Match the photo on the front to its information box to learn more about that item!

Sumac - If you happen to walk the prairie trail in the park in the fall, you may wonder what the brilliant red leaved plant is west of the nature center. The sumac is a shrub or small tree with leaves arranged in a spiral down the stem. The bright red cluster of autumn berries at the end of its branch is called a sumac bob. Sumacs propagate by rhizome, which means they spread through underground stems and can easily form large colonies and take over an area. They provide winter food for a variety of animals such as squirrels, rabbits and deer which eat the bark and stems, and birds such as turkey and grouse which feed on the berries.	Low lying areas – Can you see a difference in the types of plants that exist in low lying areas versus higher, dryer areas of the prairie? Low lying areas collect more moisture after a rain and dry out slower due to being more sheltered from the wind. Higher areas are more exposed to sun and wind effects and dry out faster. An area that is on the north side of a slope might get less direct sun than a south facing slope. The type of soil present will also affect what grows where. Because of these factors, you will see different types of plants growing in different locations based on the growing preference of each individual type of plant.	Scat – Because many animals try to avoid human contact or are more active at night, it may be hard to spot a live animal in the park. Scat is a term for animal droppings and they can be a way for us to tell what is living or hunting in the woods. If you find scat that has fur in it, it is likely to have been left by an animal that eats other animals. Scattered splotches of what looks like dried white paint may have been left by a large bird such as an owl. Both deer and rabbits produce pellets and the color can vary depending on what the animal has been eating. (Always be careful not to handle scat without proper gear!)
Milkweed – Milkweeds are the only type of plants that monarch butterfly larvae will feed on, although the plants contain substances that make them toxic to most insects. There are many different varieties of milkweed and all are perennial meaning they come back every year. Some have a history of being used for medicinal purposes. Common milkweed is native to America and is often found along roadsides, ditches, prairies and fields. It has rhizomes (horizontal underground stems that put out roots and shoots) and also develops a pod that is full of seeds that once mature, bursts and spreads seeds through wind dispersal.	Gopher mounds - Pocket gophers have fur lined cheek pouches or 'pockets' on the outside of their mouth for carrying food into their storage burrows. To empty, they simply turn them inside out. They are built for digging with large clawed front paws and lips behind their teeth that allow them to loosen soil and bite off roots without getting any dirt in their mouth. Pocket gophers live most of their lives underground. They eat roots and other parts of plants as they dig their burrows and are able to get most of the water they need from the plants they eat. As they dig, they push the dirt out of the hole in a U-shaped mound.	Bird nest – Bird nests can be a challenge to try to identify. If you want to try to identify the type of bird that built a nest in the park, you can watch to see if it is active and what type of bird approaches. The location, building materials, shape, size, and construction of the nest may also be a clue. Some species build their nests up high and others low, some in the woods and others in open prairie areas, some with twigs or sticks and others with grass or materials such as mud, feathers, or moss. The shape of the nest can vary too from cups (like in the photo), to platforms, cavities, pouches and more.
Tree line – There are signs in the park that certain areas have been changed by human activity. If you've seen a large open area meeting a forested area where the trees form a straight line, you may have guessed that the open area was once a farm field. A transition area where different habitats meet is called an edge environment or ecotone. Certain types of animals may prefer and inhabit this edge environment, for example living in the shelter or cover of trees but going to hunt or feed in the open space. Hawks are an edge lover, often seen circling in the sky above the prairie looking for a rodent or snake to eat but nesting in the trees.	Birdhouses - When human development breaks up natural areas into smaller parcels, the remaining areas may be too small to support and provide the resources that a species needs to survive. Bluebirds prefer edge environments, hunting for insects in wide open areas and nesting in tree hollows or holes along the tree line. Man made nesting boxes in the restored prairie section of the park serve to replace lost habitat with the intention of increasing the number of bluebirds here. Bluebird houses are often used by other birds and require careful construction, placement, cleaning and monitoring for them to be effective.	Animal tracks – Although there are many animals in the park, it may sometimes be difficult to see them as they might be nocturnal (active at night) or camouflaged (coloring blends in with surroundings), or hiding when they sense your presence. Tracks are often easier to see and identify in sand, mud or fresh snow and their shape, size and pattern can often help in identifying the animal that made it. Other features to note include the presence or absence of claws, toes and tail marks. Looking at the length and width of the prints can give you an idea how fast the animal was moving, and the size of the prints an idea of how large it was.