

## Dichotomous Key for Rangeland Grasses

**Duration:** 1 hour

**Group Size:** variable

**Setting:** Classroom

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*NOTE: Complete “Constructing a Dichotomous Key” Activity prior to leading students through this activity.*

The purpose of this activity is to have students use a dichotomous key and their knowledge of plant characteristics to identify common rangeland grasses.

### Goals:

Students will:

- learn to use a dichotomous key to identify common rangeland grasses
- use terminology related to plant identification
- explore the identifiable characteristics of common rangeland grasses

### Materials Needed:

- *Dichotomous Key to Rangeland Grasses* handout
- Glossary of Plant Terms handout
- laminated herbarium plant set (grasses)
- large activity table
- magnifying glasses or hand lenses (optional)
- notebook paper and pen/pencil

### Preparation:

Lay out grass herbarium mounts on a table and number them 1 to 15. Cover the portion of herbarium sheet that displays the plant information. (Note: It works best to use small pieces of construction paper and tape to hide the identities.) Allow enough space around each plant to accommodate students working together in teams.

### Process:

Divide students into small groups (2 or 3 students each). Each student should have a copy of the dichotomous key handout and the glossary of terms. Each group should take a sheet of notebook paper and number lines 1 to 15. Groups will start at a different plant (number 1 to 15) and discuss the identifying characteristics of each plant, collectively deciding the plant’s correct identity using the dichotomous key. Students will record the name of the plant next to the corresponding number on their answer sheet. Groups will rotate to the next available plant and continue until they have selected a plant name for all the numbered lines on their answer sheet. After everyone has completed the activity, discuss the correct answers as a class.

### Variations:

Students may complete the activity individually if class size allows.