

## Lesson Guide: Bison

### Vocabulary:

- Bison
- Herd
- Plains
- Survive
- Share

See the attached vocabulary sheet in *Educators Guide*.

### Engage:

- **Activity 1: Show and Wonder**
  - Display images or objects related to bison:
    - Photo of bison herd.
    - Map showing where bison once roamed.
    - Pictures of items made from bison (clothing, tools, hide, etc.)
  - Ask students guiding questions:
    - "What animal do you see in this picture?"
    - "How big do you think a bison is?" (Compare to familiar animals)
    - "Where do you think bison live?"
    - "What do you think people might use from bison?"

### Explore and Explain:

- **Activity 2: The Story ‘The Buffalo are Set Free’**
  - Read aloud the story, provided in the *Educators Guide*  
Story Summary for Young Learners: Long ago, the people were very hungry. There was no meat to eat. A clever bird named Raven had hidden all the buffalo behind a big door, keeping them only for himself. The people were smart and made a plan. They turned a brave person into a puppy who went to live with Raven. One night, when Raven was sleeping, the puppy opened the door and let all the buffalo run free! Now the buffalo could roam across the plains, and the people had food again. This is how the buffalo came to belong to everyone, not just one person.
  - Discussion Questions:
    - "Why were the people hungry at the beginning?"
    - "What did Raven do that wasn't fair?"
    - "How did the people solve the problem?"
    - "Why was it important to share the buffalo?"
- **Using all parts of the Bison**
  - Discuss how Indigenous people use every part of the bison (nothing is wasted)
  - Ask guiding questions:
    - "What does it mean to waste something?"
    - Why do you think it's important not to waste things?"
    - "How can we show respect for animals?"
  - Students will match bison parts to their uses

- Handout **Activity 3: Every Part Has a Purpose**
  - Review the buffalo parts chart together and provide further explanation on all the buffalo can provide for people.
  - Have students complete the matching section on the worksheet, drawing lines to connect, then complete the writing prompt.

***Elaborate:***

- **Activity 4: Bison Then and Now**
  - Show two images side by side:
    - Historical image: Millions of bison on the plains
    - Modern image: Small herd or bison returning to Tribal lands
  - Share this simplified, age-appropriate historical context:
    - "A long time ago, there were MILLIONS of bison across the plains—so many you couldn't count them all! Indigenous people took good care of the bison and only used what they needed. But then, some people who came from far away hunted too many bison. They didn't follow the rule of only taking what you need. Almost all the bison disappeared. The Indigenous people were very sad and hungry because the bison were gone. Today, Indigenous Nations are bringing the bison back and to live on the land again, just like long ago."
  - Discuss the following as a class:
    - "Why is it important to only take what we need?"
    - "How do you think Indigenous people felt when the bison came back?"
    - "What does it mean to take care of animals?"

***Evaluate***

- **Activity 5: Share What You Learned**

Exit Ticket (Choose appropriate format by grade):

  - Students K-1: Draw a picture showing:
    - One way people used bison
    - OR: The bison running free from Raven's door
  - Students 2-3: Complete the following sentences:
    - The people were hungry because \_\_\_\_\_.
    - Bison are important because \_\_\_\_\_.
    - Today, Indigenous Nations are \_\_\_\_\_.
  - Students 4-5: Write 3-5 sentences:
    - Why are bison important to Indigenous people?
    - What happened to the bison herds?
    - Why is bringing back bison important today?

**Suggested Lesson Activities:**

- Indigenous Vocabulary
- Show and Wonder
- The Story: 'The Buffalo Are Set Free'
- Every Part Has a Purpose
- Then and Now
- Share What You Learned

**Additional Educator Resources:**

- [Bison by numbers](#)
- [Bison and the Food Web](#)
- [Bison Banquet](#)
- [NPS Bison Hub](#)
- [Intertribal Buffalo Council](#)

## The Buffalo Are Set Free

*A Story from the Jicarilla Apache People, adapted for Grades K-5*

Long, long ago, people lived on the wide, grassy plains. But there was a big problem—they had no food. The people were very, very hungry.

Every day, they looked for animals to hunt, but they could not find any buffalo. The children's bellies rumbled. The grown-ups worried. Where were all the buffalo? Why couldn't they find any meat?

The people tried to stay busy. They played games and told stories. But everyone was thinking the same thing: *We need food. We need the buffalo.*

One day, a mysterious visitor arrived at the camp. It was Raven, a large black bird. He had shiny feathers and bright, clever eyes.

Raven looked well-fed and healthy. In fact, he looked like he had plenty to eat! The people noticed something interesting—Raven had a bag with him, and inside the bag were pieces of meat.

"Where did Raven get that meat?" whispered one person.

"Look! He has plenty of food while we are starving!" said another.

The wise woman Magpie looked closely at what Raven had. "This is buffalo meat," she said.

"Raven knows where the buffalo are!"

The people decided to watch Raven carefully. *Maybe he will lead us to the buffalo,* they thought.

That evening, when Raven thought no one was watching, he began to fly home. Up, up, up he flew into the sky! He circled higher and higher until he looked as small as a dot.

Most of the people lost sight of him. But two special friends kept watching very carefully—Rattlesnake and Bat. They had excellent eyesight and could see in the dark.

"I can still see him!" said Rattlesnake. "Me too!" said Bat. "He's flying toward those black mountains in the east!"

The people followed the path that Raven had taken. They walked for many days, moving their camp four times. Finally, they found Raven's home near the Black Mountains.

And there, they saw that Raven had LOTS of buffalo meat—enough to feed many families!

Raven shared some meat with the hungry people. They were grateful, but they had questions.

"Raven, where are the buffalo?" they asked. "Please tell us, so we can hunt them too."

But Raven would not answer. He wanted to keep his secret. *If I keep the buffalo hidden, Raven thought, only I will have meat. I will be the most important one.*

The people knew they had to find where Raven was hiding the buffalo. So, they made a very clever plan.

They asked the bravest man in their group to help. Using special magic, they transformed him into an adorable little puppy! They gave the puppy beautiful eyes made from shiny black stone called obsidian. The eyes sparkled and looked very real.

The people hid the puppy under some bushes near the old campsite. Then they quietly moved their camp away, making it look like they had left.

The next day, Raven's children came to explore the empty camp. "Look!" cried the youngest child. "A puppy! A cute little puppy!"

The puppy wagged its tail and made sweet puppy sounds. Raven's youngest child fell in love with the puppy right away.

"Can I keep him? Please, please, can I keep him?" begged the child.

But Raven was suspicious. *This puppy appeared right after those people left, he thought. Maybe this is a trick.*

To test if it was a real puppy, Raven brought a hot poker close to the puppy's face, near its eyes.

The puppy yelped and cried out, just like a real puppy would!

"See, Father?" said the child. "It's just a puppy. He's scared of the hot poker. A person would have stayed quiet."

Raven decided the puppy was real. "Very well," he said. "You may keep the dog." The child was so happy! "I will name you *Înôldî*," the child said, hugging the puppy tight.

The puppy lived with Raven and his family. Every day, the puppy followed Raven everywhere he went. The children played with the puppy. Raven got used to having the puppy around. And every day, the puppy watched and learned.

One day, the puppy discovered Raven's big secret.

Behind Raven's home, there was a HUGE door. And behind that door, Raven had trapped ALL the buffalo! Every single one! There were hundreds and hundreds of buffalo—big ones, small ones, mothers and babies—all crowded together behind that door.

Whenever Raven wanted meat, he would open the door just a tiny bit, let one buffalo out, hunt it, and close the door again. This way, Raven controlled all the buffalo. He decided who ate and who went hungry. He kept all the power for himself.

*This isn't fair!* thought the puppy. *The buffalo should be free. They should belong to everyone, not just Raven. The people are starving, and all these buffalo are locked up!*

The puppy knew what he had to do.

That night, when Raven and all his children were sound asleep, the puppy crept quietly to the big door.

The door was heavy. The puppy pushed and pushed with his nose. He pulled with his teeth. Finally—*CREAK*—the door began to open!

"Go! Run! You're free!" barked the puppy.

The buffalo didn't need to be told twice! They burst through the door in a thundering stampede! BOOM! BOOM! BOOM!

Their hooves shook the ground like an earthquake. Dust flew everywhere. The sound of hundreds of buffalo running was like rolling thunder!

Raven woke up with a start. "What's happening?!" he cried.

He ran outside and saw the buffalo escaping in every direction—north, south, east, and west! They were running free across the plains!

"NO! Come back! COME BACK!" Raven shouted. He grabbed his bow and arrows and started shooting, trying to stop them. But there were too many buffalo, and they were running too fast.

Most of the buffalo escaped. The great herd spread out across the wide plains, running free at last!

One old buffalo at the very back of the herd was struggling to keep up. The man, still in his puppy form, grabbed onto that buffalo's side and rode away with the herd.

Raven looked everywhere for the puppy, but he couldn't find him anywhere. He didn't know that the puppy had escaped with the last buffalo.

The man rode the old buffalo all the way back to his people. When he arrived at camp, he transformed back into his human form.

"I did it!" he announced. "The buffalo are free! They are spreading across the plains right now!"

The people cheered and danced with joy! The children jumped up and down. The elders smiled with relief. Everyone was so happy!

The people moved their camp back to the plains. And sure enough, they found buffalo everywhere—grazing on the grass, drinking from the rivers, roaming in great herds.

Now the people could hunt the buffalo respectfully, taking only what they needed. The buffalo provided everything: meat for food, hides for clothing, blankets, and tepees, bones for tools and toys, horns for cups and spoons, and much more. Nothing was wasted!

The people were no longer hungry. They had warm clothes. They had strong homes. They taught their children to be grateful to the buffalo and to hunt with respect, never taking more than they needed.

Back at his home, Raven was very upset. He called his children together and said:  
"The people have tricked us and taken away our buffalo. From now on, we will not hunt buffalo ourselves. We will eat only what others leave behind—the scraps of meat on the bones, the eyeballs, the bits that hunters don't want."

And that is why, to this day, ravens eat the leftovers from other animals' meals. They no longer control the buffalo. The buffalo belong to everyone.

**TEACHER EXAMPLE**

**Indigenous Languages Vocabulary Sheet (K-5)**

**Directions:**

In Column 1, rewrite the word in English. In Column 2, write the definition of the word in your own words, then in Column 3 rewrite in Native language (if available). If it's not available, you may use the Native language of a neighbor, friend, or community member.

<b>Vocabulary Word</b>	<b>English Rewrite</b>	<b>Definition</b>	<b>Cherokee</b>
			<b>Language Rewrite</b>
Bison			ᎠᎩᎠ, pronounced ya-na-sa
Herd			
Plains			
Survive			
Share			

**STUDENT WORKSHEET**

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

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

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Bison			
Herd			
Plains			
Survive			
Share			

# **Activity 1: Show and Wonder**

Display Images: bison herd, map of where bison roamed, pictures of items made with buffalo

# Bison herd



*Bison roamed from territory now known as Alaska in the north to Mexico in the south, and from California in the west to New York and Georgia in the east*

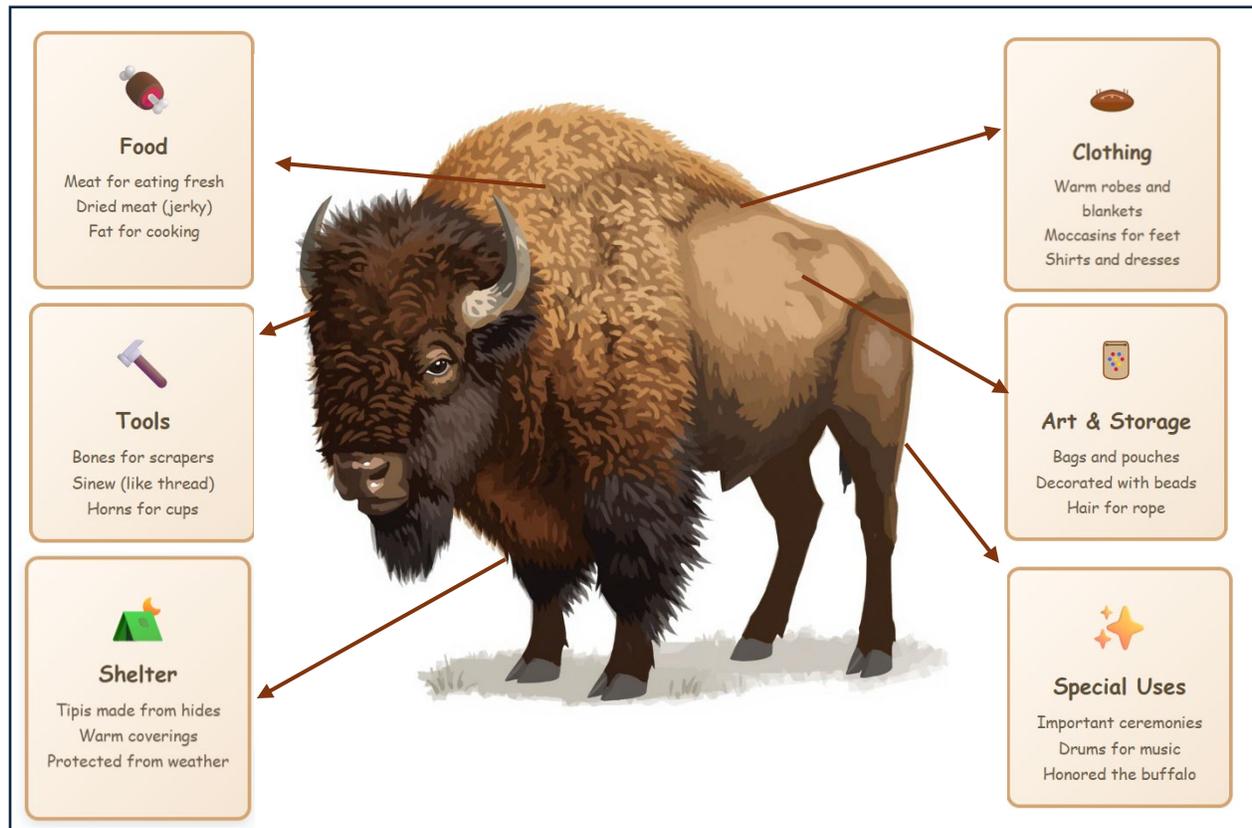


# Items made with buffalo



## Every Part Has a Purpose!

Indigenous peoples show great respect for the buffalo. They are thankful for everything the buffalo gives. Using every part shows an understanding of how precious the buffalo are. Nothing should be wasted when an animal gives its life to help people live.



### Match Each Part to Its Use:

Buffalo Part
Meat
Hide
Bones
Horns
Hair

What It Was Used For
Tools, toys, needles
Rope, stuffing for pillows
Clothing, tepees, blankets
Food for the family
Cups, spoons, decorations

**In your own words (or with a drawing), explain how using every part of the buffalo shows respect for the animal.**

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# Activity 4 Images

Historical Image of bison on the plains

Modern image of small herd



