

American Buffalo

Read about the buffalo and do a “felt board” activity.

OBJECTIVES

Students will:

- Ĥ understand that the buffalo is the state animal of Kansas
- Ĥ understand that Native Americans living in Kansas long ago depended on the buffalo for many different things
- Ĥ be exposed to the idea of conservation (not to waste but to use all parts of something).

MATERIALS FROM TRUNK

Objects

Buffalo stuffed toy

Buffalo fur

Fabric panel

Buffalo puzzle (**When finished please return puzzle to trunk already assembled so the velcro does not snag the pieces.**)

Book

Buffalo

Graphics

#1 - Buffalo

#2 - Uses of the Buffalo

TEACHER PREPARATION

- ' Be prepared to explain the uses of different parts of the buffalo.
- ' Review the book *Buffalo* to decide if the entire book will be read or only selected portions.
- ' Hang up the fabric panel in a location where the entire class can see it.

HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

In 1955 the legislature of the State of Kansas enacted into law a bill designating the American buffalo as the official state animal of Kansas. The reasons for specifying the buffalo as state animal are: 1) the first line of the state song "Home on the Range" reads "give me a home where the buffalo roam," and 2) buffalo once roamed the Kansas prairies in countless thousands during the days of Kansas Territory and early statehood.

The American buffalo once roamed the Great Plains in unbelievable numbers. On the entire North American continent a one-time population of thirty to sixty million has been estimated. The Southern Plains, of which Kansas is a part, was the home of a good percentage of these.

The importance of the buffalo to the Native Americans of the Plains, such as the Kaws, Pawnees, Wichitas, Osages, Cheyennes, Arapahos, Comanches, and Kiowas, can not be underestimated. In addition to being their main food supply, the buffalo also supplied them with many other products. After being tanned the **hide** of the buffalo became tipi covers, clothing, robes, bedding, and packing cases, to name but a few items. The hair on the hide was removed from buffalo killed in summer, but during the winter, when the hair was thick, it was left on. These winter hides were used to make robes and bedding.

Rawhide, hides that weren't tanned, were used to make cooking utensils (kettles, cups, and bowls), horse equipment (bridles, ropes, and saddles), and other items (cradles, knife sheaths, drumheads, and rattles). It could also be used in place of nails and glue. For example, a rock could be attached to a wooden handle by wrapping wet rawhide around the two pieces. When the rawhide dried and shrank, a strong war club resulted.

The war shields that Native American men carried were made from the hide on a bull's neck. This tough piece of hide was heated repeatedly until it shrank. It was then stretched over a round frame. These shields could stop arrows and slow down the speed of bullets.

The **hair** of the buffalo was also used in many ways. Braided into rope, it could be utilized for making belts, cords, and lariats. Unbraided, it was used as lining for moccasins and stuffing dolls and balls for children.

The long **tendons** along a buffalo's backbone and legs were also a worthwhile commodity. Called sinew, this material was turned into a tough thread then used to sew tipi covers and clothing and tie feathers and points on to arrowshafts. It was also braided into bowstrings.

Other parts of the buffalo were also used. **Bones** were used for war clubs, knives, arrowpoints, and pipes. **Teeth** were used as necklaces and decorations on clothing. The **stomach** was used as a cooking pot. The **bladder** and **large intestine** became containers for food and water. **Hoofs**, **eyes**, and other small pieces were cooked down to make glue. Even the **tail** was used as a flyswatter and, of course, **buffalo chips** (dried buffalo dung) were used as fuel. It's been said that the buffalo was a traveling grocery store on four feet.



Because of the general utility of the buffalo, Plains Indians built their lives around them. Scouts were sent out to find the herds and once found, whole villages moved toward the herd to better hunt and process the kill. Before the coming of the horse (which came with the arrival of the early Spanish explorers) buffalo were hunted on foot. This was very difficult to do. One method used by the horseless Indians was to disguise themselves in animal hides and sneak up on the herds. To be successful at this method the hunters had to crawl carefully up on all fours against the wind so the buffalo could not see nor smell them. Another method was to find a cliff or steep canyon in the area and have someone in the tribe start a stampede in the direction of the cliff, driving large numbers of animals over the edge. The rest of the tribe would be down below to butcher the animals. This method supplied large amounts of meat to the tribe.

Once the Native Americans obtained the horse, the hunting techniques changed. Hunters could ride their horses along side the buffalo and shoot the animals with bow and arrow from horseback. This made hunting easier and more efficient and also increased the amount of meat and other products the Indians got from the buffalo.

The arrival of European Americans on the Plains in the late 1800s brought large-scale commercial hunting. The hides and the bones of the buffalo were shipped back east for commercial and industrial uses. Many more buffalo were killed for sport. The number of buffalo on the Plains diminished rapidly. Native Americans no longer had the many products that the buffalo supplied. This decreasing food supply came at the same time that military operations on the Plains were forcing Plains Indians onto reservations. Along with the near-extinction of the buffalo came a drastic change to the Native Americans' way of life.

By 1889 less than six hundred buffalo remained in the United States. Today, because of careful management, there are now seventy five thousand buffalo in the U.S. In Kansas most of these are part of small herds on land under supervision of the Kansas Department of Wildlife and Parks.

Sources:

Kansas State Historical Society, *People of the Plains: Native Americans in Kansas; Trunk Manual*
David Webb, *Indians in Kansas*

VOCABULARY

Bison	A large shaggy-maned animal with short horns. Commonly known as a buffalo.
Buffalo	A word commonly used to refer to the bison of North America. The true buffalo is found only in Asia. In this trunk the word "buffalo" will be used when referring



to the state animal of Kansas.

Flyswatter	Made from a buffalo tail; used to keep flies away.
Hoe	A farming tool made from a buffalo scapula bone (shoulder blade) and tied to a long stick.
Rawhide	Hide that has not been processed but has been left to dry and become hard.
Scapula	Shoulder blade of a buffalo; used to make a hoe.
Symbol	Something that stands for something else. Symbols are used to communicate words, emotions, directions, etc.
Tanned hide	An animal hide that has been processed to make a soft, supple hide that can be used for clothing, bags, tipi covers, etc.

ACTIVITY

- 1) Show students graphic #1, the American Buffalo and the buffalo stuffed toy. Ask them the name of the animal?

® *In this lesson the animal will be referred to as the buffalo. It is really a bison but is commonly called a buffalo. Buffaloes are found only in Asia.*

Ask those who have seen buffaloes to raise their hands. Where did they see it? At a farm, a zoo, in the wild?

- 2) Tell the students that the buffalo is the state animal of Kansas; it is a symbol of Kansas. Ask the class what a symbol is.

® *Something that represents something else. Examples might include stop signs or red traffic lights that mean stop, green lights that mean go, and railroad crossing signs that mean stop and look for a train before crossing.*



Explain that the buffalo was chosen as the state animal because it has been important to many people who lived in Kansas at one time. Sing the beginning of "Home on the Range" and have them listen to see if the song says anything about buffalo.

**"Oh, give me a home,
Where the buffalo roam
Where the deer and the antelope play.
Where seldom is heard a discouraging word,
And the skys are not cloudy all day"**

- 3) Ask the class what they know about the buffalo.

Explain that the buffalo was very important to earlier groups of people living in Kansas such as the Kaws, Pawnees, Wichitas, Osages, Cheyennes, Arapahos, Comanches, and Kiowas. Ask the students if they know how Native Americans used the buffalo.

® *Food, clothing, to make tipis, etc.*

Pass around the piece of buffalo fur. Ask how the fur feels.

® *Soft, warm.*

What could hide like this be used for?

® *Clothing, gloves, blanket, to keep warm.*

- 4) Read aloud to the students from the book *Buffalo*. To meet the objectives of this lesson read pages 22-32. Show them the photographs on pages 24, 25, 26, and 28.

- 5) Ask the following questions about the book:

± What are three ways the Indians hunted the buffalo?

® *Made the buffalo stampede over a cliff, disguised themselves as wolves, and used a bow and arrow while riding on a horse.*

± Why was the buffalo so important to the Indians?

® *It provided food, clothing, shelter, weapons, and tools.*

± Did the Indians waste any part of the buffalo?

® *No, they used all of the buffalo.*



- 6) Begin placing the buffalo puzzle pieces one-by-one on the fabric panel in the order indicated. At the same time have the class look at graphic #2, Uses of the Buffalo and decide how each part of the buffalo's body was used by the Indians. Discuss each piece as it is placed on the fabric panel.
- ± **White buffalo outline** - Use this a base to place the other pieces on.
 - ± **Scapula** (Shoulder blade) - The blade of a hoe for gardening.
 - ± **Stomach** - Cooking pot.
 - ± **Hide** - Tanned to use as tipi covers, clothing, moccasins, mittens, bags, and bedding. Rawhide (untanned) to use as horse equipment, drumheads, shields, soles of moccasins, horseshoes, ropes, and cooking equipment.
 - ± **Tail** - Flyswatter.
 - ± **Horns** - Bowls, spoons, and containers.
- 7) Show the class the buffalo stuffed animal again and review the fact that Native Americans used the entire buffalo. The buffalo is often compared with a general store because it provided food, clothing, shelter, and tools.

EXTENDED ACTIVITIES

- 1) Buffalo Tag Game (Indoor version)
Have all but one student be the buffalo herd. One student is the hunter. The herd mills about in the center of the room. The hunter circles the outside of the herd and when the hunter is ready to start the hunt, he announces "begin the hunt." At that time, the herd stops moving and stays very still. They also must shut their eyes and keep them shut. The hunter then walks very quietly through the herd, touching each buffalo as he "kills" it. For each "kill" the teacher announces "the village will eat tonight." If a buffalo hears the hunters approach, the buffalo announces "hunters!!" This ends that hunter's turn and it will be someone else's turn. If a buffalo announces "hunters!!" and the hunter is not near that buffalo, then the buffalo is counted as a kill for the hunter. The buffalo do not open their eyes until the teacher announces "The hunt is over."
- 2) Buffalo Tag Game (Outdoor version)
Choose a relatively windy day to play this game. Set boundaries for this game. Nobody can leave the play area while the game is in session. Have all but one student be the buffalo herd. One student is the hunter. The herd randomly spreads out and faces the



wind. All eyes are closed and the herd is motionless. The hunter sneaks up and "tags" one of the buffalo. Once that buffalo is tagged, it yells "buffalo, run!" At that point the hunter tries to tag the other buffalo as they scatter. They all must stay within the boundary. Stop the game either when all buffalo are tagged or after a set amount of time.

With larger groups, the game can be played with more than one hunter.

- 3) Borrow the traveling resource trunk *People of the Plains: Native Americans in Kansas* from the Kansas State Historical Society. Numerous items created from the buffalo are included for hands-on use such as a drum, shield, scapula bone, moccasin, sinew, and bone awl. Explore the Native American culture through housing, food, clothing, crafts, spiritualism, and games. To reserve this trunk call 785-272-8681, ext. 414; FAX 785-272-8682, or mail to Education and Outreach Division, Kansas State Historical Society, 6425 SW Sixth Avenue, Topeka, KS 66615-1099.

