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Grassland Interview: Drawing the Prairie Workshop

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Grassland Interview:

Drawing the Prairie Workshop

Katie Kingery-Page and Erin Wiersma, Kansas State University

Image: Drawing by high school freshman
at JC Harmon High School



PRELUDE

Grassland Interview: Drawing the Prairie Workshop

Friends, this session was designed as an in-real-life workshop. While we know one can teach drawing online, this particular workshop is place-based and relational. To be honest, the magic of this workshop is being in the same room together, with a big pile of harvested prairie plant growth, and discovering the ecological significance and sublime form of these plants, *together*.

For this reason, we decided instead of an online adaptation of the workshop, to share with you the background of how these workshops came to be and some of what has been created so far, by people like you.

Drawing the Prairie Workshop is part of a larger project called Grassland Interview.

Visual artist Erin Wiersma and Landscape architect Katie Kingery-Page began to work together in 2018 with a goal of bringing the ecological significance of grasslands to a broader audience.

Erin Wiersma is an artist making large scale, performative works on paper. Her ongoing body of work, *Konza Drawings*, is created at the Konza Prairie Long Term Ecological Research Station using the bio char and its remnants following controlled prairie burns.

Katie Kingery-Page is a landscape architect who uses ethnographic interview methods to understand place. She helps communities build fit-to-purpose public spaces.

Image: Cover of *Minding Nature*, featuring Erin Wiersma's work in the Konza Prairie watersheds (image courtesy of the artist)



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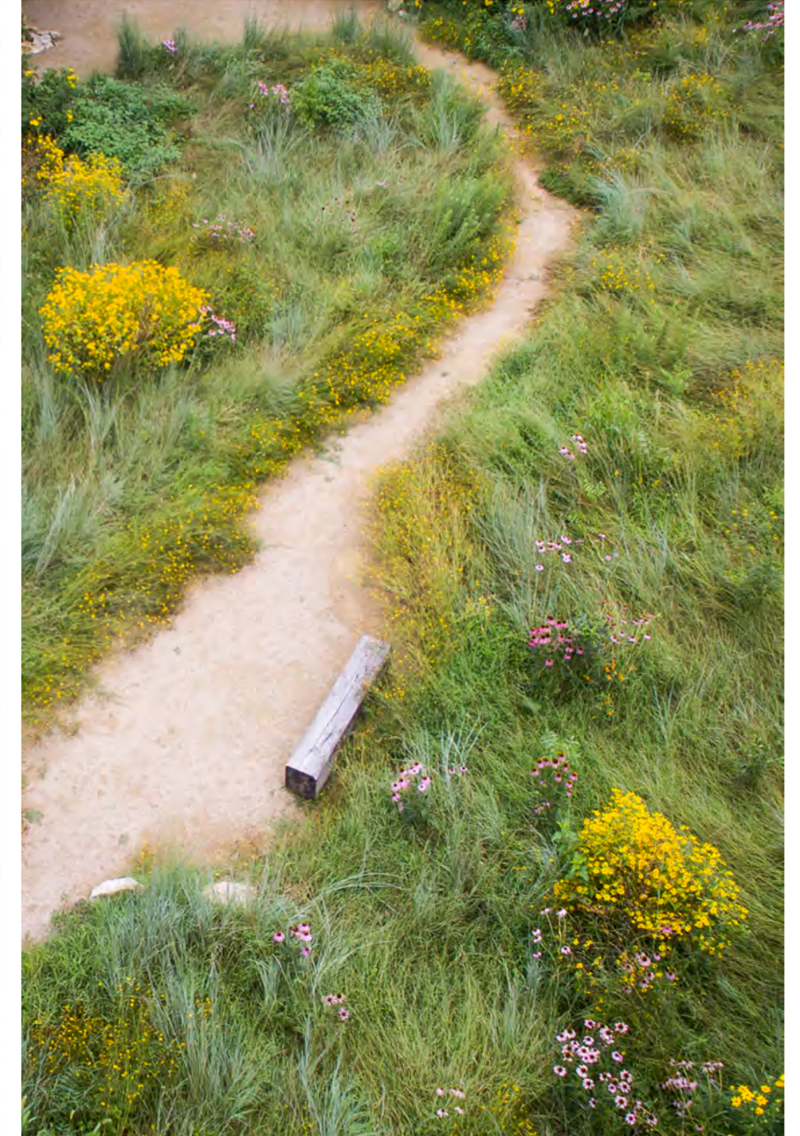
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Images:

(left) ICTPopUpPark in Wichita, KS, co-designed by graduate students in landscape architecture at K-State led by Kingery-Page, with Downtown Wichita and Terry Farha (photo by Downtown Wichita)

(right) The Meadow at K-State, lead designer Kingery-Page, built in process with a community team (photo by K-State)



Kingery-Page & Wiersma

Drawing the Prairie Workshop is part of a larger project called **Grassland Interview**.

Grassland Interview brings Wiersma's works on paper into the gallery context with interviews collected by Kingery-Page, the voices of ecologists and land managers working in grassland ecoregions.

The pair have also collaborated on video-audio works.



Image:
Tracing Watersheds featuring *Grassland Interview (voices)* at Salina Art Center, fall 2019, collaborative exhibit by Wiersma and Kingery-Page
(photo by Aaron Paden)

Drawing the Prairie Workshop is a live event.

The workshop insists that participants touch and learn about native plants from their eco-region.

When possible, we gather plants together at the place belonging to participants.

As we gather plants, we name them discuss the significance of common and scientific names.

After an introductory lecture that describes the concept of ecosystem serves, green infrastructure, and ecological careers such as landscape architecture....

Participants are guided in independent research of "their" plant online.

Image:
Plants harvested on site at JC Harmon High School in Kansas City, KS
(photo by Kingery-Page)



Drawing the Prairie Workshop combines formal and informal learning.

The introductory lecture by Kingery-Page gives participants an overview of some of the services of grassland ecosystems that humans depend upon. Participants are asked to think about landscapes they know and offer examples of possible ecosystem services.

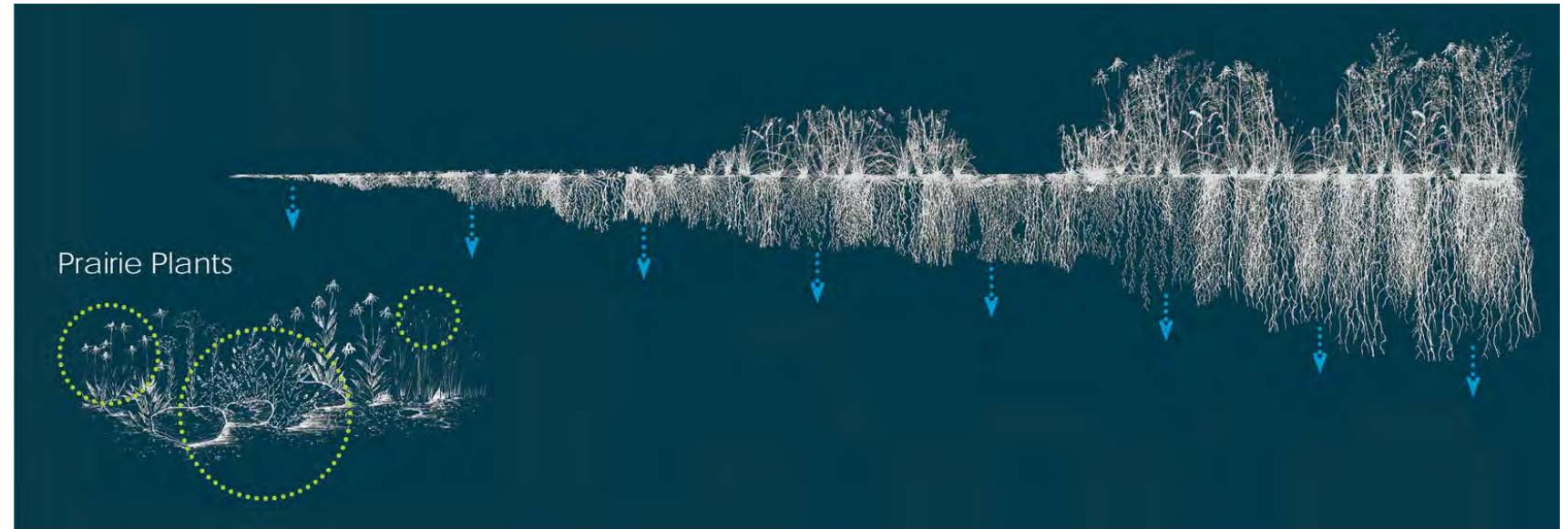


Image:
Illustration of how prairie plants create
soil-root systems that absorb stormwater.
(drawings by Kingery-Page)

Drawing the Prairie Workshop is a whole body experience.

Wiersma leads participants in the freeing experience of drawing using broad body motions, while taking inspiration from prairie plants.

Image:
JC Harmon student drawing
(photo by Evert Nelson)



Drawing the Prairie Workshop is collaborative.

Community partners have helped to refine and strengthen the workshop. David Bennett, biology teacher at JC Harmon high school has been a key collaborator. Others who have helped develop the workshop include extension horticulturalist Catherine Bylinowski, high school art teacher Rachel Fontenot, and landscape architect Mark O'Hara.

Participants also experience collaboration, as they co-create a large expressive drawing while standing.

Image:
JC Harmon students drawing
(photo by Erin Wiersma)



Drawing the Prairie Workshop is focused.

Kingery-Page leads participants in detailed observation and drawing of plants, as they create botanical drawings of "their" plant.

Image:
JC Harmon student drawing
(photo by Evert Nelson)



Drawing the Prairie Workshop can happen anywhere, but is always specific.

So far, more than 300 people have experienced the workshop.

With access to native plants and somewhere to perch, the participants can learn and draw together.



Image:
JC Harmon student drawing in a stairwell
converted to workshop studio
(photo by Kingery-Page)

Drawing the Prairie Workshop is building a larger work of art.

A hundred JC Harmon high school students have created drawings on a special material for murals.

The *Grassland Interview* team is preparing these drawings for installation at the school as a durable mural.

Image:
The Grassland Interview team works late into the evening assembling drawings.
(photo by Kingery-Page)



Drawing the Prairie Workshop connects students with design pathways.

To celebrate the students' drawings, Kansas City Design Center hosted a temporary exhibit in their urban design space.

See a video about their exhibit [here](#).

Image:
JC Harmon students' drawing on exhibit.
(photo by Kingery-Page)



Drawing the Prairie Workshop inspires us.

The drawings made by participants are as varied as grassland plants themselves.

Thank you for viewing this presentation. We hope you will spend some time in nature today. Whether it's a natural landscape, an urban park, or your own yard, get out there and see what you learn.

Image:
Grassland Interview team assembling
panels of drawings.
(photo by Erin Wiersma)



Drawing the Prairie Workshop and the *Grassland Interview* team thank:

JC Harmon High School

Kansas City Kansas Public Schools

Manhattan High School

Salina Art Center

Spartanburg Art Museum

Flint Hills Discovery Center

Center for Humans and Nature

K-State Center for Engagement & Community Development

Kansas Creative Arts Industries Commission & National Endowment for the Arts

K-State College of Architecture, Planning & Design

Kansas City Design Center

K-State College of Arts & Sciences

K-State Office of Research Development

Konza Prairie Biological Station