The savanna is a type of grasslands biome. The savanna is sometimes called the tropical grasslands.

**Characteristics of the Savanna**

- **Grasses and trees** - The savanna is a rolling grassland with scattered trees and shrubs.
- **Rainy and dry seasons** - Savannas have two distinct seasons in regards to precipitation. There is a rainy season in the summer with around 15 to 25 inches of rain and a dry season in the winter when only a couple of inches of rain may fall.
- **Large herds of animals** - There are often large herds of grazing animals on the savanna that thrive on the abundance of grass and trees.
- **Warm** - The savanna stays pretty warm all year. It cools down some during the dry season, but stays warm and humid during the rainy season.

**Where are the major savanna biomes?**

Savannas are generally found between the desert biome and the rainforest biome. They are mostly located near the equator.

The largest savanna is located in Africa. More than half of the continent of Africa is covered with savanna grasslands. Other major savannas are located in South America, India, and northern Australia.

**Animals in the Savanna**

One of the more spectacular sights in nature is the animals of the African Savanna. Because the savanna is so rich in grasses and tree life, many large herbivores (plant eaters) live here and congregate in large herds. These include zebras, wildebeests, elephants, giraffes, ostriches, gazelles, and buffalo. Of course, where you have lots of herbivores, there must be predators. There are many powerful predators roaming the savanna including lions, hyenas, cheetahs, leopards, black mambas, and wild dogs.

The plant eating animals have developed ways at avoiding predators. Some animals like the gazelle and ostrich use speed to try and outrun predators. The giraffe uses its height to spot predators from far off and the elephant uses its sheer size and strength to keep predators away.

At the same time predators of the savanna have adapted their own special skills. The cheetah is the fastest land animal and can run in bursts of 70 miles per hour to catch its prey. Other animals, like lions and hyenas, hunt in groups and trap the weaker animals.
away from the protection of the herd.

One reason that so many different kinds of plant eating animals can live on the savanna is that different species have adapted to eat different plants. This may be a different type of plant or even plants at different heights. Some animals are built to eat low grass while others, like giraffes, are designed to eat leaves high up in trees.

**Plants in the Savanna**
The majority of the savanna is covered in different types of grasses including lemon grass, Rhodes grass, star grass, and Bermuda grass. There are also lots of trees scattered about the savanna. Some of these trees include the acacia tree, the baobab tree, and the jackal berry tree.

The plants need to be able to survive the dry season and drought in the savanna. Some store water and energy in their roots, bulbs, or trunks. Others have roots that go deep into the ground to reach the low water table.

**Fires in the Savanna**
Fires are an important part of the savanna. During the dry season fires clear out old dead grass and make way for new growth. Most of the plants will survive because they have extensive root systems that allow them to grow back quickly after a fire. The trees have thick bark which helps them to survive. The animals generally can run to escape the fire. Some animals burrow deep into the ground to survive. Insects generally die by the millions in a fire, but this provides a feast to many birds and animals.

**Is the savanna in danger?**
Overgrazing and farming has destroyed much of the savanna. When overgrazing occurs, the grasses don't grow back and the savanna can turn into desert. In Africa, the Sahara desert is expanding into the savanna at the rate of 30 miles per year.

**Facts about the Savanna**

- Many animals of the savanna are endangered due to overhunting and loss of habitat.
- The grassland in Australia is called the Bush.
- Many animals migrate out of the savanna during the dry season.
- Some animals in the savanna, like vultures and hyenas, are scavengers which eat other animal's kills.
- The African savanna boasts the largest land animal, the elephant, and the tallest land animal, the giraffe.
- The baobab tree can live for thousands of years.
- The savanna has the highest biodiversity of herbivore animals of any biome.
- Many of the animals in the savanna have long legs which helps them when migrating long distances.
FACING THE LION:
Growing Up Maasai on the African Savanna

Before reading the book
What is a savanna?

What types of animals live on a savanna?

What types of activities do people who live on a savanna do to make a living?

On the map below identify, label, and lightly shade the areas of Africa where savannas exist.

Using a brown colored pencil outline and shade where Kenya would be on the map below.