

NEWS BREAK

Article: **In Yellowstone, bison reawaken a landscape**

Section: **MAIN, A11**

Sunday's News Break selects an article from **Sunday, September 7, 2025**, of The Seattle Times print replica for an in-depth reading of the news. Read the selected article and answer the attached study questions.

Feel free to adapt this lesson for your students. For instance, some educators may assign this as a homework task, while others might facilitate the reading and discussion of questions within small groups or larger class discussions.

****Please take a moment to review all NIE content before classroom use to ensure it is suitable for your students.****

Standards:

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RI.4.1

- Refer to details and examples in a text when explaining what the text says explicitly and when drawing inferences from the text.

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RI.4.2

- Determine the main idea of a text and explain how it is supported by key details; summarize the text.

Objectives:

The article explains how migrating bison at Yellowstone restore the environment by making the soil healthier and supporting more types of plants and animals. This refutes the idea that their presence is a form of overgrazing. It validates traditional knowledge of Native American tribes regarding the importance of buffalo and highlights the powerful connection between modern science/research and Indigenous knowledge and wisdom. The research makes a case of the importance of restoring large, migratory bison herds for ecological restoration, but also delves into the difficulties of doing that in today's society.

Pre-Reading Discussion:



- What do you think the article will be about, using this picture?
- Are there any clues? What can you infer?

Vocabulary Building:

Read this sentence, what do you think the highlighted words mean using *context clues*? A **context clue** is a word or words that are hints and refers to the sources of information outside of words that readers may use to predict the meaning of the word.

“After being driven nearly to **extinction** in the 1800s, the animals exist in small herds.”

Extinction Guess:

Extinction Definition:

Comprehension Questions:

1. Lakota oral histories gauged herd size by what?
2. After being driven nearly to extinction in the _____, the animals exist in small herds.
3. A new study conducted in _____, where the last migratory herd still roams, offers a glimpse into the crucial role these animals played in restoring their ecosystem and perhaps still could.
4. Of the 400,000 extant bison, more than 5,000 live in Yellowstone’s 3,500 square miles; there are two herds in the park, one of which is

- _____. (Most of the other bison outside the park are held in privately owned herds.)
5. The migratory bison of Yellowstone travel more than _____ miles in a year, grazing different habitats along a 50-mile migratory route in the northern ecosystem.
 6. The study, published in the journal *Science*, examined what?
 7. Outwardly the effect can look like what?
 8. But the researchers found that bison do what?
 9. Troy Heinert, a member of the Rosebud Sioux tribe and chief of the branch of bison management for the Bureau of Indian Affairs, said that such research validated what Indigenous peoples have known for generations. What specific examples did he give?
 10. Yellowstone, established as a national park in _____, provides scientists with a rare opportunity to study how large herbivores have shaped grazing patterns across decades.
 11. When given more land to roam, bison create a mix of different habitats and improve the quality of the _____.
 12. The power of large, migrating herbivores lies not only in their physical size but what other three key factors?
 13. For many years, Native American tribes have sought to restore bison to their lands. Hamilton noted that the study confirmed Indigenous people's _____ of the value of the bison. "They didn't need science to demonstrate that," he said. "But in modern times, other people do, and I find that as a great outcome."
 14. The study's findings, he added, were "not just cool ecology." Heinert concurred. "The connection between Indigenous people and buffalo has never been broken," he said. "But the _____ is extremely important, so that our younger generations know what having buffalo on the landscape means."

Class Discussion Questions:

- What surprised (or stood out to) you in the article?
- At first, I thought _____, but now I think _____?

Deeper-Dive comprehension questions for small groups, entire classes or journal entries and/ or essay prompts for extended enrichment:

Bison and the Ecosystem

- The text notes that "Native American tribes have sought to restore bison to their lands." Why might the restoration of bison be a key part of tribal sovereignty and cultural revitalization?
- The article highlights a study that shows how bison grazing "increase the density of microbes and nitrogen" in the soil. How can ecological restoration efforts, like reintroducing bison, be viewed as a form of

environmental stewardship and what role do government agencies (like the Bureau of Indian Affairs or the National Park Service) play in these efforts?

- A researcher in the article suggests that "if we value a system, we need to allow them to operate as close to naturally as possible." Discuss the ethical and political challenges of balancing human interests (e.g., land use, private property, public safety) with the goal of allowing an ecosystem to function naturally.

Science, Society, and Indigenous Knowledge

- The article notes that the new research "validated what Indigenous peoples have known for generations." Why is it important for modern scientific research to acknowledge and collaborate with traditional ecological knowledge?
- A researcher states that the study's findings were "not just cool ecology" but were also important because "in modern times, other people do" need scientific proof to accept traditional knowledge. What does this statement reveal about the relationship between science, traditional knowledge, and public policy in contemporary society?
- The text quotes a researcher who states, "the whole world can't function like Yellowstone." What civic and economic constraints prevent the large-scale restoration of migratory bison herds across the U.S.? Consider factors such as population density, agricultural land use, and property rights.

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