



Meet Dr. Ford!

Photo: Paulette Ford



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Glossary words are in **bold**.

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<http://www.naturalinquirer.org>



This is Dr. Paulette Ford.



Photo: Paulette Ford

Dr. Ford is a scientist who studies animals. She studies how animals live in their **environment**.

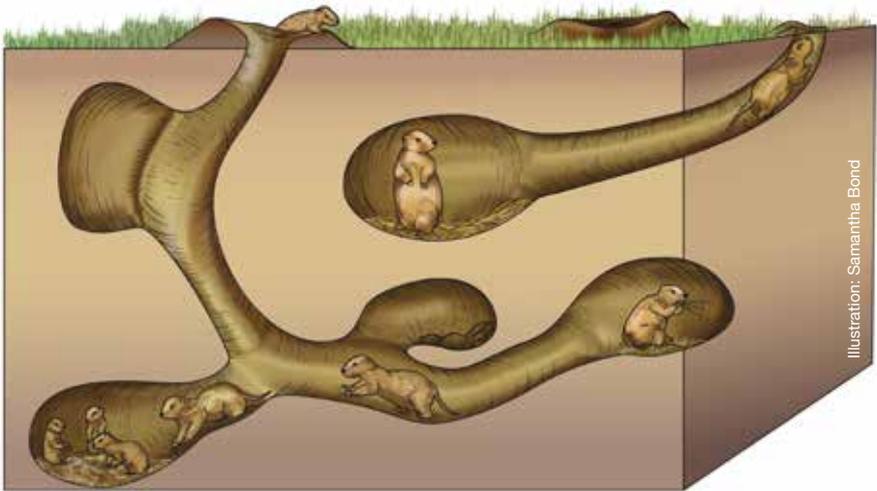




Photo: Paulette Ford

Dr. Ford loved to explore and play outside when she was young.

She wanted to be an explorer when she grew up.



Dr. Ford explores the Great Wall of China.

Dr. Ford closely **observes** things. She likes to find patterns in the world around her.



Photo: Babs McDonald

Like Dr. Ford, these boys closely observe things. They look for patterns in the world around them.

Dr. Ford likes to ask questions about our world. With another scientist, Dr. Ford asked a question about prairie dog **habitat**.

Dr. Ford



Ms. Archuleta



Prairie dogs are a type of ground squirrel. Prairie dogs live in grassland environments. They build **burrows** under the ground. See page 4 to see what a burrow looks like.

Dr. Ford knew that prairie dogs help other animals. Prairie dog burrows provide habitat for other animals. Prairie dogs also serve as food for some animals.



Some of the animals helped by prairie dogs include ferrets, eagles, hawks, and buffalo.

By providing habitat or serving as food for other animals, prairie dogs help the prairie environment to stay healthy.



Photo: Lisa Lynch, National Park Service

Before many people lived near prairies, prairie fires sometimes burned. Following these fires, new grasses grew on the prairie. The new grasses provided food for many animals, including prairie dogs.



Photo: U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service

Green grass provides food for prairie dogs.

People began to put out the prairie fires.
They thought putting out the fires was the best thing to do.



With fire, the prairie grasses would grow again and provide food for prairie dogs.



Without fire, tall and **dense** grasses grew on the prairies.

Prairie dogs do not dig their burrows under areas with tall and dense grasses. Tall and dense grasses block their view of **predators**.



Illustration: Stephanie Pfeiffer



With taller and denser grasses, the prairie dogs had fewer areas in which to live.

Dr. Ford and Ms. Archuleta thought about the prairie fires. They wondered if prairie fires would help prairie dogs. Prairie fires might reduce the amount of tall and dense grasses on the prairie.



The firefighter sets fire to the prairie on purpose. The firefighter keeps the fire under control.

Dr. Ford and Ms. Archuleta counted the number of prairie dog burrows in areas that had been burned. They also counted the number of burrows in areas that had not been burned.

Then, they compared the two numbers.



Illustration: Stephanie Pfeiffer

Prairie dogs can enter and leave their burrow from many different spots. How many of these spots do you see?

The scientists observed that prairie dogs built more burrows in areas that had been burned.

Following a prairie fire, new grass grows. The grass is short but provides food for prairie dogs.

The scientists learned that prairie fires improve prairie dog habitat.



Photo: Michelle Andrews

Prairie dogs can look for predators because the grass is short.

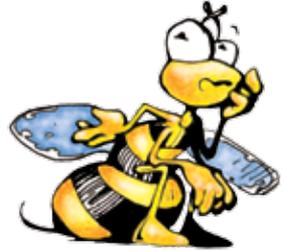
Dr. Ford helps animals by studying them and their environment.

What kind of animal do you like to study?



This girl likes to study animals and their environment.

Critical Thinking Questions:



- Name two ways that you can help animals.
- The scientists learned that prairie fires help prairie dogs. Name at least one way the fires help prairie dogs.
- Dr. Ford worked with another scientist. Tell about one time when you worked with another person.
- Dr. Ford likes to ask and answer questions. Why do you think it is important to ask and answer questions?

Glossary:

burrow (**bər**-ō): Underground tunnels built by prairie dogs for shelter and protection.



dense (**den**(t)s): Closeness or crowding together of parts.

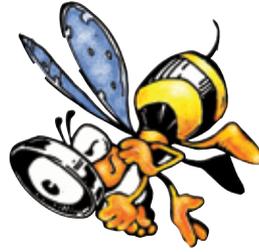
environment (in **vī** rə(n) mənt): The conditions that affect the growth and health of someone or something.

habitat (**ha**-bə-tat): The place where an animal or plant lives or grows.

observe (əb-**zərv**): To watch something.

predator (**pred**-ct-ər): An animal that eats other animals.

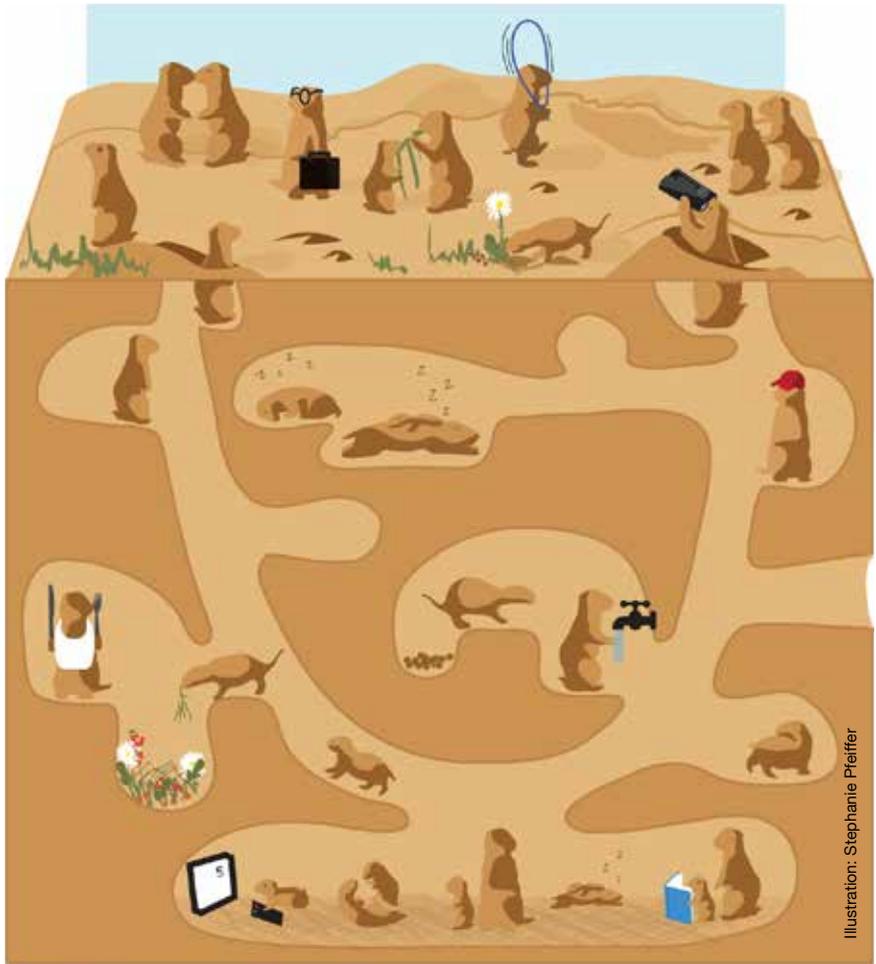
Try This!



Prairie dogs live in burrows. They build the burrows underground. Prairie dogs also go outside of their burrows.

Look at the prairie dog burrow on page 22. Circle each prairie dog that is doing what prairie dogs would never do. Your teacher will hold a class discussion about how prairie dogs live inside and outside of their burrows.

- How many prairie dogs did you circle?
- How many prairie dogs do you see in the whole picture?



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Hint: Prairie dogs really do kiss!

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For more information on Dr. Ford's research, read "Prairie Dog Days" in the "Animals and Ecosystems of the Southwestern United States" Investi-gator, <http://www.naturalinquirer.org>.

Note: For more background information and a lesson plan, visit <http://www.naturalinquirer.org> and click on "Natural Inquirer Reader Series."

Background Information: Dr. Ford and Ms. Archuleta's research focused on prairie dog habitat. The scientists wanted to know how fire might affect prairie dog habitat. Scientists were interested in this information because prairie dogs are an important component of the ecosystem. Prairie dogs help aerate the soil, their scat provides nitrogen for the soil, and several predators rely on the prairie dog as a food source. One particular predator, the black-footed ferret, is an endangered species. Due to the importance of the prairie dogs in the ecosystem, the scientists were concerned with learning more about the habitat of the prairie dog and what things improve prairie dog habitat. In this reader, students are challenged to think about studying animals and the animal's habitat. For information on additional prairie dog research conducted by Dr. Ford, read "Prairie Dog Days" in the Animals and Ecosystems of the Southwestern United States Investi-gator, <http://www.naturalinquirer.org/investigator-i-42.html>

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Be a Possibility Possum

Scientists make things possible;
They ask and answer questions.
You can make things possible
If you follow these suggestions.

Observe your world and wonder;
Ask how, what, why, and who?
Ask and answer questions
To make things possible for you.

Wonder is a good thing;
It is very plain to see.
When I ask and answer questions,
I make things possible for me.

