American Buffalo

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

The true buffalo is found only in Asia. In this trunk the word “buffalo,” rather than American Bison, will be used when referring to the state animal of Kansas.

OBJECTIVES
Students will:
1. recognize the buffalo as the state animal of Kansas
2. recognize the buffalo as an animal important to the survival of American Indians living in Kansas long ago
3. be exposed to the idea of conservation

MATERIALS FROM TRUNK
Objects
- Buffalo stuffed toy
- Buffalo fur
- Fabric panel & pieces
- Sinew
- Buffalo puzzle

Book: Buffalo
Graphics
- #1 – American Buffalo
- #2 – Uses of the Buffalo

OTHER MATERIALS NEEDED
- Jerky or some type of dried meat to represent dried 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 Bison as the official state animal of Kansas. At that time this animal was known as a buffalo, and that is how the legislation was written. The reasons given for specifying the buffalo as state animal were: 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 American Indians of the Plains, such as the Kaw, Pawnee, Wichita, Osage, Cheyenne, Arapaho, Comanche, and Kiowa, can not be underestimated. In addition to being their main food supply, the buffalo also supplied the American Indians with many other products. Tanned hide became many things including tipi covers, clothing, robes, bedding, and packing cases. The fur on the hide was removed from buffalo killed in summer, but for those killed in the winter, when the fur was thick, it was left on. These winter hides became robes and bedding.

Rawhide, untanned hides, 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). Rawhide 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 club resulted. The tough hide on a bull’s neck could be formed into a war shield by heating the hide repeatedly until it shrank. These shields could stop arrows and slow down bullets.

The hair of the buffalo had many uses. Braided into rope, it became such things as belts, cords, and lariats. Unbraided, it was used as lining for moccasins and stuffing for dolls and toy balls.

The long tendons along a buffalo’s backbone and legs are known as sinew. This material was used like string or thread. American Indians used it to sew hides together for tipi covers and clothing, tie feathers and points on to arrow shafts, braid into cord for bowstrings, and much more.

Other parts of the buffalo were also used. Bones became war clubs, knives, arrow points, and pipes. Teeth were used as necklaces and decorations on clothing, and the stomach 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 store on four feet.

Plains Indians built their lives around the buffalo. Scouts went out to find the herds. Once found, entire villages moved toward the herd to better hunt and process the kill. Before the introduction of the horse by early Spanish explorers, buffalo hunts took place on foot. This was very difficult to do. The American Indians disguised themselves in animal hides and snuck up on the herds. This method required the hunters to crawl carefully against the wind so the buffalo could not see or smell them. Another method was to stampede a herd off a cliff or steep canyon. This method supplied large amounts of meat to the tribe.

Horses changed the hunting techniques. Hunters rode their horses alongside the buffalo and shot the animals with bow and arrows 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 American settlers on the Plains in the late 1800s brought large-scale commercial hunting. The hides and the bones 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 and could no longer supply the many products needed by the American Indians. This decreasing food supply came at the same time that Plains Indians found themselves forced onto reservations by military operations on the Plains. Along with the near-extinction of the buffalo came a drastic change to the American Indians’ way of life.

By 1889 less than six hundred buffalo remained in the United States. Due to careful management, there are now over seventy five thousand buffalo in the U.S.

**VOCABULARY**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Term</th>
<th>Definition</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>American Bison</td>
<td>A large animal with a shaggy mane and short horns, commonly known as a buffalo.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Buffalo</td>
<td>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.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Conservation</td>
<td>The protection and preservation of animals.</td>
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<td>Flyswatter</td>
<td>Made from a buffalo tail.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Rawhide</td>
<td>Cleaned, untanned hide left to dry and become hard.</td>
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Scapula  Shoulder blade of an animal. Buffalo scapula were used to make a hoe by attaching it to a stick with rawhide.

Sinew  Tendons and ligaments. Tough flexible tissue in animals that connects bone to muscle, bone or cartilage.

Symbol  Something that stands for something else. Symbols are used to communicate words, emotions, directions, etc.

Tanned hide  An animal hide that was processed (tanned) to make it soft and supple for use in making clothing, tipi covers, etc.

**ACTIVITY**

1) Show students graphic #1, the American Buffalo and the buffalo stuffed toy. Ask them the name of the animal, and let them share what they know about it. Ex: Who has seen a buffalo? Where did they see it? Where do buffalo live? What do they eat?

2) Discuss the meaning of the word “symbol,” and explain that the buffalo is the state animal of Kansas. It is a symbol of Kansas.

   Explain that the buffalo was chosen as the state animal because it has been important to many people who lived in Kansas a long time ago. Sing, or read, the beginning of “Home on the Range.” Have the class listen to what the song says about the 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.”**

   What does the song say about buffalo? What were they buffalo doing? Do the words of the song make you think there were a lot of buffalo in Kansas or a few buffalo?

3) Explain that at one time there were many, many buffalo living in Kansas and other states in the Great Plains. There were so many buffalo that if you were crossing Kansas you might have to wait for hours for a herd of buffalo to pass by before you could continue.

   Ask the class, if there were that many buffalo, and no stores of any kind, do they think the buffalo would have been important to the American Indians living on the plains? Buffalo were so important to the American Indians that lived here a long time ago that...
people sometimes call the buffalo the general store of the Great Plains. The Kaw, Pawnee, Wichita, Osage, Cheyenne, Arapaho, Comanche, and Kiowa all lived in the place we now call Kansas and they all relied on the buffalo to provide things they needed.

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.

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.

Pass round the piece of buffalo fur. Ask how the fur feels and what something like this might be used for.
● Soft, warm. Clothing, gloves, blanket. Things that people needed to stay warm.

Explain that sometimes the Indians took off the fur. These hides would be made into tipi covers or clothing for warm weather.

Show the class the sinew and explain that this too was from the buffalo. Sinew is tendons and ligaments, tough flexible tissue in animals that connects bone to muscle. It was used as thread to sew pieces of hide together.

Show the class the jerky. Explain that meat spoils fairly quickly unless it is frozen, dried or canned. The American Indians who lived long ago could not freeze it or can it so they dried it. This way they could save some of it to eat later.

5) 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 American Indians. Discuss each piece as it is placed on the fabric panel.
● White buffalo outline – Use this as 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 a tipi cover, 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.
6) Show the class the buffalo stuffed animal again and review the fact that American Indians used the entire buffalo. The buffalo is often compared with a general store because it provided food, clothing, shelter, weapons and tools.

EXTENDED ACTIVITIES
1) Read the book *The Return of the Buffaloes: A Plains Indian Story About Famine and Renewal of the Earth* by Paul Goble. This story is based on a Lakota myth in which a mysterious woman returns the buffalo and the other animals to the American Indian people.

2) Buffalo Tag Game – Have one student be the hunter and the rest be the buffalo herd. 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. The buffalo 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, 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.”

3) Borrow the traveling resource trunks *Uses of the Buffalo* or *Indian Homes in Kansas* from the Kansas Historical Society. For more information look at the trunks on the Society’s website at www.kshs.org.