

Buffalo Hunt

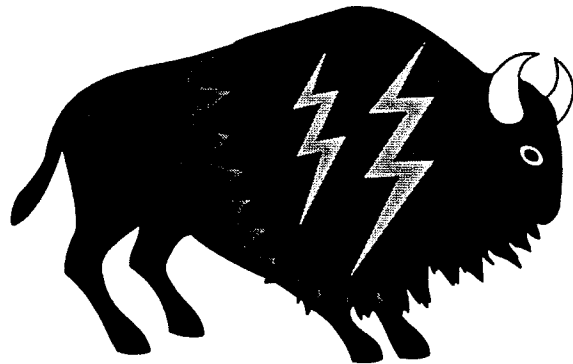
Adapted from *The Prairie Ecosystem Teacher's Guide* by Rich Durgin.

SUMMARY: Students participate in an active game that simulates two methods used by Plains tribes to hunt buffalo.

GRADE LEVEL: 3-6

TIME ⌚: 1 hour

SUBJECTS: Anthropology, Science



MATERIALS:

- ♦ 30-60 meters (100-200 ft) of rope
- ♦ blindfolds for half the class (optional)

LEARNING OBJECTIVES:

- ✓ Describe and evaluate at least two techniques used by Plains Indians to hunt buffalo.
- ✓ Understand how these techniques take advantage of buffalo behavior.

BACKGROUND:

Imagine you are standing on a hill looking down at a herd of several hundred grazing buffalo. Your task is to help your tribe kill several of these gigantic animals. But how? You don't have any guns, and you don't have horses. Instead, you think about how buffalo behave: They bunch up when they are threatened, and sometimes they will run if they are frightened.

Before the horse became a part of Plains Indian culture, Indians hunted buffalo on foot. They would encircle the herds, trick them into jumping off cliffs, or lure them into traps and then kill the animals with spears or arrows.

To encircle a herd, hunters spread out and formed a large circle around the buffalo. At the hunt leader's signal, they converged on the buffalo while running in circles and yelling and waving robes. Few buffalo escaped the confusion alive.

Sometimes, when hunters found buffalo near a sizable cliff, they would drive the stampeding herd over these "buffalo jumps." Any animals that survived the fall were killed by other hunters at the base of the cliff.

At other times, tribes would lure unsuspecting herds into impoundments such as canyons or corrals. Once trapped, the buffalo were killed with little risk to the hunters.

PROCEDURE:

To introduce the activity, have the students in small groups imagine they are Plains Indians and brainstorm ways they may be able to kill enough buffalo to last them for the winter. Their methods should not include guns or horses, or killing more buffalo than they need. Then take the class outside to the school yard. Explain that they are going to play several games of tag that are similar to the ways that Native American people used to hunt buffalo.

GAME 1

1. Divide the class into two groups: buffalo and hunters. (Make sure you have many more buffalo than hunters.) Read them the rules in the adjacent box.
2. Have the buffalo stand next to each other in an open area and close their eyes. (Younger students may need blindfolds.)
3. Take the hunters aside and explain that they are going to surround the buffalo and run in a large circle that slowly spirals in on the herd. Explain that the goal of the activity is to tag all of the buffalo before they can escape from the circle. Strongly discourage the students from running directly at the buffalo as soon as the chase begins.
4. After the hunters are in position, tell the buffalo to open their eyes and join hands. Give the signal for the hunt to begin. The game ends when all of the buffalo have been tagged or they have escaped from the circle.

RULES OF THE GAME

1. Hunters "kill" the buffalo by tagging them. The goal for the hunters is to tag all of the buffalo. The goal for the buffalo is to avoid being tagged.
2. The teacher is the hunt leader. Hunters cannot begin the chase until they are in position and the leader gives the signal.
3. The buffalo must keep their eyes closed until the leader notifies them that the hunters are in position and ready to begin the chase. (This simulates that buffalo have relatively poor vision.)
4. Until they are tagged, the buffalo must all hold hands and run in a long chain. (This simulates a stampede.)
5. Buffalo that are tagged are no longer part of the chain and must "freeze" in place.

GAME 2

1. Have the two groups switch roles. Again, ask the buffalo to stand next to each other in the middle of the field and close their eyes. Lay the rope out in a straight line on one side of the playing field.
2. Take the hunters aside and explain that the rope represents a tall cliff. Emphasize that although the buffalo think that you are going to try to tag them, the real goal is to get them to stampede over the cliff. Position the hunters in a line so that the buffalo are between the hunters and the rope.
3. Tell the buffalo to open their eyes and join hands, and give the signal for the chase to begin. Stop the chase as soon as the buffalo run over the rope. Explain to the buffalo that they have just been tricked into running over a cliff, or "buffalo jump." (Note: The "buffalo" might feel cheated because they didn't know the rope represents the cliff. This is a common reaction, and provides a good lead into the discussion in Step 4.)

4. Return to the class room. Discuss how these two hunting techniques used buffalo behavior, and the advantages/disadvantages of each method.

MODIFICATIONS AND ADAPTATIONS:

- ❖ In Game 1, if your students need a more challenging game, allow the buffalo to tag the hunters. Tagged hunters are “injured” and must drop out of the hunt.
- ❖ In Game 2, if your students have a hard time holding hands for the duration of chase, provide them with short segments of rope to keep them together.

EXTENSIONS AND ASSESSMENTS: (extensions can also be used to assess the students’ mastery of the learning objectives)**

- ** Challenge your students to design a method of hunting buffalo, then try it out. Discuss how well each idea worked.
- * Have students research the history of the Plains tribes and how horses changed their hunting methods and their cultures.
- ** Have students write a story about a Plains Indian buffalo hunt that describes the method used to capture the buffalo.