

Student Handout

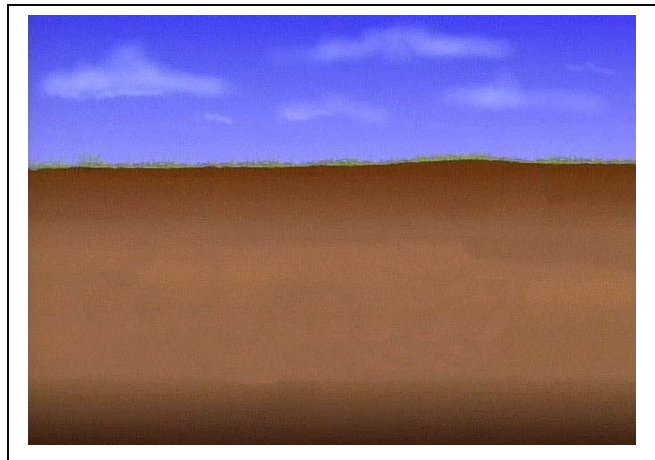
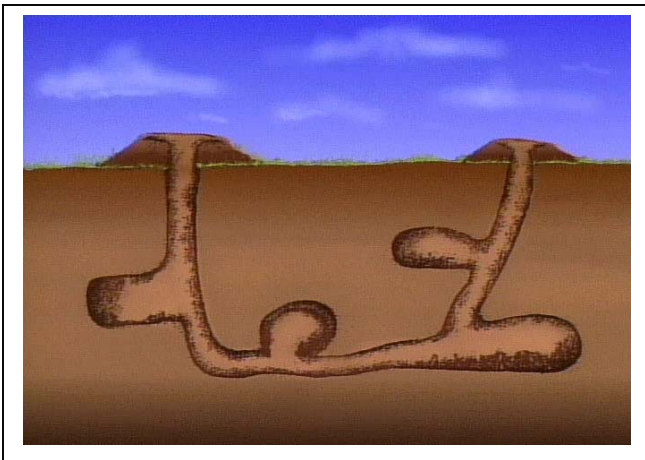
Prairie Dog Den

Background Information

Imagine that a group of prairie dogs have just left the den on the left. What affects will the empty prairie dog burrows have on the ecosystem? Watch the AFG video and jot down the answers to the following questions. Then show how the prairie dog burrow affects the local ecosystem.

Part 1. Watch the American Field Guide video 'Prairie Dogs' and answer the following questions.

1. What other animals use a prairie dog burrow?
2. How does a prairie dog burrow help grasses grow?
3. How might the prairie dog burrow affect the absorption of water into the ground?



Part 2. The diagram on the left shows a recently abandoned prairie dog burrow. The diagram on the right shows ground that has never been dug up. Show how the different types of ground might affect the following:

1. Show where the animals mentioned in the video might go in each of the diagrams. You might draw them in, or simply write their names.
2. Show the path of air and oxygen. Draw a red arrow to represent where air might go.
3. Show the path of water. Use blue arrows to represent water.
4. Show grasses and draw their roots. Remember that roots need air and water to grow. How deep do you think they might be in each environment.

Part 3. Answer the following questions:

1. What advantages does the prairie dog burrow give to other animals in the ecosystem?
2. How does the prairie dog burrow affect oxygenation and watering of the ground?
3. In an area with hot and dry summers, how do you think the prairie dog burrow affects the ability of grasses to survive?

Part 4. Write a short essay to answer the following question:

If prairie dogs were to disappear from an area, how would that affect the diversity of plants and animals of that area? Why?