



Comeback of the Prairie Bison

NewsDepth, April 30, 2009

Classroom Activities

Online Lesson Plans

Additional Resources

Overview:

During the spring, we see plenty of baby animals. However, the birth of prairie bison is significant, as the species nearly went extinct a little more than a century ago. Nature conservations in a Siouxland nature preserve in northwest Iowa are working hard to protect prairie bison, and for the first time since the herd moved there last fall from South Dakota, a mother has given birth. Eight more bison are due this spring. While the bison birth is significant to the animal species' population, the reason the bison was reintroduced has more to do with reinvigorating the prairie. Their grazing makes this environment more suitable for other animals, like the hundreds of species of plants and birds, along with the prairie rattlesnake, that make their home where the bison now roam. Students will learn more about the bison and their history and importance in preserving grasslands.

(Source for photos: <http://www.akronhometowner.com/>)

Grade Level: 4-5

Subject: Social Studies

Standards:

Students will explain how American Indians settled the continent and interacted with their environment in different ways.



Classroom Activities:

1. Activity #1 "Give me a home where the buffalo roam" (10-15 minutes)

- Even though the NewsDepth feature made no mention of "buffalo," the terms buffalo and bison have been used synonymously for years.

- Show your students a “Buffalo nickel” or show them the picture.
- Ask them to name the animal. Most will probably identify it as a buffalo especially since it is called a buffalo nickel.
- Ask students if they know the difference between a buffalo and a bison. Visit this site:



<http://www.tpwd.state.tx.us/learning/resources/activities/bison/taxonomy.phtml> for an explanation of the difference.

2. Activity #2 Discovering the Importance of Preserving the Bison

- Bisons are native to North America. These animals played a vital role in the lives of the Plains Indians. Their meat and skins provided food, clothing and shelter. The importance of bison in today’s lifestyles has diminished. However, in the NewsDepth feature, the importance of preserving the bison was twofold. What were the 2 reasons given for wanting to preserve the bison? Refer to the overview. Another site explaining this :



<http://www.mnn.com/local-reports/south-dakota/nature-conservancy/conservancy-transfers-bison-to-iowa> This site also highlights the move from South Dakota to Iowa.

- There are also significant health benefits of eating the meat of bison, and the consumption of bison meat has risen significantly. How many of you have ever had a Buffalo Burger or Buffalo Chips or a Buffalo Steak?

The following website goes into more detail about the health benefits:

<http://www.bisoncentral.com/bison-cooking-health.php?c=67&d=99&a=1056&w=2&r=Y>

3. Activity #3 How Many Ways Can You Use A Buffalo?

- This interactive site allows you to put your mouse on different parts of the buffalo to discover how the Indians used everything from its beard—to its brains! They even found a use for bison doo-doo—it fueled their cooking fire. Aren't you glad your home has an oven?

<http://www.texasbeyondhistory.net/kids/buffalo.html>

- Did you know that the bison (or buffalo) is the biggest land animal in North America? They can weigh more than 2,000 pounds—that's as much as a car! So how did Indians hunt and kill them—and without guns? The link at the site informs students about their powerful strategy.

Online Lesson Plans

<http://homepages.stmartin.edu/students/rfrasier/webquest.htm>

American bison WebQuest (directed at 3rd grade, but can be used for older grade levels)

http://www.defenders.org/wildlife_and_habitat/wildlife/bison.php

At home on the range. This is a lesson plan for grades 6-8

<http://www.tallgrass.org/buffalo.html>

Learning about bison classroom activities

Additional Resources

<http://www.pbs.org/wnet/nature/episodes/american-buffalo-spirit-of-a-nation/introduction/2183/>

PBS's American Buffalo: The Spirit of a Nation

http://www.plentycoups.org/educate/educator/lessons/socstudies/buffalo_1.html

Educator's site: Bison: Their influence on the cultures of the plains

http://www.defenders.org/wildlife_and_habitat/wildlife/bison.php

Defenders of wildlife. Good site that shows a video of the bison as well as a soundtrack

<http://www.sierraclub.org/lewisandclark/species/bison.asp>

In the footsteps of Lewis and Clark - a look at then and now with the bison

<http://www.tallgrass.org/buffalo.html>

Friends of the Prairie Learning Center

<http://kids.yahoo.com/search?p=bison>

Yahoo kids bison and buffalo sites

<http://www.whozoo.org/mammals/Hoof/bovids/bison.htm>

Picture gallery of bison

<http://www.nps.gov/archive/wica/Bison.htm>

Wind Cave National Park bison information

http://www.newwest.net/city/article/bob_jackson_waxes_about_bison_culture_and_traditional_ag/C396/L396/

Bob Jackson on "Bison Culture"