the white circles and thread string through the holes to create the mask. Add some whiskers!





Primary Activity #3

Math Project: The Grassland Community

Description:

Black-footed ferrets live in a grassland community with other species of animals such as the prairie dog (their prey) and owls which are the ferret's predator. In the scenario provided, Noir is out with her kits and observes these two animals in the area. Students will graphically represent the number of animals observed on the grasslands during Noir's time out of her burrow.

Materials:

- Coloured pencil crayons, crayons, or markers
- Math activity sheet

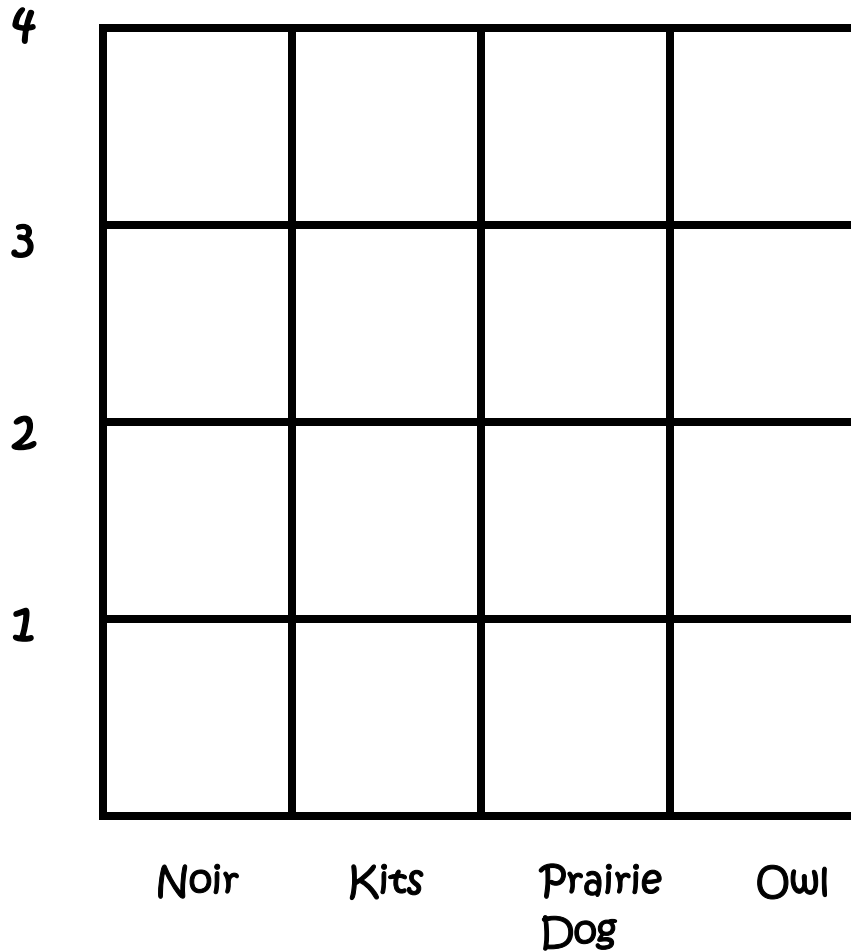
Procedure:

1. Distribute the math activity sheet entitled "The Grassland Community!" (page 60) to each student.
2. Have each student complete the exercise.



The Grassland Community

Noir, the black-footed ferret is out of her burrow with her four kits. She sees that there are two prairie dogs eating grasses and seeds. Flying high in the sky over them is one owl looking for food. Colour in the bar graph below to show how many of each animal can be found on Noir's habitat.





Primary Activity #4

Gym Activity: Dusk

Description:

Black-footed ferrets predate primarily on prairie dogs as their food source. They are nocturnal animals that are most active around dusk. Through this simulation predator-prey game, students will understand the link between the two species.

Procedure:

1. Select two students to be the black-footed ferrets. The remaining students are prairie dogs.
2. Line the prairie dogs up in a straight line, along a wall if played in a gymnasium.
3. The two black-footed ferrets stand in the centre of the room.
4. When the black-footed ferrets yell out “**Dusk**”, the prairie dogs must run across the room towards safety and avoid being tagged by the ferrets.
5. When a prairie dog is tagged, they become a ferret
6. The game ends when there is only one prairie dog left.

Discussion:

After the game, discuss with the students the relationship between predators (ferret) and prey (prairie dog). Discuss if the simulation would be true to what happens in the wild, i.e. eating all the prairie dogs. Discuss how in nature there is a balance and these animals are part of a bigger, more complex web.



Junior/Intermediate Activity #1

The Maze of Life

Description:

Black-footed ferrets have many physical and behavioural adaptations to help them survive in the temperate grasslands habitat. Students will use their knowledge from reading the background information to assist them in the maze activity.

Procedure:

1. Distribute a copy of the black-footed ferret information (found on pages 3-6) to each student.
2. Hand out a copy of the questions (page 63) and the *Maze of Life* activity to each student.
3. Students will answer the questions to reinforce the key facts about ferret life, their predators, their food, and how they use their senses to stay safe.



Student Page

Answer the following questions about the Black-footed ferret to guide you in the maze!

1. Black-footed ferrets are the only ferrets native to North America. They evolved from *where* 30,000 - 45,000 years ago.

- A. Europe
- B. Africa
- C. Siberia



2. One of the reasons the black-footed ferret became extinct in the wild was because...

- A. Hunting
- B. Lack of food & habitat
- C. They moved back to Siberia

3. Black-footed ferrets are being reintroduced in which National Park?

- A. Grasslands National Park, Canada
- B. Prince Albert National Park, Canada
- C. Wood Buffalo National Park, Canada



4. The black-footed ferrets are part of the Mustelid family that includes weasels, mink, badgers, otters, and...

- A. Prairie Dogs
- B. Wolverines
- C. Squirrels

5. Black-footed ferrets have evolved to hunt with their...

- A. Sharp claws
- B. Strong jaw
- C. Strong tail

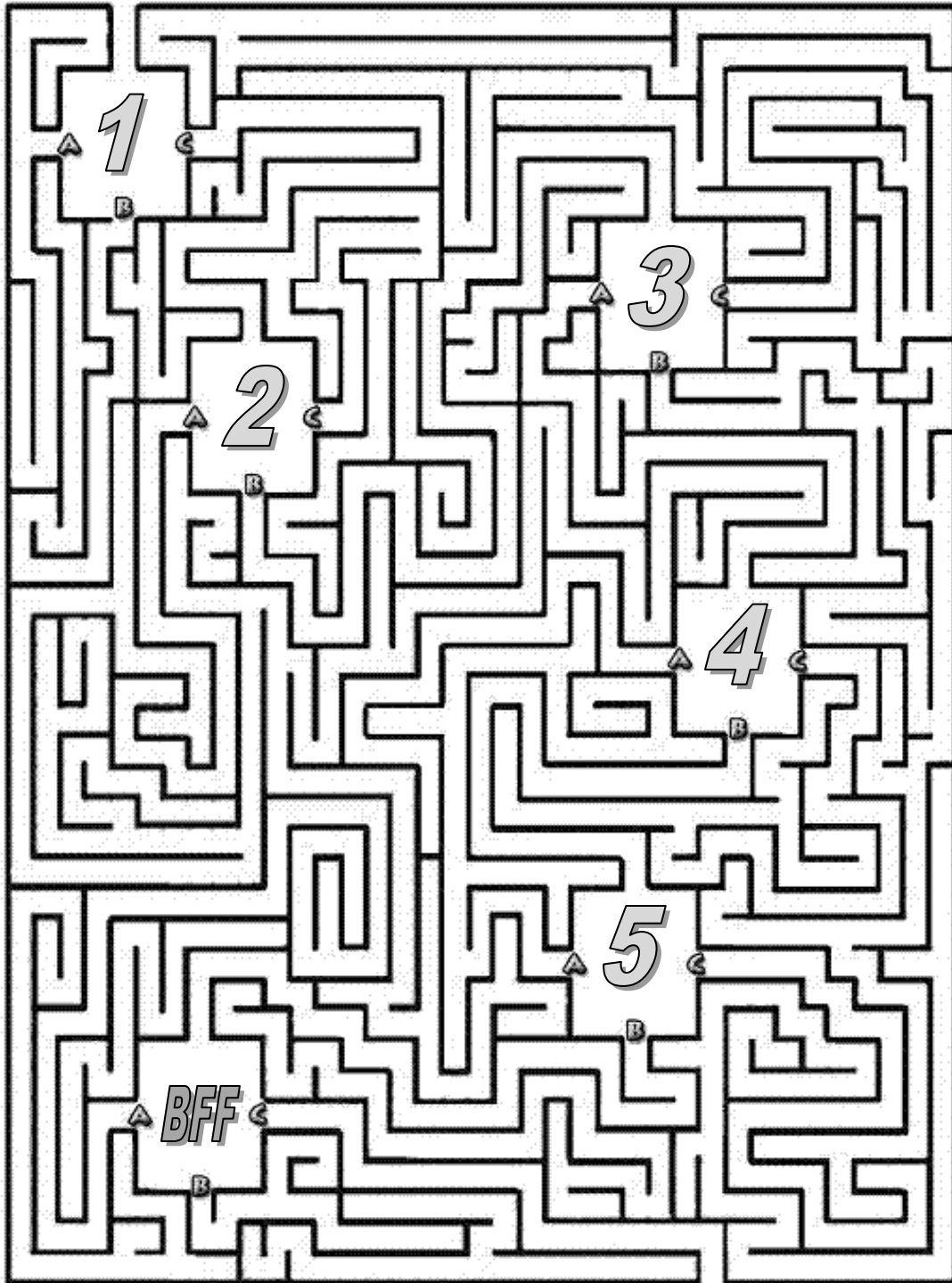




The Maze of Life

Use the clues to find your way to the finish line.

Start



Finish



Junior/Intermediate Activity #2

Grassland Habitat: Home for the Black-footed Ferret

Description:

Grasslands National Park in Saskatchewan is the site of the reintroduction of black-footed ferrets into Canada. Students will use the vocabulary provided in the following two exercises to write a paragraph about the black-footed ferret.

Procedure:

1. Distribute the worksheets found on pages 26 and 27 to each student.
2. Distribute a copy of the *Return of the Black-footed Ferret to Grasslands National Park - Fall 2009* (page 39) to each student.
3. Have the students read the information sheet and use the materials covered to complete the exercises.

Next Steps:

Discuss with the students what the reintroduction program is. Ask what steps are being done to ensure success? What is “boot camp”? Why is it important? Why is this reintroduction important for the grasslands ecosystem?



Grassland Habitat: Home for the Black-footed Ferret

Match each word with its meaning.

adaptation	a	the total number of a kind of animal living in an area or habitat
agile	b	a series of organisms in which each uses the next usually lower member of the series as a food source
biodiversity	c	land covered with herbs rather than shrubs and trees also the name of a national park in Canada
community	d	variation in an environment as shown by numbers of different species of plants and animals
curious	e	to return animals to the wild
extirpated	f	a class of the same kind of plant or animal divided into groups by their characteristics
food chain	g	a change in an organism that fits it better for the conditions of its environment.
grasslands	h	active at night
habitat	i	extinct in the wild
kits	j	a group of living things that belong to one or more species, interact ecologically, and are located in one place
nocturnal	k	the place where a plant or animal naturally or normally lives or grows
population	l	able to move quickly and easily
reintroduce	m	baby ferrets, short for kittens
species	n	an active desire to learn or to know

What four things are needed in every habitat?

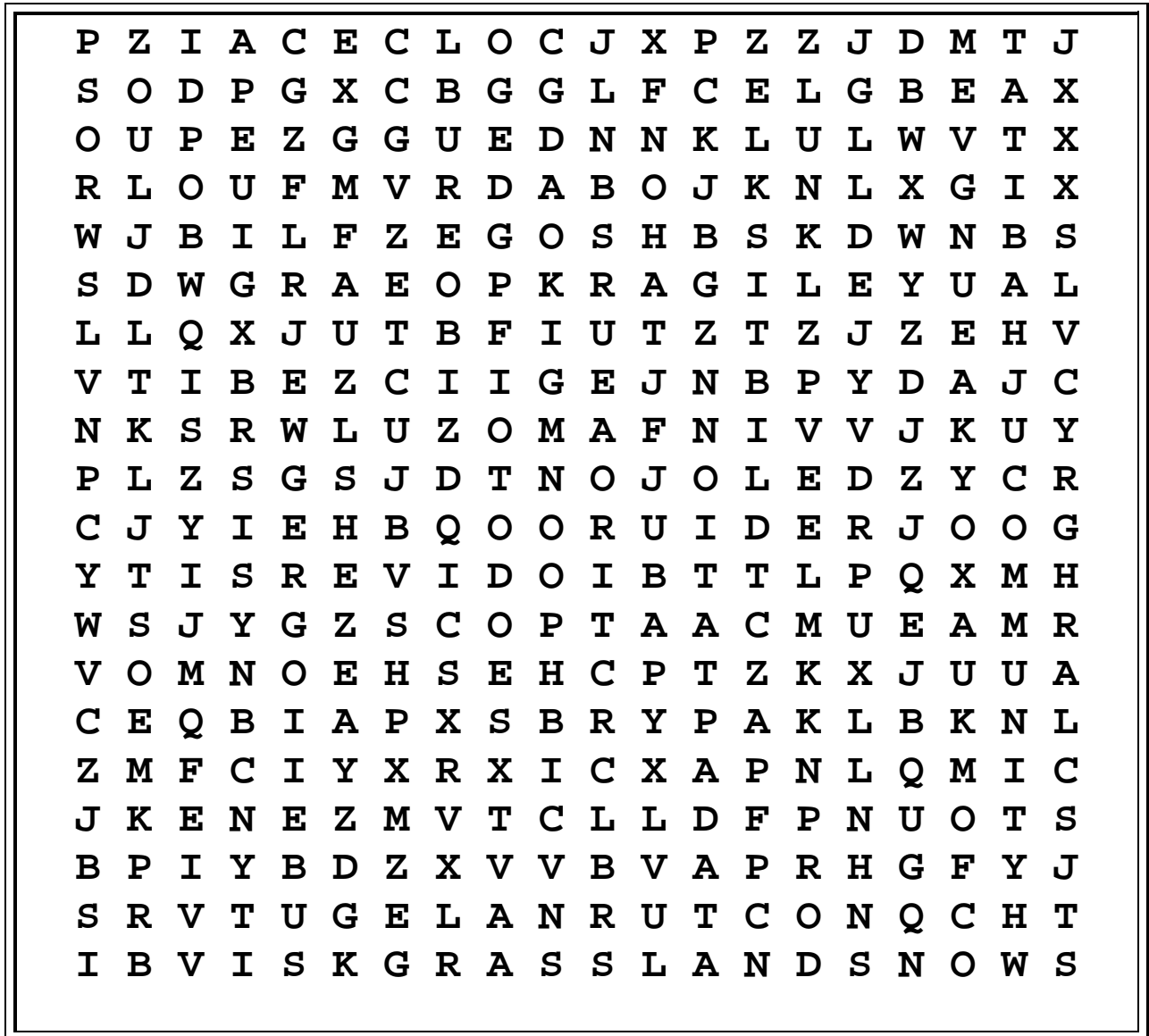
- a. _____ b. _____ c. _____ d. _____

Write a paragraph about black-footed ferrets using 4 of the above words from the matching activity.



Word Search

Find the words from the list below in the word search puzzle.



ADAPTATION

AGILE

BIODIVERSITY

COMMUNITY

CURIOUS

EXTIRPATED

FOODCHAIN

GRASSLANDS

HABITAT

KITS

NOCTURNAL

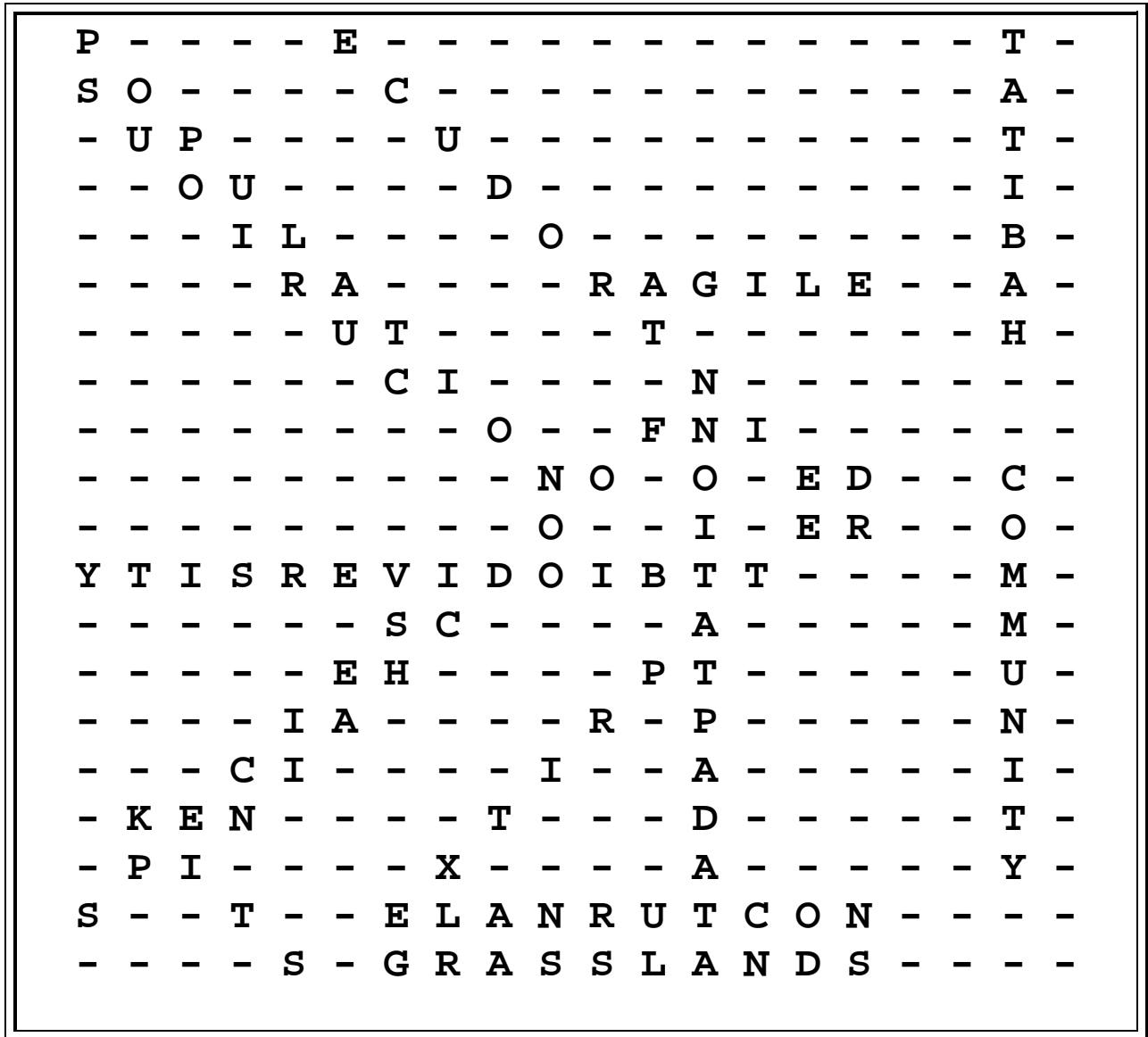
POPULATION

REINTRODUCE

SPECIES



Word Search – Solution



(Over,Down,Direction)

ADAPTATION (13,3,N)

COMMUNITY (19,10,S)

FOODCHAIN (12,9,SW)

KITS (2,17,SE)

REINTRODUCE (16,11,NW)

AGILE (12,6, E)

CURIOUS (7,8,NW)

GRASSLANDS (7,20,E)

NOCTURNAL (16,19, W)

SPECIES (1,19,NE)

BIODIVERSITY (12,12, W)

EXTIRPATED (7,19,NE)

HABITAT (19,7, N)

POPULATION (1,10,SE)



Junior/Intermediate Activity #3

Gym Activity: Black-footed ferrets, Prairie dogs, and Great-horned owls

Description:

Students through this simulation game will understand the role of predators, prey, consumers, and decomposers in a food chain found in the grasslands habitat. In this game, the food chain is as follows:



Materials:

- Gymnasium or playing field
- Paper to record data from each round of play

Procedure:

This game is similar to “Rock, Paper, Scissors” and “Giants, Wizards, Trolls”.

1. Divide the students into two teams. Direct each team to go to opposite ends of the gymnasium.
2. Students decide what animal their team will be in the first round. They can be black-footed ferrets, prairie dogs, or great-horned owls. The entire team is the same animal.
3. Once each team has decided what animal they are, have the two teams line up, facing the opposing team, in the middle of the gymnasium (or playing field).
4. Everyone together then yells out “Ferret! Prairie dog! Owl!” followed by what creature the team is. For example, Team one might yell “Ferret, prairie dog, owl, owl” as they chose to be owls in the first round of play. The other team may yell “Ferret, prairie dog, owl, ferret” as they chose to be ferrets. In this example, owls prey on ferrets and thus the owl team “wins”.
5. The winner of the round is determined as:



- Great-horned owls wins over ferrets (predator-prey)
 - Black-footed ferrets win over prairie dogs (predator-prey)
 - Prairie dogs win over Great horned owls (decomposers convert owls to nutrients that provide nourishment to the grasses that the prairie dogs eat)
6. The winning team then chases the losing team back to their side of the gymnasium.
 7. Any student on the losing team tagged before reaching their side of the gymnasium now belongs to the other team.
 8. In the situation where both teams end up being the same creature, consider it a tie and start over.
 9. Continue playing rounds until the majority of students are on one team.

Next steps:

After each round is played, record the numbers of students on each team and what animal they are. Using this data, have the students graphically represent the changes in population between the rounds. Discuss how animal populations change with changes in predation patterns. What may contribute to these changes?

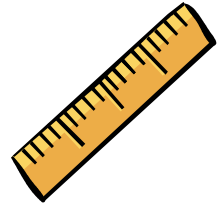


Junior/Intermediate Activity #4

Math Project: Ferret Statistics

Grade 4:

1. An adult male black-footed ferret can grow to a length of 61 cm, including a 15 cm tail. Without the tail, how long is the body of the black-footed ferret?



2. The black-footed ferret searches for food at night, often covering a distance of 6 kilometres in a single evening. How far would a black-footed ferret travel in one week? How far would the ferret travel in the month of June?

Grade 6:

1. An adult male black-footed ferret has a mass of about 900 grams. A fully grown female is about 10% lighter. What is the mass of an adult female black-footed ferret?



2. An adult male black-footed ferret can grow to a length of 61 cm, including a 15 cm tail. Convert these measurements to mm (millimetres) and m (metres).

Full body length is 61 cm which is _____ mm or _____ m

Tail length is 15 cm which is _____ mm or _____ m



3. Prairie dogs make up 90 percent of the diet of the black-footed ferret. They also catch a variety of small animals: rabbits, ground squirrels, insects, and small birds. Create a graph to display this information.



Junior Activity #1

Investigating the Black-footed Ferret

Using online and library resources, answer the following question:

Why is the black-footed ferret endangered?

My Hypothesis:

I think the black-footed ferret is endangered because _____

Research:

- Description of the black-footed ferret

- Shelter requirements (Habitat)

- Food requirements

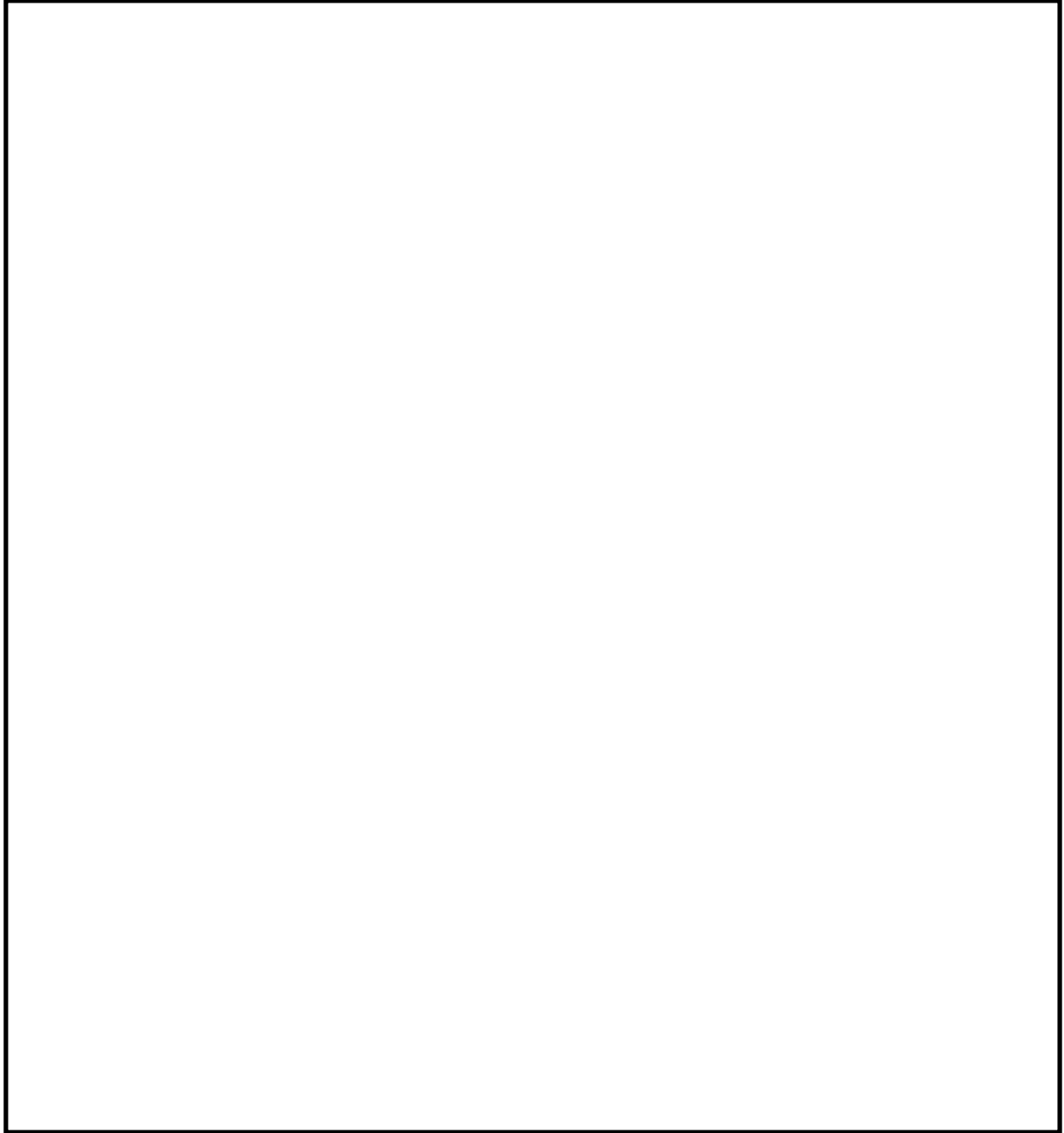
- Problems the black-footed ferret has in its environment

Conclusion:

The black-footed ferret is endangered because _____



Draw a picture of the black-footed ferret in its habitat with its food.





Intermediate Activity #1

Investigating the Black-footed Ferret

1. Why is it important to save the black-footed ferret and other species which are endangered or on the verge of extinction?
2. Through much effort, the black-footed ferret has been re-introduced into the Canadian wilderness. This type of work takes a lot of time and effort, and considerable financial resources. Is it worth while to make sure that this species survives? Why?
3. Describe the process which led to the decline and near extinction of the black-footed ferret. Include the following:
 - a. Where they lived? (range, habitat);
 - b. What happened to the land?
 - c. What happened to their food supply?
4. What is sylvatic plague and how does it affect the survival of the black-footed ferret?
5. Find out how the black-footed ferret was saved from extinction.

Useful websites

www.blackfootedferret.org

www.prairiewildlife.org

www.torontozoo.com/conservation/captive-breeding.asp?pg=bff

www.nwhc.usgs.gov/disease_information/sylvatic_plague

www.pc.gc.ca/eng/nature/eep-sar/itm3/eep-sar3j/3.aspx