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# Bison by the Numbers

## Objective:

Students will be able to create a bar graph using data showing the American bison population in different years.

## South Dakota Math Standards:

3.N.1.1, 3.S.1.1, 3.S.1.2, 4.N.1.1, 4.S.1.1

## Materials:

- Student worksheets and pencils

## Procedure:

1. Remind the class that a park ranger from Badlands National Park recently visited the class and talked about Native American uses of the bison. The ranger mentioned that there were millions and millions of bison in North America in 1800, but that by 1900 there were fewer than 500. The buffalo nearly went extinct!
2. Explain that the class will now take a closer look at what happened to the bison population by creating a bar graph showing the changes in bison population over time. Hand out “Bison by the Numbers” worksheet and have students draw a bar graph using the data provided.
3. Lead a class discussion of the graph and what it means. Remind students that the bison were once tremendously abundant and that they constituted one of the most important natural resources for Plains Indians. This one animal could provide almost everything a person needed to survive in the often-harsh environment of the prairie: food, shelter, clothing, and tools. Examine the graph and notice the timing of the bison’s precipitous decline in the mid to late 19th century.

Reiterate the causes of this dropoff, as discussed in the ranger’s classroom visit: the arrival of settlers on the prairie as the United States expanded westward led to habitat loss and overhunting. The near-extinction of the bison led to huge changes in the way of life of the Native Americans of the Plains. Have students imagine what it would have felt like to have been a Native American alive at that time, forced to give up a lifestyle and long-standing traditions.