

Illinois: The Prairie State

By National Geographic, adapted by Newsela staff on 05.15.17

Word Count 447

Level 510L



Illinois may be nicknamed "The Prairie State," but it is home to one of America's most bustling cities -- Chicago! Photo from: Pixabay.

Scientists believe the first humans lived in Illinois thousands of years ago. Of course, Illinois was not a state yet. Eventually, Native American tribes lived on the land. One of the tribes was called the Illiniwek. Another was called the Miami.

French explorers arrived in what is now Illinois about 350 years ago. France took control of the region. Later it was ruled by England. Finally, the area became part of the United States. Illinois eventually became the 21st state.

During the Civil War, the country's north and south fought against each other. There were no major battles in Illinois. But the state still sent thousands of soldiers into war. They fought on the northern side to end slavery. The northern states won the war.

After the war, there was a disaster. A huge fire swept through Chicago, Illinois, the largest city. The fire destroyed much of the town. However, Chicago was rebuilt. It became a modern city. It became home to the world's first skyscrapers.

Why Is It Called That?

The name Illinois comes from the Illiniwek tribe. They were also called the Illinois. The tribe lived on the land for many years.

Much of Illinois was once covered in prairie grass. That is why the state's nickname is "the Prairie State."

Geography And Landforms

Illinois is surrounded by five states. They are Wisconsin, Indiana, Kentucky, Missouri and Iowa. One corner of Illinois is next to Lake Michigan.

Wildlife

Many different animals live in Illinois. It has black bears and bobcats. Birdwatchers can find orioles and bluebirds. The state bird is the northern cardinal. The state's reptiles include scarlet snakes and snapping turtles. Some of its amphibians are tiger salamanders and American toads.

Natural Resources

One of Illinois' top natural resources is its soil. It is rich and fertile. Illinois farmers grow many crops. Some of them are corn, soybeans and apples.

Fun Stuff

Popcorn is the state's official snack food. Some people eat it Chicago-style: covered in cheese and caramel!

Two former first ladies are from Illinois. One is Hillary Clinton and the other is Michelle Obama. President Ronald Reagan also called Illinois home. Walt Disney was born here, too!

Chicago has a famous museum. It is the Museum of Science and Industry. Kids enjoy seeing the world's largest pinball machine there. They can also walk through a real German submarine. Younger visitors can visit a mini fairy castle.

Illinois is known as the Land of Lincoln. That is because President Abraham Lincoln lived there for 31 years. Today visitors can see Lincoln's home and tomb. They are in Springfield, the state capital.



The United States of America



Quiz

- 1 Which sentence from the article BEST states a MAIN idea of the entire article?
- (A) Illinois eventually became the 21st state.
(B) It became home to the world's first skyscrapers.
(C) Much of Illinois was once covered in prairie grass.
(D) One corner of Illinois is next to Lake Michigan.
- 2 What is the MAIN idea of "Why Is It Called That?"
- (A) how the Illiniwek tribe lived
(B) how to grow prairie grass
(C) how to read a map
(D) how Illinois got its names
- 3 What information will the reader find in the section "Wildlife"?
- (A) examples of the crops grown in Illinois
(B) examples of animals that live in Illinois
(C) examples of what to do when you visit Chicago
(D) examples of famous people from Illinois
- 4 If the reader is looking for information on which president lived in Illinois, which section should he or she read?
- (A) "Why Is It Called That?"
(B) "Geography And Landforms"
(C) "Natural Resources"
(D) "Fun Stuff"