

Teaching News Is Elementary

May 13, 2016

Each week, this lesson will share some classroom activity ideas that use the newspaper or other NIE resources. You are encouraged to modify this lesson to fit the needs of your students. For example, some classrooms may be able to use this as a worksheet and others might need to ask and answer the questions in a class discussion.

Materials you will need for this lesson: The Seattle Times e-Edition, access to YouTube/computer, pencil and paper.

Article: “President makes bison the first national mammal”

Page: Main, A2

Date: Tuesday, May 10, 2016

Pre- Reading Discussion Questions:

What is a national symbol? Why do we have them? How many of the following national US symbols can you name?

National Flower:

National Bird:

National Colors:

National Tree:

National Mammal:

Answers:

National Flower: The rose; National Bird: The bald eagle; National Colors: Red, white and blue; National Tree: The Mighty Oak; National Mammal: The buffalo.

Vocabulary:

Read the following quotes and determine the meaning of the word based on how it's used in the sentence:

“The **designation** does nothing to threaten the bald eagle's position as the national animal. But the eagle, since its young are **birthed** through eggs, is not a mammal. So, at long last, the nation now has an official mammal.”

Designation: the action of choosing a place for a special purpose or giving it a special status.

Birthed: an act or instance of being born.

“The bison's **territory** once stretched from the forests of Alaska to the grasslands of Mexico. The animal remains the largest mammal in North America, with **mature** bulls weighing up to a ton. Despite their size, the animals are surprisingly quick, reaching speeds of up to 35 mph.”

Territory: a certain area that's owned or under the control of someone.

Mature: fully developed physically; full-grown.

“Native American tribes survived on bison by following herds, and **massacres** of the animals helped push their cultures into **collapse**.”

Massacres: the unnecessary, indiscriminate killing of a large number of human beings or animals.

Collapse: to break down; come to nothing; fail.

"A groundhog from Punxsutawney, Pa., serves as a national weather forecaster in an annual rite."

Rite: a ceremonial act or action.

"Bison served a small role in President Nixon's **diplomatic** opening to China."

Diplomatic: skilled in dealing with sensitive matters or people, also tactful.

Journal Writing Prompts:

Read the poem 'Buffalo* Dusk' by Carl Sandburg out loud. (You can find the text and listen to Sandburg read it himself at: <http://www.poetryfoundation.org/poems-and-poets/poems/detail/53232>)

Who is Sandburg talking about when he says "those who saw the buffalo are gone"? Are the buffalo really gone? What is the mood of the poem? How do you know? How does the poem relate to the article that you just read? How do buffalo relate to our history as a nation?

**The American buffalo and the American bison are actually the same animal. Early settlers in North America called bison "bufello" because they resemble buffalo species from Africa and Asia.*

Discussion Questions:

"They were not fast enough, however, to outrun bullets, and their extraordinary size and tendency to travel in herds made them easy targets for hunters during the 19th century. Native American tribes survived on bison by following herds, and massacres of the animals helped push their cultures into collapse."

What does it mean for a species to go extinct? What does it mean for a species to be endangered? What difference does it make to the environment for an animal to go extinct? Should we protect endangered animals – if so, whose job is it to protect them? Should we prioritize protecting certain animals (are there certain animals that it is more important to protect)? Is it important to preserve other things besides animals – for example, plants or traditions? What if a certain tradition is harmful to an endangered animal species (i.e. if the species is hunted for medicinal properties), what is most important to preserve?

Small Group Discussion and Activity (starts on new page)

Option A

Native American tribes and nations all have different characteristics, cultures and traditions. Bison played a large part in the lives of many tribes that inhabited the Great Plains region of the United States. Pick one of the Great Plains tribes and research some of the traditions and characteristics that are specific to this tribe. How are this tribe's culture and traditions preserved today? Present what you find to the rest of the class. See if you can figure out how bison played a role in this specific tribes' culture.

Option B

Bison play a very important role in the North American ecosystem, they are what is referred to as a "keystone" species. Conduct your own research to figure out the exact role of Bison in their

ecosystem, and see if you can figure out what it means to be a keystone species. What benefits do Bison have on their environment? What are the forces that threaten Bison? What kind of recovery efforts are being made to bring back the bison? See if you can make a visual or diagram that shows the role that Bison play in their ecosystem.

Extensions

- 1) Visit the following website to learn more about how each part of the bison was used by Native Americans:
<http://americanbison.si.edu/american-bison-and-american-indian-nations/>
- 2) Learn more about “animal diplomacy” (and other types of non-traditional diplomacy) by exploring the following resources on the PBS website:
<http://www.pbslearningmedia.org/resource/b905deff-93c5-4159-b902-f36a2ef33ad2/a-history-of-diplomacy/>
- 3) You might also watch this video about the extinction of the American buffalo and how this impacted Native Americans:
<http://www.history.com/topics/native-american-history/native-american-cultures/videos/american-buffalo>