



| A lioness on a savanna in Africa

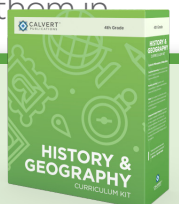
Grasslands often have rich, **fertile** soil. Less rain falls on grasslands than in the forests which can wash out the minerals that helps plants grow. Also, the grasses die and pile up quickly, then decompose to fertilize the soil. The grasslands often have a thick layer of very, very good black soil from the dead grass.

The dead grass and roots from the living grass make a thick mat on top of the ground called “sod.” Sod is difficult to cut through and sticks together so well that people can build with it. Many of the early settlers on the Great Plains lived in sod houses. The thick sod blocks kept the house warm in the winter and cool in the summer.

There are usually very few trees on the grasslands, because they need more water than grass does. Savannas do have special trees scattered here and there. In other grasslands, trees are found along rivers or lakes or where people have planted them.

Grass grows well even in dry places because it grows so fast. It can quickly sprout up when there is rain and die when there isn’t, leaving seeds for the next time. Trees need to grow for many years to produce seeds.

The savanna is unusual because it gets a great deal of rain during the wet season. Trees that can store up water or send down deep roots can live on the savanna. Savannas usually have trees spread out among the grass, looking as if somebody dropped them in the wrong place.



The American space program was led by NASA (National Aeronautic and Space Administration). It has gone through five stages. Mercury, the first stage, carried one man into space at a time. Under Mercury, in 1961, Alan Shepard was the first American in space, and John Glenn was the first American to orbit the Earth in 1962.

The Gemini program began in 1965 and put two men at a time into space. Apollo, which carried three men into space, was launched in 1968. Under the Apollo program, Neil Armstrong became the first man to walk on the Moon. Several other Apollo ships went to the moon after that. The last Apollo mission, in 1975, was a link-up between an American and a Soviet space ship. It showed that the two countries could work together in space.

Skylab was a small space station in orbit around Earth. Beginning in 1973, it was used by three crews to do experiments in space and learn about how people can live in space. It fell out of Earth's orbit in 1979.

The Space Shuttle, the fifth stage of the American space program, was first launched in 1981. It could carry five to seven people and was the first reusable spaceship. It landed on a runway like an airplane, instead of splashing down into the ocean like earlier ships. Space shuttles made over one hundred thirty trips to launch satellites, repair satellites, and do experiments in space. The satellites which the Shuttle launched are used to watch the weather on Earth, allow people to communicate, and explore the rest of the universe. So, modern man continues to explore just as Columbus and Magellan did.



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