GORD DOWNIE & CHANIE WENJACK FUND

Lesson Plan

SINGING BACK THE BUFFALO

Documentary by Tasha Hubbard

SUGGESTED AGES:

Grades 9-12

SUGGESTED SUBJECT AREAS:

Geography, English Language Arts, Indigenous Studies, History, & Science

Singing Back the Buffalo can be adapted to a variety of subjects, and educators are encouraged to modify the questions contained in this viewing guide to meet the needs of their subjects and grade levels.

DURATION:

2-3 class periods (90-135 minutes total)

Disclaimer: Educators and group leaders are responsible for ensuring lessons and materials presented in their classrooms or groups are appropriate for their unique students.

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OVERVIEW

Singing Back the Buffalo follows Indigenous visionaries, scientists, and communities who are rematriating the buffalo to the heart of the North American plains they once defined, signalling a turning point for Indigenous nations, the ecosystem, and collective survival. Award-winning Cree filmmaker Dr. Tasha Hubbard combines her academic work with her goal to tell compelling Indigenous stories in a visual and connective way.

OBJECTIVES:

By the end of this lesson, students will be able to:

- Understand the historical and cultural significance of buffalo to Indigenous Peoples of the Great Plains
- Explain the concept of "buffalo consciousness" and Indigenous relationships with the natural world
- Analyze the near extinction of buffalo as a colonial strategy and its impacts on Indigenous communities
- Identify current buffalo rematriation efforts and their importance for ecological restoration
- Explore connections between Indigenous knowledge, environmental sustainability, and reconciliation
- Reflect on concepts of kinship with non-human beings and interconnectedness

MATERIALS:

- Access to **Singing Back the Buffalo**
- **Map of the Great Plains showing traditional buffalo range** OR access to **online maps of treaty territories**
- Access to **buffalosong.com** for additional resources
- Paper, notebooks, or journals for reflection and personal connection activities
- Markers, pens, or pencils for visual projects, maps, or diagrams

KEY THEMES AND CONCEPTS

- **Rematriation:** The return of buffalo to Indigenous lands and care (note the intentional use of "rematriation" rather than "repatriation").
- **Buffalo Consciousness:** Understanding the deep spiritual, cultural, and physical ties between buffalo and Indigenous Peoples.
- **Colonial Violence:** The deliberate destruction of buffalo herds as a strategy to control Indigenous Peoples.
- **Ecological Restoration:** How buffalo returns can heal damaged grassland ecosystems.
- **Indigenous Knowledge Systems:** Traditional ecological knowledge and its relevance today.
- **Kinship Relations:** Viewing buffalo as relatives and teachers rather than resources
- **The Buffalo Treaty:** Signed in 2014 and expanding, representing Indigenous-led conservation.

ACTIVITY 1: GEOGRAPHICAL CONTEXT AND SETTING (10 MINUTES)

Have students find the following on a map. There are a number of websites which allow users to view treaty territories.

1. The Great Plains of North America
2. Elk Island National Park (Alberta)
3. Blackfeet Reservation (Montana)
4. Treaty 4 and Treaty 6 territories
5. Grasslands National Park

ACTIVITY 2: VOCABULARY AND CONCEPT INTRODUCTION (10 MINUTES)

Students will be assigned one of the concepts from the following list. Students will provide a definition and explain the concept in their own words.

- Rematriation vs. repatriation
- Buffalo consciousness
- Kinship relations
- Blackfoot and Cree nations
- The Buffalo Treaty
- Industrial agriculture's impact on grasslands

Depending on the amount of time available, educators may want to adapt the activity to have students work in groups, define all concepts instead of only one, or submit written work for assessment.

VIEWING GUIDE:

Provide students with focused viewing questions:

1. How does Tasha Hubbard describe her childhood connection to being Cree?
2. What role did buffalo play in Indigenous societies before near-extinction?
3. What is the significance of buffalo songs and ceremonies according to Dr. Leroy Little Bear?
4. What are some of the challenges facing buffalo rematriation efforts?
5. How do buffalo contribute to ecosystem health?
6. What examples of successful buffalo returns does the film showcase?
7. How do different communities and nations approach welcoming buffalo back?
8. What does the film suggest about the future of buffalo and Indigenous Peoples?

CONCLUSION (30-40 MINUTES):

The following discussion questions may be assigned to students based on the educator's discretion. Students could be asked to answer some or all of the questions, either on their own or in a group.

COMPREHENSION AND ANALYSIS:

- Dr. Leroy Little Bear states: "We still have the songs. We tell the stories. We have the ceremonies. But there's no buffalo to be seen." What does he mean by this, and why is it important to reconnect youth with buffalo?
- Why does the film use the term "rematriation" instead of "repatriation"? What does this word choice signify?
- How was the near-extinction of buffalo connected to colonial policies toward Indigenous Peoples?
- What is "buffalo consciousness" and how does it differ from Western approaches to wildlife management?

CRITICAL THINKING:

- Tasha Hubbard notes that "The grasslands are the most threatened ecosystem in the world because of industrial agriculture" and that "Bringing back the buffalo revitalizes plant and animal life, increasing biodiversity." How does buffalo rematriation address both cultural and environmental concerns?
- What obstacles do communities face in bringing buffalo back to traditional territories?
- How does the film present buffalo as "relatives and teachers" rather than simply as animals or resources?
- In what ways does buffalo rematriation represent both healing from historical trauma and hope for the future?

ASSESSMENT:

Assessment can be based on students' participation in discussions, engagement with the material, and the quality of their reflections during the activity.

EXTENSIONS:

- Explore additional readings or multimedia on buffalo rematriation and Indigenous ecological knowledge.
- Create a map or visual project showing historical and contemporary buffalo ranges and Indigenous territories.
- Write a reflective journal or story connecting personal experiences to buffalo, land, or kinship with animals.
- Engage in a classroom debate or role-play on buffalo restoration versus land use priorities.

LEGACY SCHOOLS EDUCATOR REFLECTION AND IMPACT QUESTIONS:

Please complete the short **Feedback Form**.

https://www.tfaforms.com/5199886

Your feedback helps DWF improve resources and support reconciliation-focused learning throughout Canada. Plus, each submission enters you into our monthly draw for classroom resources!

Stage I – Short Term Results (Respect and Empathy, Learning History and Impact)

How effectively did my lesson help students understand the historical and cultural significance of buffalo and the impacts of colonial policies on Indigenous communities?

Stage II – Medium Term Results (Reflection, Taking Action, Reciprocal Relationships)

In what ways did the lesson encourage students to reflect on their relationship with the natural world and consider actions that support Indigenous-led conservation or environmental stewardship?

Stage III – Long Term Results (Shifting Institutional Values and Culture)

How might integrating this lesson influence my teaching practices, classroom culture, or the broader school community in supporting Indigenous perspectives, reconciliation, and environmental responsibility?