

TOPIC 5 – BISON HUNTING

Topic Overview

Topic 5 highlights the decimation of the bison herds of the Great Plains. It includes primary sources that will help you understand the reasoning and actions behind the horrific slaughter of these magnificent animals.

Topic Objectives

- As a result of the study of Topic 5, you will be able to
 - Analyze and interpret primary documents.
 - Examine circumstances leading to the decimation of the bison herds.
 - Understand how the people living in Dakota Territory were impacted by the loss of the bison herds.

ND Content Standards

- 8.1.2
- 8.2.10
- 8.2.11
- 8.3.2
- 8.6.1

Common Core Standards

- RH 2
- RH 7
- WHST 1
- WHST 2
- WHST 9

Topic Activities

- Learning from Historical Documents 1
- Learning from Historical Documents 2
- Debate/Discussion



Learning from Historical Documents 1

To access a photo/document/map, refer to the topic reading assignment or use the SEARCH feature to enter its name or number.

The American bison, the largest land animal native to North America, prospered in the open grasslands of this country for centuries. Perhaps as many as 30 million bison once roamed the Great Plains from the Rocky Mountains to the Mississippi River. Bison hunting was an activity fundamental to the Plains Indians; however, it was later adopted by American professional hunters. Bison were hunted almost to extinction in the 19th century.

Study the photograph of the bison eating grass in the Badlands (**photo 10825-01-060**). In addition, complete an Internet search to find images that Catlin painted of Plains Indians hunting bison and complete the chart below. The following sites may be of assistance to you:

- <http://americanart.si.edu/exhibitions/online/catlin/highlights.html>, a site that provides a virtual tour of Catlin paintings, particularly numbers 9, 10, 14, 15, 23, and 25; and
- <http://www.philaprintshop.com/catlin.html> that displays several paintings of Catlin relating to the bison.

George Catlin (1796-1872) was an American painter, author, and traveler who specialized in portraits of American Indians. Catlin journeyed west five times in the 1830s to paint the Plains Indians and their way of life. He was the first artist to record the Plains Indians in their own territories.

After reading and closely observing a few of Catlin's paintings, complete the following chart to determine the role that bison played in the lives of both the Plains Indians and professional hunters during the mid-1880s. Write a concluding statement on what you learned about bison hunting and the people who hunted them.

NORTH DAKOTA: PEOPLE LIVING ON THE LAND

Unit 3 – Lesson 2 – Topic 5

Learning from Historical Documents 1 (continued)

Plains Indians	Professional Hunters
Methods Used to Hunt Bison	Methods Used to Hunt Bison
Reason(s) to Hunt Bison	Reason(s) to Hunt Bison
Parts of the Bison Used	Parts of the Bison Used
How Parts of Bison Were Used	How Parts of Bison Were Used

Concluding Statement:



Learning from Historical Documents 2

To access a photo/document/map, refer to the topic reading assignment or use the SEARCH feature to enter its name or number.

The bison were a central part of the Indians' food, fuel, shelter, and religion. The supply of bison had seemed inexhaustible, but the increase of railroad transportation and demand for hides in the East depleted the herds. From an estimated bison population of over 30 million, fewer than 1,000 animals survived. Most of the slaughter took place between the 1830s and 1860s.

Study and discuss each photograph below with a partner or in a small group.

- **00739-v2-p09e** – Buffalo hide bales
- **0Re0739-v1-p52b** – Shipping buffalo bones
- **D0480** – Red River carts with bones
- **A3361-1** – Buffalo bones

Read the **1883 *Bismarck Tribune* interview with Running Antelope (photo C0158)**. Running Antelope was a highly respected speaker and diplomat of the Dakota Nation. With a partner or in a small group, discuss your reactions to his interview.

Debate/Discussion

The following factors contributed to the decimation of the bison herds of the Great Plains. After reading the information in Topic 5, decide which factor YOU think was most significant in the near-extinction of the bison and complete the chart below. Decide which other factors YOU think were most to least significant (descending order) in the remaining chart. Discuss/debate your and your classmates' rankings. Be prepared to defend your explanations.

- Market for bison meat
- Hunting for sport
- Railroads
- Furniture and coats
- Leather belts to drive machinery
- Sharps .50
- New tanning process
- Tanneries in New York and Pennsylvania
- Drought
- Diseases of domestic cattle

Most Significant Factor	Explanation
1.	
2.	
3.	
4.	
5.	
6.	
7.	
8.	
9.	
10.	

