

Name _____ Date _____

Prairie Dog Town

Prairie dogs are small animals that live on prairies, or grasslands. These animals are a little like squirrels, but they have shorter tails. Pioneers crossing the Great Plains in the 1850s often saw these little animals peering out of holes in the ground. Because the animals made barking sounds, the pioneers called them prairie dogs.

Prairie dogs are very social animals. Several families often share the same underground burrow. Many groups live near each other in prairie dog towns. Two prairie dogs put their front teeth together to make sure that they belong to the same group. When they do this, it looks like they are kissing.

Prairie dogs make special sounds when enemies come near. Scientists think that the prairie dogs make a different sound to identify each kind of enemy.

Prairie dogs dig safe, comfortable burrows. An entrance tunnel goes three to ten feet straight down. The entrance tunnel leads to a level main tunnel that is ten to a hundred feet long. Side tunnels, used for nesting, branch out from the main tunnel.

Prairie dogs are suited to the dry prairie weather. The insects, grasses, and flowers they eat give them all the water they need. Prairie dogs help keep the prairie ecosystem healthy. An ecosystem includes the physical parts of a place, such as hills, plains, and lakes. It also includes the plants and animals living there. Some scientists think prairie dogs fertilize the prairie soil. Prairie dogs are also food for many prairie animals.

At times, other animals hide in prairie dog burrows. In that way, the prairie dog helps other animals live on the prairie, where there are few places to hide and keep warm.

