

Itasca State Park



Pre-reading

Questions: What do you know about the subject of this reading? What questions do you have about it?

Definitions: Woodland Period – between 200 B.C. and 900 A.D.

Anishinabe – the third largest Indian Tribe in North America; were primarily located around the Lake Superior area; are known for their canoes and wild rice.

Reading

17 Itasca is Minnesota’s oldest state park. It is home to the Headwaters of the Mississippi River. Visitors
to the park can walk across the mighty river as it starts its journey 2,552 miles to the Gulf of Mexico.

38 This famous state park has a rich history. Some 8,000 years ago, Indian hunters pursued wild animals
55 for food in the Itasca State Park region. They ambushed and killed bison, deer, and moose at watering sites.
74 The Bison Kill site along Wilderness Drive in the park gives visitors more history about this period.

91 A few thousand years later, a group of people of the Woodland Period arrived at Lake Itasca. They
109 lived in larger, more permanent settlements and made stone, wood, and bone tools. Burial mounds from this
126 era can be seen today at the Itasca Indian Cemetery.

136 In 1832, an Anishinabe guide led explorer Henry Rowe Schoolcraft to the source of the Mississippi
152 River at Lake Itasca. It was on this journey that Schoolcraft and a missionary created the name Itasca. The
171 Latin words for “truth” and “head” were joined by linking syllables: verITAS CAput, meaning “true head.”

187 In the late 1800s, Jacob Brower, a land surveyor, came to the park region to settle the dispute of the
207 actual location of the Mississippi Headwaters. Brower saw this region being quickly transformed by logging.
222 He was determined to protect some of the pine forests for future generations.

235 Brower worked tirelessly to protect the pine forest surrounding Lake Itasca. His efforts led the state
251 legislature to establish Itasca as a Minnesota State Park on April 20, 1891, by a margin of only one vote.

271 Through this **conservation** work and the continuing efforts of others throughout the decades, the
285 splendor of Itasca has been maintained. Awesome stands of virgin pines are found throughout the park. In
302 fact, both the state’s largest red pine and largest white pine can be seen at Itasca.

318 Today, the park totals more than 32,000 acres and includes more than 100 lakes. The diversity of
335 vegetation in the park supports many wildlife species. You can expect to see loons, herons, ducks, owls,
352 warblers, hummingbirds, woodpeckers, chickadees, and sometimes even bald eagles.

361 Trails in the park are shared with deer, chipmunks, and squirrels. Beaver, porcupines, black bears, and
377 wolves also live in the park. Wilderness Drive winds past the 2,000 acre Wilderness Sanctuary, one of
394 Minnesota’s seven National Natural Landmarks.

399 Itasca State Park is located in the northern part of the state. It is twenty-one miles north of Park Rapids
419 on U.S. Highway 71. Since the park is open year round, it can be enjoyed during all seasons.

437 Source: MN Department of Natural Resources – text reprinted with permission

Level 8.0

Understanding

1. Who created the name Itasca? How and why was that name chosen? _____

2. Who were the first known people in the region? _____

3. What does the word **conservation** mean? _____

4. How and when did Itasca become a state park? _____

5. Who had the vision to preserve the area? Why? _____

6. Why is this park one of the more well known ones? _____

7. If you were traveling from the city in which you live to Itasca State Park, what would be the most direct route? _____

8. List at least three things you'd like to see if you visited the park. _____

Writing

Option A: Summarize the reading in your own words.

Option B: Write about a state park you have visited. What did you do there?
