

# ILLINOIS FROM A-Z

A Teacher's Guide for  
*L IS FOR LINCOLN: AN ILLINOIS ALPHABET*

Teacher's Guide by NANCY A. MONROE

based on the book *L is for Lincoln: An Illinois Alphabet*  
by Kathy-jo Wargin, illustrated by Gijsbert van Frankenhuyzen

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## ACTIVITY IDEAS FROM A-Z USING ILLINOIS STATE GOALS AND BENCHMARKS

### **A – ARTIFACTS: MOUNDS OF ILLINOIS**

1. Divide students into Mound Groups. Each Group researches their mound.
2. Groups research the artifacts found in their mound. Explain what each artifact tells about the Native Americans who made it.
3. Make a miniature model representing the size and shape of their mound with the artifacts next to it.
4. Chart results comparing the various mounds according to location, size, the artifacts, the people who built them, the years they were built, etc.
5. Have students make up questions that can be answered by using the chart.
6. Plot different mounds on an Illinois map.
7. Visit a museum of natural science.

### **B – BIG BLUESTEM GRASS, BLUEGILL (STATE SYMBOLS)**

1. Create a fresh water lake with a school of bluegill fish on a wall. Students research the size and color of a typical bluegill, make it out of two pieces of paper with the correct coloring and dimensions, then stuff it.
2. Invite a naturalist to come in and talk about fish.
3. Invite a local fisherman to tell the class about fishing.
4. Get some Big Bluestem Grass seed. Have students grow their own grass in a cup. Graph the growth with a line graph or bar graph.
5. Plant a patch of Big Bluestem grass on the playground to represent the prairie that covered Illinois.
6. Sketch the grass; color it with a green crayon, then do a purple-blue wash over it.
7. Research prairies and locate them on an Illinois map. Research which states were covered by prairies.
8. Read *Little House of the Prairie* by Laura Ingalls Wilder. Read *The Dear America Series: Across the Wide and Lonesome Prairie* by Kristiana Gregory.
9. Have students write a diary about traveling across the prairie. Students could pretend they're in a wagon train traveling across the prairie. They could do a diary entry for five days.

### **BLACK HAWK**

1. Look up information about Black Hawk. As you read the information, have students use listening skills and take notes. Have the children generate a list of facts about Black Hawk or list what they know about Black Hawk and what they would like to know.
2. Children could do a time line of Black Hawk's life.

## **C - CHICAGO**

1. Have students create a class book about the city. Each child researches a different area: industry, natural setting, people, recreation, history, etc. Each child would be responsible for a drawing and a paragraph on one page for the book.
2. Make a Chicago quilt covering each area. Each child does one square.
3. Take a field trip to Chicago.
4. Create a big city skyline. Do a watercolor wash of yellows, pinks, and blues. After dry, cut the background rectangles out of black paper representing the skyscrapers. Cut windows out and fill space with yellow construction paper. Overlap the rectangular shapes on the paper.

## **C – CARDINAL (BIRD STUDY)**

1. Do group bird reports. Each group is assigned a different bird. Each child in the group researches a different thing about their group bird. They present their report to the class. Make papier-mâché eggs. Paint the eggs to represent the color of the group bird's egg.
2. Students can do a cardinal picture. As a background, use black paper, tear little pieces of bright red construction paper and glue them on, over-lapping them. Cut the beak, feet and eye out of construction paper and glue on.
3. Write a fable: How The Cardinal Got Its Red Feathers. Discuss legends and how they explain something in nature. Read *The Legend of Sleeping Bear*, *The Legend of Mackinac Island*, and *The Legend of the Loon* by Kathy-jo Wargin.
4. Invite a naturalist in to tell about birds found in Illinois.

## **D – JOHN DEERE: INVENTIONS**

1. Read *Toilets, Toasters, and Telephones* by Susan Goldman Rubin
2. Read *Inventions No One Mentions* by Chip Lovitt.
2. Hang up John Deere Posters of different tractors in the classroom.
3. Discuss the impact of the self-polishing plow on farming.
4. Brainstorm all the different inventions that have helped farming.
5. Visit a modern farm to see the different equipment used on a farm.
6. Do a chart comparing old tools used to the modern ones today.
7. Have an "Invention Convention". Each child comes up with an invention to solve a problem.

## **E – EASTERN RIBBON SNAKE (HERPETOLOGY)**

1. Discuss characteristics of a reptile.
2. Do a Venn diagram comparing and contrasting two types of snakes found in Illinois.
3. Each child does a papier-mâché ribbon snake, a report, and a diorama showing the snake's environment.
4. Have the children make a snake out of cloth, like an Eastern Ribbon Snake, stuff it and paint it. The head is made by tying a thread lightly around the top.
5. Invite a herpetologist to discuss snakes with the class.
6. Take a trip to the Lincoln Park Zoo.

## **F – FIRST FERRIS WHEEL, CHICAGO WORLD’S FAIR**

1. Research Chicago World’s Fair: exhibits, special facts, types of rides, history, etc.
2. Have each student write about a day at the World’s Fair with at least 5 true Worlds Fair facts in their story.
3. Sit in small buzz groups and read their stories.
4. Make a trivia book about the Chicago World’s Fair. Each child does one fact and a picture.
5. Recreate a mini World’s Fair in the classroom. Invite other classes.

## **G – GREATER PRAIRIE CHICKEN (ENDANGERED SPECIES)**

1. Research other endangered species in Illinois.
2. Compare the flying speed of the endangered Greater Prairie Chicken to the flying speed of other Illinois birds.
3. Bring in a feather, discuss the different types of feathers birds have and the purpose each kind of feather serves. Sketch a feather and label its parts.
4. Students could demonstrate the flapping and gliding flight of the endangered Prairie Chicken.

## **H - HAROLD WASHINGTON (LIBRARIES)**

1. Take a field trip to the Harold Washington Library Center in Chicago.
2. Have a librarian or media specialist talk to the class about the history of the library. Have them explain the Dewey decimal system.
3. Invite a book publishing company in to discuss how a story becomes a book.
4. Research the history of books before the printing press.
5. Discuss Mayor Harold Washington - his love of reading and books.
6. Celebrate reading and books by cross-grade-level reading.
7. Write an essay about the importance of reading and books.
8. Design book covers for their favorite books.
9. Read *How a Book Is Made* by Alikei.

## **I – ILLINOIS AND MICHIGAN CANAL (MAP SKILLS)**

1. Fill in an Illinois map showing the Michigan Canal connecting the Illinois River to Lake Michigan.
2. Recreate a canal with clay.
3. Research the natural areas, state & local parks along the Michigan canal.
4. Tell about the types of boats found in the canals and the products that they carried.
5. Research the effect the canals have had on Chicago’s growth.
6. Do a chart comparing and contrasting canals around the world.

## **J – JANE ADDAMS (IMMIGRANTS)**

1. Have the children find out where their ancestors came from. Use a map of the world. Connect locations to their hometown.

2. Read *If Your Name Was Changed at Ellis Island* by Ellen Levine.
3. Make a list of other famous Illinois woman, where their ancestors came from, and why they're famous.

### **K – KASKASKIA BELL (FAMOUS BELLS)**

1. Write to Kaskaskia for information about “The Liberty Bell of the West.” Read the information aloud to the children.
3. Research other famous bells. Each child could write a story about their life as a famous bell using their gathered information. The students could write facts on individual bell patterns. Draw a picture showing their bell in a real setting.

### **ILLINOIS FORTS**

1. Have students plot the various forts located in Illinois.
2. Divide students into fort groups. Each group constructs a fort showing all the particular parts: the stockade, for example.

### **L - LINCOLN (CELEBRATE PRESIDENTS)**

1. Children organize the dates for a “Lincoln timeline” of his life.
2. Create a “Did You Know?” book. Each child does a different president.  
Example: Did you know Lincoln was our 16th president? Illustrate the fact.
3. Research favorite foods of the presidents. Read *George Washington Breakfast* by Jean Fritz. Read *Lives of the Presidents* by Kathern Krull. Have a presidential favorite-food-party.
4. Read *So You Want To Be President?* by Judith St. George.

### **FAMOUS PEOPLE FROM ILLINOIS**

1. Each child researches a well-known person from Illinois.
2. The children assume that character and write a speech telling about them.
3. Teachers from other classes can sign up to have a “famous Illinois person” (a student) come to their class and tell about themselves in costume.

### **M – MONARCH BUTTERFLY (INSECTS)**

1. Discuss characteristics of insects; find out their different life cycles.
2. Order cocoons or collect Monarch caterpillars found on milkweed plants.
3. Order Carolina Catalog - Science and Math, [www.Carolina.com](http://www.Carolina.com) (800)334-5551.
4. Talk about symmetry in nature. Have the children design a butterfly with symmetrical design.
5. Each student creates an insect collection.
6. Children write a story about an insect overcoming a problem. Talk about setting, main idea, characters, problems, and solutions. Read *Buzzy the Bumblebee* by Denise Brennan Nelson.

### **MAZON CREEK FOSSILS (GEOLOGY)**

1. Have the children bring in rocks and fossils.

2. Talk about what type of animal each fossil was.
3. Read *Digging up Dinosaurs* by Alike. Read *A New True Book - Fossils* by Allen Roberts
4. Using plaster of paris, make digging sites for groups of three students. Put fossils and gem stones in the plaster. Supply paintbrushes and pumpkin carving knives. The plaster block would be the dig site. Children work in groups to extract the gems and fossils.
5. Invite an archeologist or geologist to speak to the class.
6. Using a balance, practice weighing fossils and rocks in grams.

## **N – NORTHERN CROSS - CELEBRATE TRAINS!**

1. Read about trains.
2. Hang a paper train on the walls with train facts on the cars.
3. Invite a train engineer to speak to the class.
4. See if there are any train clubs in your area. Invite someone from the club to speak to the class about different types of trains.
5. Check with historical societies for information about the first trains and their routes across Illinois.
6. Discuss what part trains played in Illinois history and economy.

## **O – O'LEARY'S COW (FIRE SAFETY)**

1. Invite the local fire marshal in to discuss what the fire department does in an emergency and to talk about home safety.
2. Take a field trip to the fire station.
3. Have children write an informative paper on what they learned about home safety.
4. Make posters telling what to do to have a fireproof home. Hang the posters around the school.

## **CHICAGO FIRE**

1. Contact the Chicago Historical society for information about the Great Chicago fire.
2. Go to <http://www.umi.com/hp/Support/K12/GreatEvents/Chicago.html> for more information.

## **P – PRAIRIE STATE (BOTANY AND MAP SKILLS)**

1. Research the variety of vegetation that has covered Illinois.
2. Color in an Illinois map with a key showing forests and prairie.
3. Discuss the different grasses that made up a prairie.
4. Research what life was like living on a prairie.
5. Read *Sarah, Plain and Tall* by Patricia MacLachlan.
6. Find out what other states were covered by prairie.
7. Have each child do a colored pencil or crayon square of grass. Put all the squares together to form a prairie quilt.
8. Discuss the physical characteristics of a prairie.

## **Q – QUINCY’S ROUGH AND READY - FIRSTS IN ILLINOIS**

1. Research other firsts in Illinois. (Ex: First fire engine, first use of a metropolitan alarm system.)
2. Each child presents a brief report about an Illinois “first.”
3. Locate each city with a “first” on the Illinois map.
4. Children could create a float with their information using a shoe box. The top could show a model, the sides could tell various information with text and pictures.

## **R – RIVER OTTER (ILLINOIS WILDLIFE)**

1. Do an ABC book of Illinois wildlife. Children could create their own book during the year or be responsible for one page in a class book.
2. Invite a wildlife artist in to demonstrate drawing of different animals.
3. Each child picks two animals to compare and contrast with a Venn Diagram, then write about how the two animals are alike and different.
4. After researching a certain wild animal, children could write a persuasive paper telling why their animal is the most interesting wild animal.
5. Have a wildlife biologist visit the class and discuss Illinois Wildlife.

## **RIVER BOATS**

1. Read *Amazing Boats - Eyewitness Juniors*.
2. Ask a riverboat captain to come in and speak to the class.

## **RIVERS (MAP SKILLS)**

1. On an Illinois map, locate and label the major rivers. Show which rivers the riverboats traveled on.

## **S – SPRINGFIELD: ILLINOIS CITIES**

1. Read *Around Illinois*. The minutes read could equal “miles” from city to city. A small symbol of something important about that city could be given as they reach different cities.
2. Each child researches an Illinois city. Have a Cities Fair. Children set up a booth (at their desk) that tells about their selected city.
3. Write to capitals Kaskaskia, Vandalia, and the current capitol Springfield, asking for information about history, industry etc.
4. Do a time line showing when each city was the capital. Relate it to other events in Illinois history.
5. Use a graphic aid to compare and contrast the three capitols.
6. Take a field trip to the state capitol. Discuss the different branches of government.

## **T – TULLY MONSTER (GEOLOGY)**

1. Discuss what a fossil is.
2. Research the Tully Monster Fossil and how it shows what Illinois was like 300 million years ago.

3. Have students research other fossils found in the Mason Creek deposits.
4. Each student draws a creature that once lived 300 million years ago that is now a fossil. Create a mural.
5. Read *Time Train* by Paul Fleischman.
6. Have students write about traveling around Illinois on a Time Train 300 million years ago. What would they see?
7. Do a fossil dig using a chocolate chip cookie. Give each child a small brush and a toothpick and a Chips Ahoy Chocolate chip cookie. Their goal is to dig as many complete fossils (chocolate chips) out.

## **U – ULYSSES GRANT: CIVIL WAR**

1. Read to the class about Ulysses Grant. Have students take notes on important dates, then do a time-line of Grant's life.
2. Find out which states were part of the Union and which were part of the Confederacy.
3. Read *Just a Few Words, Mr. Lincoln - The Story of the Gettysburg Address* by Jean Fritz.
4. Research different flags that have flown over Illinois. Have them drawn and dated.
5. Read *Magic Tree House #21 Civil War on Sunday* by Mary Pope Osborne.

## **V – VIOLET (BOTANY)**

1. Bring in a potted violet. Let the class do a crayon-resist watercolor of it.
2. Invite greenhouse owner or master gardener in to tell how to propagate violets.
3. Have students grow roots from a violet leaf.
4. Plant a seed such as a marigold. Have students graph its growth.
5. Children can do a seed collection.

## **W - CELEBRATE THE WHITE OAK**

1. Give each child an acorn. Explain what seeds are, and that an acorn is a seed.
2. Let them sketch the acorn, weigh it with a balance, write a description of how it looks, feels smells etc. Have them determine the average weight of all the acorns weighed.
3. Bring in white oak leaves. Children can measure in length and width.
4. Collect all types of oak leaves and other leaves. Dry them between newspapers with a weight on top. Do leaf animal pictures. Read *Look What I Did With An Oak Leaf* by Morteza E. Soki.
5. Do leaf rubbings of oak leaves.
6. Adopt a White Oak or another tree in the schoolyard. Have students observe and keep notes on the tree during the seasons. Study the bark, leaves, tree shape, looks, smell, animals it attracts, etc. Do a drawing of it from various angles.

## **WRIGLEY**

1. Bring in Wrigley Spearmint Gum in honor of William Wrigley. Bring in 3 or 4 more flavors. Let each child have a small piece of each. Graph which gum was their favorite.

## **X - RAILROAD CROSSINGS: ILLINOIS CENTRAL RAILROAD**

1. Do a time line of the start of the Illinois Central Railroad.
2. Draw its route on an Illinois map.
3. Research what it carried.
4. Research different types of trains.
5. Take a field trip to the Illinois Tech Model Railroad.
6. Join the Illinois Tech Model Railroads club. E\*Mail: [itmr.org@charlie.cns.iit.edu](mailto:itmr.org@charlie.cns.iit.edu)

## **Y – YELLOW FIELDS: AGRICULTURE**

1. Invite a local farmer to come in and tell about a day on the farm. Discuss different types of farming.
2. Take a field trip to a farm.
3. Research different types of livestock and crops grown in Illinois. Plot them on a map.
4. Have a tasting party of crops grown in Illinois.
5. Have the class plant a garden on the school grounds with vegetables grown in Illinois.
6. Take a field trip to the state or local fair.
7. Do a Venn Diagram comparing and contrasting farming in the past and now. Using the information, write about farming over the years.

## **GLACIERS**

1. Explain what glaciers are.
2. Show pictures of some glaciers still found in Alaska.
3. Demonstrate how glaciers helped shaped the land.
4. Do a topographical map of Illinois.

## **Z - ZOOS IN ILLINOIS**

1. Plan a field trip to the Lincoln Park Zoo.
2. Contact a Zoo for programs available to schools.
3. Children could start their own Unusual Animal Facts book, which includes a fact written in a complete sentence (in their own words) and an illustration.
4. Invite a zoo director to come in and talk about running a zoo.
5. Do a short report and diorama of an endangered animal.

# Your Own Illinois Alphabet

Name:

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This is your own Illinois Alphabet. What does each letter remind you of in Illinois? Is it a special place, animal, food, plant or special thing to you in our state?

**A**

**J**

**S**

**B**

**K**

**T**

**C**

**L**

**U**

**D**

**M**

**V**

**E**

**N**

**W**

**F**

**O**

**X**

**G**

**P**

**Y**

**H**

**Q**

**Z**

**I**

**R**

# My Illinois Map



Name:

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Draw your own map of Illinois! Add your favorite places, or places you would like to visit.

## Do you know where to find...?

Name:

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- ① Illinois and Michigan Canal
- ② Chicago
- ③ Starved Rock State Park
- ④ Springfield
- ⑤ Dickson Mounds
- ⑥ Peoria
- ⑦ BONUS: Superman's home town?



*...What other places can you identify around Illinois?*

# Draw a picture of any of the following:

**State Tree:** White Oak

**State Prairie Grass:** Big Bluestem

**Endangered animals:**

Eastern Ribbon Snake

**State Bird:** Cardinal

**State Fossil:** Tully Monster

Greater Prairie Chicken

River Otter

**State Fish:** Bluegill

**State Flower:** Violet