



Plains Indians

Suggested Pre-visit Activities

These activities are tied into the Missouri, Illinois, and national standards for Social Studies and Language Arts.



Lesson Overview

Students will roleplay a discussion about how to use natural resources from different perspectives.

Objectives

The object of this activity is to help students to understand the conflicts that arose over natural resources on the Great Plains during the 1880s.

Description

The year is 1872. The dwindling number of buffalo on the Great Plains is having a dramatic affect on several groups of people. In their groups, have students debate a course of action agreeable to all groups. Select one student as moderator. Assign the others one of the roles from the page titled "ACTIVITY ROLES."

Historical Background

The traditional way of life for many Plains Indian people, whether agricultural or nomadic hunter-gatherer, followed the cycle of seasons. Springtime brought warmer weather and the chance to hunt, plant, or socialize after months of confinement in winter quarters. During the summer months, people traveled, traded, and gathered for ceremonies and celebrations. Fall was a time to gather food and prepare for the rigors of winter. During the long winter months, people mended and made clothes, spent time with family, and passed on tribal history through stories and songs. Generations of Plains Indian people adapted to this cycle, developing distinct and specialized skills that characterize their cultures.

Many Americans are familiar with the nomadic hunting tribes, such as the Lakota, Cheyenne, or Crow. However, some Plains Indian tribes lived in permanent villages along rivers. Tribes like the Hidatsa and Mandan grew corn, beans, and squash in the rich soil along river floodplains. Because their villages remained in one place, they became the hub of a trade network extending for thousands of miles across North America. People brought horses, buffalo meat and hides, and European trade goods to exchange for surplus agricultural products.

During the 1800s, thousands of buffalo roamed the Great Plains grazing on abundant prairie grasses. Plains Indian people who followed these herds relied on the animal for food, shelter, and clothing. To them, buffalo were special and sacred. To this day, the buffalo figures prominently in Plains Indian stories, songs, and ceremonies.

As settlers flooded onto the Great Plains, thousands of men, women, and children died in defending their traditional way of life. Those who surrendered were forced to live within reservations, where their songs, dances, and ceremonies were illegal. The buffalo herds were slaughtered to near extinction, and many people feared the Plains Indians would also become extinct. Today, Plains Indian culture is experiencing a resurgence. It is visible in art, music, literature, and film, as well as powwows and cultural demonstrations. Museum Education Programs at Jefferson National Expansion Memorial interpret traditional Plains Indian life and its significance in American history.

Vocabulary

bison—a wild animal with a shaggy mane and curved horns; another name for the American buffalo

community—a group of people living together and having similar stories and traditions.

culture—the ideas, skills, arts, tools, and way of life of a certain people in a certain time.

environment—all the conditions that surround a person, animal, or plant, which affect its growth, actions, and character.

Great Plains—the level stretch of land located between the Rocky Mountains and the Mississippi River

holiday—a day of celebrating or commemorating a special person or event.

native—having to do with the place one was born

nomads—a group of people that moves from place-to-place, making its home in different areas

pioneer—a person who goes before others. Pioneers led the way in settling the West.

rawhide—a piece of animal skin that has not been treated in any way, but dries hard and stiff

resource—something that meets the needs of a community. Resources can come from nature or be made.

season—a period of time marked by weather or special events. Winter, spring, summer, and fall are the seasons of the year.

settler—a person who makes a permanent home in a place.

sinew—a stringy fiber connecting muscle tissues to bone; used by American Indians for sewing, bowstrings, etc.

ACTIVITY ROLES

<p>RANCHERS All these buffalo eat the grass where we graze our cattle and foul the water holes. Stampedes scatter our herds. The glut of cheap buffalo hides forces down prices for our hides.</p>	<p>SOLDIERS Killing off the buffalo will weaken rebellious American Indians. The sooner we can do this, the sooner we will have peace on the frontier.</p>
<p>SPORT HUNTERS Buffalo hunting is great sport; there are so many it's hard to miss. We shoot them right from the train. Sometimes soldiers give us free ammunition.</p>	<p>FARMERS Buffalo don't bother us much. We collect the bones to be used for fertilizer and bone china back east. Sometimes the Indians beg us for food.</p>
<p>FACTORY OWNERS We need the hides from the buffalo for the leather belts that run our machines. We will pay good money for as many hides as we can get.</p>	<p>HISTORIAN The killing must stop. Buffalo must not become extinct. Set aside Yellowstone as a place to preserve the buffalo and the wilderness for the future.</p>
<p>AMERICAN INDIANS The Buffalo supply us with food, shelter, and clothing. The dwindling herds mean we have less of what we need to meet our basic needs. These ranchers have so many cattle, couldn't we have some for food?</p>	<p>MODERATOR Assist the groups in coming to an agreeable solution. All parties must benefit, and the result must be peaceable. Record the process and results on the board.</p>

Book List

Terry, Michael. *Daily Life in a Plains Indian Village*, 1868. New York, NY: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1999.

Goble, Paul. *Iktomi and the Buzzard; A Plains Indian Story*. New York, NY: Orchard Books, 1994.

Goble, Paul. *The Gift of the Sacred Dog*. New York, NY: Aladdin Library Reprints. 1984.

Bruchac, Joseph and London, Jonathan. *Thirteen Moons On Turtle's Back: A Native American Year of Moons*. New York, NY: Putnam and Grossett Publishing, 1992.

Matthaei, Gay, *The Ledgerbook of Thomas Blue Eagle*. Watertown, MA: Charlesbridge Publishing, 1994.

Websites

Knife River Indian Villages National Historic Site
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www.nps.gov/knri

Fort Union Trading Post National Historic Site
15550 Highway 1804
Williston, ND 58501
(701) 572-9083
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Nez Perce National Historical Park
39063 U.S. Highway 95
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