

## High School Lesson Guide: Bison

### Vocabulary:

- 1) Bison
- 2) Scarcity
- 3) Transformed
- 4) Subsistence
- 5) Herd
- 6) Livestock
- 7) Stewardship
- 8) Harvest
- 9) Commercial Hunting
- 10) Carcasses

### Engage:

- Place a few of the following items in front of students (photos are fine, if you cannot obtain the hide):
  - A photo of bison
  - A diagram of a bison carcass
  - A tanned bison hide
- Without prompting students, ask them the following:
  - Do you know what this is/is from?
  - Do you know how bison traditionally is utilized?
  - Do you know where bison currently roam freely?

### Explore and Explain:

- Activity 1: As a class, popcorn read (Teacher reads first and chooses a student, student reads paragraph, and pops to the next reader) *The Release of the Buffalo*.
  - Then use the Think, Pair, Share Method with students.
    - Think about why this story primarily focused on the meat of the bison?
    - Pair up with a neighbor to discuss your thoughts.
    - Share and record pair insights in class.
    - Review vocabulary words from the lesson with students and their meanings.
- Activity 2: Bison Bubble Map Activity
  - In student groups, fill in each bubble with details from the story. Have students think about how bison were used, who controlled them, and what happens when control changes.

### Elaborate

- As your lesson covers the historical context of bison among Indigenous communities, have students create their own news report, from their point of view and research.
  - Give students the following scenario: *Imagine it is the late 1880s. You are a reporter for a local newspaper tasked with writing a story about the dramatic decline of bison across the Great Plains. Your goal is to inform the public about what happened and why it matters.* (Activity 3)

- Share all additional resources with students to utilize for their new report if needed.

***Evaluate***

- The Bison Come Back Showcase: Create a poster in 10 minutes that shows the story of bison loss and recovery, including key facts, cultural importance, and ecological impact. Include at least 5 vocabulary words from the lesson. (Activity 4)

**Suggested Lesson Activities:**

- Bison Vocabulary Bingo
- Indigenous Language Vocabulary
- Bison Bubble Map
- Bison News Report
- The Bison Come Back Showcase

## Releasing the Buffalo



*Retold for Grades 9–12 from the original version shared by Pliny Earle Goddard (1911) of the Jicarilla Apache.*

Long ago, the people were camped on the open plains during a time of hunger. There was no meat, and food was scarce. To occupy themselves, they played the hoop-and-pole game, but survival weighed heavily on their minds.

One day, Raven appeared suddenly. No one knew where he had come from. He removed his quiver, and inside were intestines, clear evidence that he had access to meat. Magpie examined them closely. The people realized Raven knew something they did not, so they carefully watched him to learn where his food came from.

That evening, Raven began to travel home. He flew upward toward the sky-hole, circling higher and higher until he appeared very small. Most people lost sight of him, but Rattlesnake and Bat continued watching. When Raven disappeared at the top of the sky, he traveled east toward the Black Mountains, where canyons meet. Only those two could still see his path.

The people followed Raven's route, moving their camp four times before they reached him. There, they found that Raven had a large supply of meat. He shared it with them, but when they asked where the buffalo were kept, Raven refused to answer.

Knowing that buffalo meat was the key to survival, the people made a careful plan. One man was transformed into a puppy, with eyes made of black obsidian. The puppy was hidden under a brush bed, and the people quietly moved their camp away.

Later, Raven's children came across the deserted camp and found the puppy. Raven's youngest child grew attached to it and carried it home. Raven suspected the dog might be more than it seemed and tested it by bringing a heated poker close to its eyes. When the puppy cried out, Raven decided it was only a dog and harmless. The child named it *înołdî*, meaning "choke," and kept it.

The puppy lived with Raven and followed him everywhere. Through this, it discovered Raven's secret: Raven had all the buffalo shut behind a door. He controlled the herd completely, opening the enclosure only when he wanted to kill an animal for meat. This was how Raven secured food for himself and his family.

One night, after Raven and his children had gone to sleep, the puppy went to the enclosure and opened the door. The buffalo rushed out in a powerful stampede, spreading across the plains. By the time Raven noticed, most of the herd had already escaped. He ran after them, shooting arrows, but could not stop them.

As the last buffalo were leaving, an old buffalo struggled to move. The man, still in the form of the dog, clung to the animal's side and escaped with it. Raven did not notice and continued searching for the man in vain.

The man returned to his people and told them the buffalo had been released. The people moved their camp back to the plains, where they hunted buffalo and were no longer hungry. The meat provided food, clothing, tools, and survival.

Raven later told his children they would live only on the scraps the meat left along the backbone and the eyeballs. He said the people had wronged him by taking away his control of the buffalo. Because of this, Raven claimed he must now eat whatever meat others kill, since he no longer controls the herd himself.

In this way, the buffalo came to roam freely across the plains. Once the people were starving, but after the buffalo were released, there was food again. This story explains how control over buffalo meat shifted from one being to the community, restoring balance and survival.

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## **The Last Herds: How Bison Shaped Food, Culture, and Community**

During the mid-to-late 19th century, tens of millions of American bison roamed the Great Plains, providing the primary source of food, clothing, tools, and economic stability for many Plains



Indigenous communities. Between the 1860s and 1880s, massive commercial hunting, railroad expansion, and U.S. government policies led to the near eradication of these herds. Hunters killed bison for hides and tongues, often leaving carcasses to rot, while government and military leaders tacitly encouraged the destruction as a strategy to weaken Indigenous resistance and force Native peoples onto reservations via starvation. By the late 1880s, only a few hundred wild bison remained.

The eradication of the bison had devastating consequences for Indigenous communities. With their primary food source eliminated, many tribes experienced starvation and malnutrition, while also losing essential materials for clothing, shelter, and tools. The loss of the buffalo disrupted

traditional economies, cultural practices, and social systems, creating long-term effects on health and community well-being. This historical episode illustrates how control over critical food resources can be used as a tool of power and coercion, demonstrating the deep connections between environmental stewardship, food sovereignty, and cultural survival.

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## Bison Come Home: Tribal-Led Revival

After nearly disappearing in the late 1800s, American bison are making a comeback on Indigenous lands, thanks to the work of Tribal Nations and the InterTribal Buffalo Council (ITBC). Founded in 1992, ITBC helps restore buffalo herds across more than 1 million acres of Tribal territory, with over 20,000 bison now cared for by member Nations in more than 22 states. These efforts bring bison back to the lands where they once roamed, honoring their cultural, spiritual, and ecological importance. ITBC's programs not only help the animals recover but also rebuild a connection that was lost due to past government policies.



Partnerships between ITBC, organizations like the Tanka Fund and The Nature Conservancy, and Tribal communities have returned thousands of bison to ancestral grazing lands. In recent years, hundreds of bison have been transferred to Tribal Nations across the Plains and beyond, including lands in Nebraska, Oklahoma, Minnesota, South Dakota, and Texas. Each herd supports both the restoration of natural landscapes and the healing of Tribal communities, helping people reconnect with the buffalo and the prairie.

Bison revitalization also supports food, culture, and economic opportunity. Returning bison to Tribal lands provides traditional foods, materials for community use, and jobs in Tribal buffalo programs. Youth and community members get the chance to learn traditional knowledge and care for the herds. By managing bison today, Tribal Nations ensure that these animals continue to be an important part of both the land and cultural life for generations to come.

### Sources

- [Journal Panorama: Transformation on the Plains](#)
- [History Nebraska: Protection for Buffalo](#)
- [EnviroLiteracy: Problems for the Buffalo](#)
- [National Park Service: Bison Management](#)
- [Backcountry Hunters & Anglers: Return of the Buffalo](#)
- [IFLScience: Lasting Consequences for Native Americans](#)
- [World History Encyclopedia: Buffalo and the Plains Indians](#)
- [The InterTribal Buffalo Council](#)
- [The Nature Conservancy](#)

# Bison Vocabulary BINGO

## Teacher Directions

- Give each student one BINGO card.
  - Use the provided **definitions** to play the game.
  - Read one definition aloud at a time **without saying the vocabulary word**.
  - Students will listen and mark the word on their BINGO card that matches the definition.
  - Continue reading definitions until a student gets a BINGO (row, column, diagonal, or full card—your choice).
  - Check the student's card to confirm correct matches before continuing or ending the game.
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## Student Directions

- You will receive one BINGO card with vocabulary words on it.
- Listen carefully as your teacher reads a **definition** out loud.
- Find the word on your BINGO card that matches the definition.
- Mark the word if you have it.
- Keep listening and marking words as the game continues.
- When you get a BINGO, raise your hand and wait for the teacher to check your card.

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Period: \_\_\_\_\_

# Vocabulary Bingo

Bison	Stampede	Free	Plains
Harvest	înołdî	Control	Herd
Survival	Scarcity	Subsistence	Commercial Hunting
Livestock	Stewardship	Transformed	Carcasses

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Period: \_\_\_\_\_

# Vocabulary Bingo

Scarcity	Carcasses	Harvest	Control
Transformed	Plains	Stampede	Survival
Bison	Subsistence	Herd	înołdî
Livestock	Commercial Hunting	Stewardship	Free

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Period: \_\_\_\_\_

# Vocabulary Bingo

<b>Herd</b>	<b>Control</b>	<b>Livestock</b>	<b>înołdî</b>
<b>Stampede</b>	<b>Carcasses</b>	<b>Harvest</b>	<b>Free</b>
<b>Transformed</b>	<b>Commercial Hunting</b>	<b>Subsistence</b>	<b>Bison</b>
<b>Plains</b>	<b>Scarcity</b>	<b>Survival</b>	<b>Stewardship</b>

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Period: \_\_\_\_\_

# Vocabulary Bingo

Transformed	Harvest	Subsistence	Carcasses
Plains	înołdî	Bison	Livestock
Survival	Stampede	Commercial Hunting	Control
Herd	Stewardship	Scarcity	Free

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Period: \_\_\_\_\_

# Vocabulary Bingo

Free	Carcasses	Control	Plains
Herd	Harvest	Commercial Hunting	Transformed
Stampede	Stewardship	înôldî	Subsistence
Survival	Scarcity	Bison	Livestock

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Period: \_\_\_\_\_

# Vocabulary Bingo

Stewardship	Harvest	Control	Livestock
înoîdî	Free	Survival	Plains
Bison	Scarcity	Subsistence	Carcasses
Commercial Hunting	Stampede	Transformed	Herd

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Period: \_\_\_\_\_

# Vocabulary Bingo

Transformed	Commercial Hunting	Harvest	Survival
Subsistence	Stewardship	Livestock	înołdî
Herd	Control	Plains	Scarcity
Carcasses	Free	Bison	Stampede

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Period: \_\_\_\_\_

# Vocabulary Bingo

Carcasses	Stampede	Plains	Free
Bison	Stewardship	Harvest	Survival
înołdî	Subsistence	Livestock	Control
Commercial Hunting	Herd	Scarcity	Transformed

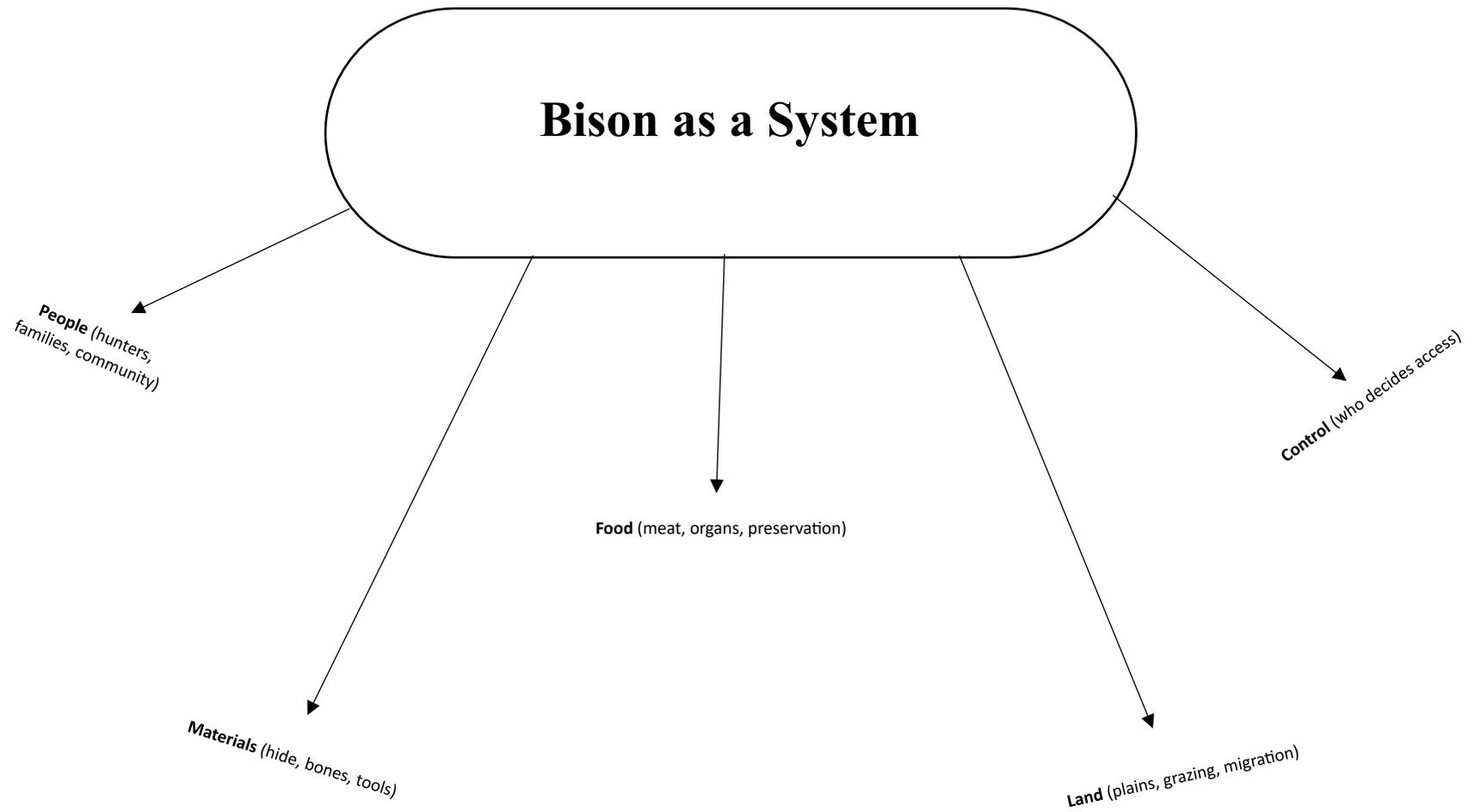
## Indigenous Languages Vocabulary Sheet (9-12)

**Directions:**

- In Column 2, rewrite the word in your own Native language (if available). If it's not viable, you may use the Native language of a neighbor, friend, or community member.
- In Column 3, rewrite the word in your own Native language (if available). If it's not viable, you may use the Native language of a neighbor, friend, or community member. If you would prefer, you can write it as the second language rewrite.
- In Column 4, write the definition of the vocabulary word.

<b>Vocabulary Word</b>	<hr/>	<hr/>	<b>Definition</b>
	<b>Language Rewrite</b>	<b>Language Rewrite</b>	
Bison			
Scarcity			
Transformed			
Subsistence			
Herd			

Stewardship			
Harvest			
Commercial Hunting			
Carcasses			
Livestock			



**Directions:** Add specific details from the story and indicate whether this use reflects stewardship or control.

**When Raven Controlled the Herd**

Who Benefitted:

Who Struggled:

What happened to food access:

**When the Herd was Released**

Who Benefitted:

Who Struggled:

What happened to food access:

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

## Bison News Report

**Scenario:** Imagine it is the late 1880s. You are a reporter for a local newspaper tasked with writing a story about the dramatic decline of bison across the Great Plains. Your goal is to inform the public about what happened and why it matters.

### Step 1: Gather Your Facts

- Using the historical paragraph, internet resources, and identify key details for your story:
  - Approximate bison population before and after eradication
  - Main uses of bison for Plains Indigenous communities
  - Human activities that caused the decline (commercial hunting, railroads, government policies)
  - Consequences for Indigenous communities

### Step 2: Write Your Article

- Your article should include:
  - **Headline:** Catchy, attention-grabbing title
  - **Lead Paragraph:** Summarize the “who, what, when, where, why” of the bison crisis
  - **Body Paragraph(s):** Expand on consequences for Indigenous communities, including food, clothing, tools, and social impacts
  - **Closing Sentence:** Explain why this event is important for readers to know

### Step 3: Add a Creative Element (Optional but Encouraged)

- Add a **sketch, small illustration, or “photo caption”** showing bison, hunters, or Plains life
- Include **at least 3 vocabulary words** from your lesson (scarcity, subsistence, harvest, commercial hunting, carcasses, etc.)

## The Bison Come Back Showcase

**Directions:** Create a poster in 15 minutes or less that shows the story of bison loss and recovery, including key facts, cultural importance, and ecological impact. Include at least 5 vocabulary words from the lesson.

### Step 1: Create Your Poster

- Design a **visual poster** that tells the story of bison loss and recovery. Your poster should include:
  1. **Key Facts:** Include important historical and modern information about bison populations, near-extinction, and revitalization efforts.
  2. **Cultural Significance:** Show how bison are important to Indigenous communities for food, traditions, and cultural identity.
  3. **Ecological Impact:** Explain the role of bison in the Great Plains ecosystem and how their return affects the land.
  4. **Visual Elements:** Add drawings, charts, symbols, or photos to illustrate your points.

### Step 2: Include Vocabulary

- Use **at least 5 key vocabulary words** from the lesson in your poster (examples: scarcity, herd, stewardship, subsistence, harvest, commercial hunting, carcasses). Words can appear in captions, labels, or short explanations.

### Step 3: Reflection Paragraph (Optional)

- Include a **short paragraph (3–5 sentences)** on your poster reflecting on what you learned:
  - Why is the revitalization of bison important for people and the environment?
  - How does this story connect past loss with modern restoration?