ILLINOIS

THE PRAIRIE STATE *Became a state December 3, 1818 (21st)*

Illinois sits in the middle of the country, between the Mississippi River and Lake Michigan. It has some of the best farmland in the country and Chicago, the third-largest city in the United States.



Why the Prairie State?

Tall grass once covered more than half of Illinois, some of it taller than a grown-up. Its thick roots made the soil rich but so sticky that it clogged iron plows. In 1837 a blacksmith named John Deere made a plow of polished steel in Grand Detour, and the soil slid off. Soon the prairie became farmland.



A City Before Columbus

About 900 years ago, a great city stood near today's East St. Louis. Between 10,000 and 20,000 people may have lived at Cahokia, the largest city north of Mexico in its time. Its builders, known as the Mississippians, piled up earth to raise about 120 mounds. The largest, Monks Mound, is 100 feet tall. By about 1350 the people had moved away.



Lincoln's Springfield

Abraham Lincoln was born in Kentucky, but Illinois is called the Land of Lincoln. He moved to Springfield in 1837 to work as a lawyer. In 1844 he and his wife, Mary, bought a house there, the only home he ever owned. He lived in it until 1861, when he left for Washington to become president.



The City That Reached Up

After a great fire burned much of Chicago in 1871, the city rebuilt with new ideas. In 1885 it put up a ten-story building held up by a metal frame, often called the first skyscraper. Chicago kept reaching higher. Willis Tower opened in 1973 with 110 stories. It is built like nine square tubes bundled together.



A Monster in the Rocks

In the 1950s a fossil collector named Francis Tully found a strange shape in the rocks near Mazon Creek. The animal lived in the sea and was up to 14 inches long, with eyes on stalks and a long snout that ended in a toothy claw. Tully Monsters have been found only in Illinois. Scientists still argue about what kind of animal it was.



The River That Runs Backward

Chicago gets its drinking water from Lake Michigan. In the 1800s the Chicago River carried the city's sewage into the same lake, and people feared disease. Engineers dug a canal 28 miles long and, in January 1900, made the river flow backward. Now its water runs away from the lake and toward the Mississippi River.

BY THE NUMBERS

Population	About 12.7 million (6th most)
Size	About 57,900 square miles (25th largest)
Highest point	Charles Mound, 1,235 feet
Counties	102
Neighbors	Wisconsin, Iowa, Missouri, Kentucky, Indiana, and Michigan across the lake

DID YOU KNOW?

- The first Ferris wheel was built for the 1893 world's fair in Chicago. It was 264 feet tall, and each car held 60 people.
- Starved Rock State Park has 18 canyons. In winter, many of its waterfalls freeze into walls of ice.
- Ronald Reagan was born in Tampico and grew up in Dixon, where he worked as a lifeguard on the Rock River.
- The state is named for the Illinois, or Illiniwek, a group of Native nations. French explorers wrote the name down in the 1600s.

FIND IT ON THE MAP

1. Which city is closest to Cahokia Mounds?
2. Which Great Lake touches Illinois?
3. In which town is most canned pumpkin packed?

Answers: 1. East St. Louis 2. Lake Michigan 3. Morton