

# Indian Education for All Units Related to Montana State Parks Madison Buffalo Jump State Park

January 2010 (revised)

## Title

Buffalo Past and Present

## Grade Level

9th – 12th

## Content Areas

Social Studies

## Duration

Five class periods and five homework assignments

## Overview and Objectives

This lesson focuses on the historical and contemporary significance of bison to Montana tribes and the indigenous peoples of the Northern Plains region. Using Madison Buffalo Jump State Park to begin the discussion of bison's importance to tribes, this lesson builds upon the purposes bison fulfilled in historical tribal economies, cosmologies, social organization, spiritual practices/beliefs, and relations with other tribes. Understanding these purposes, students will briefly examine the impact of the first "buffalo war," when in a few decades' time, Americans facilitated the near extermination of the bison and, in effect, crippled the economies of many tribes and robbed them of this vital component of their cultures and way of life. Students will learn that in spite of profound cultural, economic, and spiritual changes that have affected tribes over the last 200 years, bison still remain an important — even essential — aspect of many tribal cultures today. The tribal cultural renaissance of the last few decades has strengthened not only the traditional cultural and spiritual value of bison to these tribes, but has also assisted tribes in their efforts to address some of their current economic, nutritional/health, and societal needs. This lesson seeks to enable students to look at contemporary tribal perspectives on bison, bison management, and cultural continuity. Students will learn:

- traditional indigenous value systems and worldviews are still held by many tribal people today;
- bison are a fundamental component of many American Indian people's cultural and spiritual identity — historically and in the present;



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- bison preservation is not just a biological, economic, or management issue, but an issue of sovereignty, cultural preservation, and physical survival;
- tribal definitions of “cultural resource” differ from those of the academic, political, and legal entities who presently determine bison status, management, and preservation (or demise);
- tribes have a vested interest in the past, present, and future of American bison; and,
- understanding the historical and current values placed by tribes on bison is important to the process of determining long-term management policies and survival strategies for wild bison in the United States.

## Montana Education Standards & Benchmarks

### Indian Education for All Essential Understandings Regarding Montana Indians

**Essential Understanding 1** There is great diversity among the twelve sovereign tribes of Montana in their languages, cultures, histories, and governments. Each tribe has a distinct and unique cultural heritage that contributes to modern Montana.

**Essential Understanding 3** The ideologies of Native traditional beliefs and spirituality persist into modern day life as tribal cultures, traditions, and languages are still practiced by many American Indian people and are incorporated into how tribes govern and manage their affairs.

Additionally, each tribe has its own oral histories, which are as valid as written histories. These histories predate the “discovery” of North America.

**Essential Understanding 6** History is a story most often related through the subjective experience of the teller. With the inclusion of more and varied voices, histories are being rediscovered and revised. History told from American Indian perspectives frequently conflicts with the stories mainstream historians tell.

**Essential Understanding 7** American Indian tribal nations are inherent sovereign nations and they possess sovereign powers, separate and independent from the federal and state governments. However, under the American legal system, the extent and breadth of self-governing powers are not the same for each tribe.

### Montana Content Standards

**Social Studies Content Standard 1:** Students access, synthesize, and evaluate information to communicate and apply social studies knowledge to real world situations.

**Benchmarks:** Students will...

**(1)(c)** synthesize and apply information to formulate and support reasonable personal convictions within groups and participate in negotiations to arrive at solutions to differences....

**Social Studies Content Standard 3:** Students apply geographic knowledge and skills (e.g., location, place, human/environment interactions, movement, and regions).

**Benchmarks:** Students will...

**(1)(d)** analyze how human settlement patterns create cooperation and conflict which influence the division and control of the Earth (e.g., treaties, economics, exploration, borders, religion, exploitation, water rights, [etc.]).

**Social Studies Content Standard 4:** Students demonstrate an understanding of the effects of time, continuity, and change on historical and future perspectives and relationships.

**Benchmarks:** Students will...

**(1)(h)** analyze and illustrate the major issues concerning history, culture, tribal sovereignty and current status of the American Indian tribes and bands in Montana and the United States....

**Social Studies Content Standard 6:** Students demonstrate an understanding of the impact of human interactions and cultural diversity on societies.

**Benchmarks:** Students will...

**(1)(d)** evaluate how the unique characteristics of American Indian tribes and other cultural groups have contributed to Montana's history and contemporary life (e.g., legal and political relationships between and among tribal, state, and federal governments).

**English Language Arts - Writing** CCRA.W.2 Write informative/explanatory texts to examine and convey complex ideas and information clearly and accurately through the effective selection, organization, and analysis of content.

## Materials and Resources Needed

[Map of Tribal Territories in Montana](#)

[Iinnii Initiative: The Return of the Buffalo](#)

["The Buffalo People" \(2014\)](#)

[Fort Peck Bison Restoration" \(2014\)](#)

["Big Medicine" \(2010\)](#)

### Discussion Questions for the movie clips

**Traditional Tribal Uses of Bison (diagram)** (Used with permission from the Montana Historical Society, Helena.)

“How It Worked” (a description of buffalo jump components and process) in *Montana: Stories of the Land*, by Krys Holmes. Montana Historical Society Press, 2008. You will only need pages 38-39. Available online at <http://svcalt.mt.gov/education/Textbook/Chapter2/Chapter2.pdf>.

## Introduction to Madison Buffalo Jump and Bison in American Indian Culture

*Sun Buffalo Cow ran very fast along the other trail to the top of the cliff. She said, “I go into [change to] the form of earth buffalo. I will be meat for my Salish.” She jumped headlong from the high rock to the foot of the cliff.*

*The people came and saw the dead buffalo. They said: “Our Mother spoke true words. Here is herd buffalo fallen from the rock. It is warm meat. It is good.”*

—From “Sun Buffalo Cow Sacrificed Her Life” as told by Lassaw Redhorn, Francois Skyenna, Dominic Michell, in *I Will be Meat for My Salish*, opposite inside title page.

Madison Buffalo State Park, located near the headwaters of the Missouri River, is the site of a buffalo jump used by numerous tribes for at least 2,000 years (from approximately 500 B.C. to 1750 A.D). During and after the era when the Madison Buffalo Jump was used, this river valley drew diverse tribes from throughout the West for a common purpose: buffalo hunting.

Although bison were central to northern Plains tribal economies and cultures, many tribes from the Plateau and Great Basin regions also made annual journey to hunt bison and/or trade with Plains tribes for bison products. Some of the tribes who used the Missouri headwaters region to hunt bison include the Shoshone, Nez Perce, Bannock, Salish, Blackfeet, Gros Ventre, Assiniboine, Cree, Crow, Cheyenne, Arapaho, Dakota, Lakota, and Hidatsa. To these tribes, bison fulfilled a range of physical, cultural, spiritual, and economic purposes. Annual bison hunts both facilitated intertribal cooperation and alliances and generated intertribal competition and warfare. In many ways, bison defined and shaped many of these cultures and a way of life for many tribes.

Each tribe had its own specific cultural protocols, often defined by the tribe’s cosmology, that determined the proper course of action regarding buffalo hunting, including distribution of labor, ceremonies and rituals that were part of the hunting process, and uses of various parts of the bison by tribal members for ceremonial purposes. Within the oral traditions of these tribes are buffalo stories, including stories about the origins of bison, how tribes were taught to hunt using the buffalo jump, and tribal-bison relationships. Although the cultures and oral traditions of buffalo-hunting tribes differ, there are some similarities underlining their relationship to the bison, notably the principle of respect for the bison, who are perceived as relatives, and an acknowledgement of the interrelated well-being of humans and bison.

In the mid-1800s came the first of the “buffalo wars” — an effort by the United States to facilitate white settlement of the West and American control over tribally-occupied lands. Hide-

harvesting sharp-shooters reduced the bison population from over 20,000,000 in the 1840s to less than 2,000 by 1882, effectively debilitating indigenous peoples who so greatly relied on this resource for survival and cultural identity. For the tribes, the near extinction of the bison meant a radical and painful plunge into poverty and suffering and a sudden bewildering dependence on the very nation that had stripped them of their livelihood and sought to divest them of their cultures as well.

But is this situation the end of the story? Have tribes who once revered and relied on the bison as the core of their economies and an essential component of their spiritual practices completely severed their cultural, economic or spiritual reliance on bison in the present era? Or are bison still relevant to tribal identities and important to tribes' cultural survival? How is the present situation regarding the bison of Yellowstone National Park an ethical issue, an issue of sovereignty, and an issue of cultural continuity for many tribal people? Finally, what can be learned from the past and present that may be useful for improving the management of America's last wild bison herd and ensuring its survival into the future?

## Activities and Procedures

### **Class Period 1: Madison Buffalo Jump, History of Bison and Tribes, Uses of Bison**

For this period, you will need the Introduction (provided in lesson) to use as a lecture or print off hard copies for an in-class reading assignment, the map of tribal territories, the Traditional Uses of Bison diagram and a hard copy of the "How It Worked" description of a buffalo jump from *Montana: Stories of the Land*.

Utilize the tribal territories map to show the tribes and the reservations in Montana. The map shows the traditional territories tribes utilized. Note: The boundaries defined on this map were determined by non-Indian officials at treaty time. Have the students locate the Madison Buffalo Jump State Park on the map. According to the map, whose traditional territory is the park located in? Mention that many tribes utilized this site. Be sure to mention that tribes from other regions, such as the Kootenai, Nez Perce, Cree, and Shoshone, also hunted bison in this area and may have used this buffalo jump.

Briefly describe how a buffalo jump worked, using the description of a buffalo jump from *Montana: Stories of the Land*, Chapter 2, pages 38-39.

Next, have students read the introduction – or develop lecture notes/slides based upon the introduction and share with the class.

Go over the diagram "Traditional Uses of Bison" with your class. You can view it online, print it as a poster, or print individual page-sized copies for each student. Have the students categorize the types of uses for bison into the following categories (this can be done on the board, as a class): food; clothing; tools; household goods; medicine; spiritual practices/ceremonies; shelter; transportation; horse equipment; toys; ornamentation; weaponry.

Summarize the importance of bison to tribes by displaying tribal seals that have images of bison. [Montana Tribal Nations Seals](#)

During the following class periods, students will be watching short films that show how a few tribes are working to bring bison back to their respective reservations.

### **Class Periods 2 - 3: Tribal Perspectives and Bison**

Have students watch the films and have them provide answers to the discussion questions (individually or in small groups).

- a. Which tribe is featured in the video?
- b. What were the main themes of the film?
- c. What were some of the issues put forth in the film?
- d. What are the benefits of reintroducing bison for the tribes?
- e. What was a significant quote or statement regarding bison from a tribal member that had an impact on you? Explain.

The first film is about the Blackfeet and is called – “Iinnii Initiative: The Return of the Buffalo”

The second film is about the Assiniboine and Sioux on the Fort Peck Reservation and is called – “Fort Peck Bison Restoration”

The third film is about the Assiniboine and Gros Ventre on Fort Belknap and their bison efforts and is called - "The Buffalo People"

The final film is called “Big Medicine” and shows students on the Flathead Reservation making a buffalo image.

## **Assessment**

Write a one-two page response to each of the films, taking into account the historical significance of bison for the tribes. These responses should be the students’ own reflections on the impacts of bison extermination on tribes, tribal economies, tribal cultures, spirituality, social structures (i.e., gender roles, seasonal habits, lifestyle, etc.), physical survival, relationship to environment, and so on. The goal of this assignment is for students to integrate cultural and historical knowledge they have gathered and to think analytically about the all-encompassing impact of bison extermination on these tribes, which will provide them with a historical background for understanding tribal perspectives on bison today.

Have students develop a poster board presentation regarding key concepts they learned from watching the films and have them share with the class.

## Related Extension Activities and Online Materials

Dig deeper into issues regarding Yellowstone bison and the differing viewpoints surrounding this issue. Use the film “Facing the Storm” which was sent to all Montana high school libraries. This 2011 video by High Plains Films is a comprehensive documentary on the iconic American bison and its history in the American wilderness. Using archival materials and interviews with scientist, ranchers, animal rights activists, and state governors, the filmmakers tell the story of the eradication of approximately 30 million buffalo from the Great Plains areas in less than 50 years.

The [Fort Peck PlaceNames Interdisciplinary Unit](#) (link takes a while to open) has a section that covers the topic of Yellowstone bison and reintroduction efforts by tribes.

Visit Madison Buffalo Jump and/or the First Peoples Buffalo Jump state parks and have a park interpreter give you a tour and presentation. Contact each park via <http://stateparks.mt.gov/> website to schedule a fieldtrip or call 406-994-6934 to reach the Madison Buffalo Jump’s interpretive guide.

Visit the exhibits at the Montana Historical Society’s Museum — “Homeland” gallery and “Neither Empty Nor Unknown: Montana at the Time of Lewis and Clark” — in Helena, Montana. Contact the education office at 406-444-4789 to schedule a class field trip and tour.

Take a field trip to Yellowstone National Park to see wild bison. You may want to check with the National Park Service at Yellowstone National Park online to find out how to get a guided tour.

Visit the National Bison Range, Moiese, Montana. Learn more about the NBR at [https://www.fws.gov/refuge/national\\_bison\\_range/](https://www.fws.gov/refuge/national_bison_range/). This website also has maps and visitor information.

Head-Smashed-In Buffalo Jump [www.head-smashed-in.com/](http://www.head-smashed-in.com/) (Has a short virtual tour.)

Wahkpa Chu'gn archaeological site- a 2,000-year-old buffalo jump call 406-265-4000 for information

Website of bison/tribe related publications for research  
<http://nationalhumanitiescenter.org/tserve/nattrans/ntecoindian/ecolinksbuffalo.htm>

**Bison Profile and Status** from [http://fieldguide.mt.gov/detail\\_AMALE01010.aspx](http://fieldguide.mt.gov/detail_AMALE01010.aspx) (Also includes definitions of “Species of Concern” and Global/State Rankings.)

## Traditional Tribal Uses of Bison (some apply to current tribal uses)

VARIOUS USES OF THE BUFFALO				
<p><b>HIDE</b></p> <p><i>Buckskin:</i> tipi covers cradles, bedding winter robes clothing moccasin tops pipe bags, pouches paint bags quivers gun cases, lance covers coup flag covers dolls</p> <p><i>Rawhide:</i> containers, buckets shields lance cases, knife cases bullet pouches belts moccasin soles arm bands drums, drumsticks ropes, thongs cinches, saddles stirrups, quirts horse masks horse forehead ornaments splints bull boats</p>	<p><b>HAIR</b> headdresses medicine balls saddle pad filler pillows ropes halters ornaments</p> <p><b>TAIL</b> medicine switch fly brush lodge decoration whips</p> <p><b>HOOF &amp; FEET</b> glue rattles</p> <p><b>SCROTUM</b> rattles</p> <p><b>BUFFALO CHIPS</b> fuel, signals ceremonial smoking</p>	<p><b>MUSCLES</b> <i>sinew:</i> bows thread arrows cinches glue</p> <p><b>PAUNCH</b> <i>lining:</i> buckets, cups basins, dishes</p>	<p><b>VARIOUS USES OF THE BUFFALO</b></p> <p><b>SKULL</b> ceremonies sun dance prayer</p> <p><b>BRAINS</b> hide preparation</p> <p><b>BEARD</b> ornamentation of clothing &amp; weapons</p> <p><b>TONGUE</b> best part of meat</p> <p><b>BLADDER</b> sinew pouches quill pouches small medicine bags</p> <p><b>MEAT</b> Every part eaten</p> <p><i>The buffalo held a sacred place in Plains Indian cultures and was central to their way of life.</i></p>	<p><b>BONES</b> knives awls, scrapers arrowheads shovels, splints winter sleds arrow straighteners saddle trees war clubs, quirts paint brushes game dice, ornaments fish hooks</p> <p><b>HORNS</b> headdresses cups spoons, ladles fire carriers powderhorn signals toys</p>

(Image above used with permission from the Montana Historical Society, Helena, Montana.)