

Gifts of the Buffalo

Tatanka/Buffalo Facts

How much do you know about the ‘Tatanka?’

Buffaloes are very heavy animals. Bulls, or males, weigh between 1600 and 2000 pounds (726 to 910 kilograms). Cows, or females, seldom weigh more than 900 pounds (410 kilograms).

- 1. A tatanka has fourteen (14) pairs of ribs; humans have only twelve (12) pairs.*
- 2. Full-grown bulls (males) stand seven ft. (2.13m) or 8 ft. (2.43m) tall at the hump.*
- 3. Bulls weigh between 726 kg (1600 lbs.) and 910 kg (2000).*
- 4. A full-grown bull (male) is 10ft. (3m) to 12 ½ ft. (3.8 m) long from the tip of its nose to the end of its tail.*
- 5. The distance between a buffalo’s horns is almost 90 cm (35 in.) at its widest point.*
- 6. Cows (female) are much smaller than bulls and seldom weigh more than 410 kg (900 lbs).*
- 7. A buffalo’s height at its shoulders is between 5 ½ ft. (1.7 m) and 6 ft. (1.8 m).*
- 8. In 1859, 20 million (20,000,000) buffalo lived on the western plains. By 1899, only 550 were left.*

Resource: 1990 Teacher created materials, Inc. ; #285 Thematic unit – Native Americans

Tatanka History

Bison, commonly referred to as the American Plains Buffalo, once roamed the entire North American Continent with their numbers at over 60 million. Buffalo once roamed from Canada to Mexico, grazing the Great Plains and areas across the North American Continent. Their numbers were so great early explorers could not count them, describing them as “number-numberless” and the “the country was one black robe” and “plains were black and appeared as if in motion” with the herds of buffalo.

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Estimated buffalo numbers in 1830 = 70 – 150 million • Many of today’s highways follow roadways trampled out by migrating buffalo herds. • In 1920 our Federal Government started a restoration project in Yellowstone and discontinued the hunting of buffalo. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Named les boeufs meaning oxen or beefs, by the French. American Frontiersman translated it to ‘buffalo.’ • After 1830 the beaver were trapped out, the buffalo robes became more popular. • 1870 – 1875 estimated, 2,500,000 were taken annually for use by the American Fur Companies.
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A strong relationship between the human and the *bison* existed for thousands of years. *Bison* were the center of life for the Plains Tribes of Native Americans, providing them with food, shelter, clothing and spiritual inspiration. Legend tells, “The Great Spirit brought the pipe to the people. She came as a young woman wearing a white buckskin dress and moccasins. After the Great Spirit presented the pipe to the people and explained the significance of that pipe, she left the tipi as a white bison calf.

The near extermination of the *American Bison* did not occur just in a few short violent years. The fur trade, which began in the 1600s, initially focused on beaver but then demanded that *bison* (*buffalo*) robes be shipped to Europe. By the early 1800s, trade in buffalo robes and buffalo tongues significantly increased and caused approximately 200,000 *bison* kills annually on the Plains. The 1830s to 1860s were the four decades in which most of the slaughter of *bison* occurred. Wagon load after wagon load of robes, tongues and occasionally, selected cuts of *bison* meat, moved east. Soon, collection and shipping of *bison* bones to Eastern cities where they ground up for use as phosphorus fertilizer or bone char became common. The arrival of the railroads further exacerbated herd conditions for the *bison* and by the early 1880s there were only a few free-ranging *bison*.

The presence if the *American Bison* had deeply affected the peoples of this continent in a way that no other species, present or past, has been capable of doing. This heroic and magnificent beast is not only an inseparable part of America’s past, its future place in America history now also appears secure. The *bison*, more so than any other animal or bird, is a unique symbol of the strength and determination of the people of North America.

Resource: Buffalo Express::History of the American Bison (buffalo.express.com); ebasion.org; America.west.com; experiencenature.com

Tatanka/Buffalo

Buffaloes played an important role in the lives of the Plains tribes. Their meat provided food and their hides were used for clothing and shelter. Bowstrings and sewing equipment were made from buffalo sinew. Bones were crafted into cooking utensils and toys

for the children. Rawhide was made into lacings, moccasin soles and parfleches. (Parfleches were skin pouches that were used to carry small utensils and dried meat.)

Hunting for buffalo was no easy task. At first the Native American hunted on foot and shot the animals with a bow and arrow. Sometimes hunters would wear a buffalo or wolf skin to mask their human scent so they could get closer to the buffalo to shoot them. Scouts were sent out to find the herds. Then the hunters lined up in two columns and waved blankets to force the herd toward the edge of a cliff. Other times, buffalo were driven into a corral where they were shot with arrows or clubbed to death.

When Native Americans acquired horses and guns, hunting buffalo became easier. They developed their skills as riders and marksmen. They also became more wasteful and would kill buffalo for sport following the ways of the white man.

Credits: #285 Native American Thematic Unit; Children’s Book – The Gift of the Sacred Dog.

Tatanka Usage Chart

Traditional uses of the Buffalo

Bison were the economic and spiritual focal point of the Plains Indians; they gave us food, clothing and shelter.

HORNS: arrow points utensils decorative headdresses medication	FAT: Candle tallow Lubricant soap	HAIR: Decorative headdresses Ropes Pad & pillow filler Moccasin lining	STOMACH LINER Water container	BONES Knives, pipes Arrowheads Splints, knives Shovels, spoons War clubs	HIDE Moccasins Buckets, Drums Splints, Ropes Saddles & stirrups Snow shoes
SCROTUM Ceremonial rattle	MANURE CHIPS fuel	HOOVES glue	LIVER Hide tanning	TENDONS Sewing, bowstring	BEARD & TEETH Ornamentation
SKULL rituals	BLADDER Medicine bag	MUSCLES Glue, Thread Arrow ties	TAILS: ornament, decoration, fly brush, whip	GALL & BLADDER Decorative paint	

Other Uses of the Buffalo

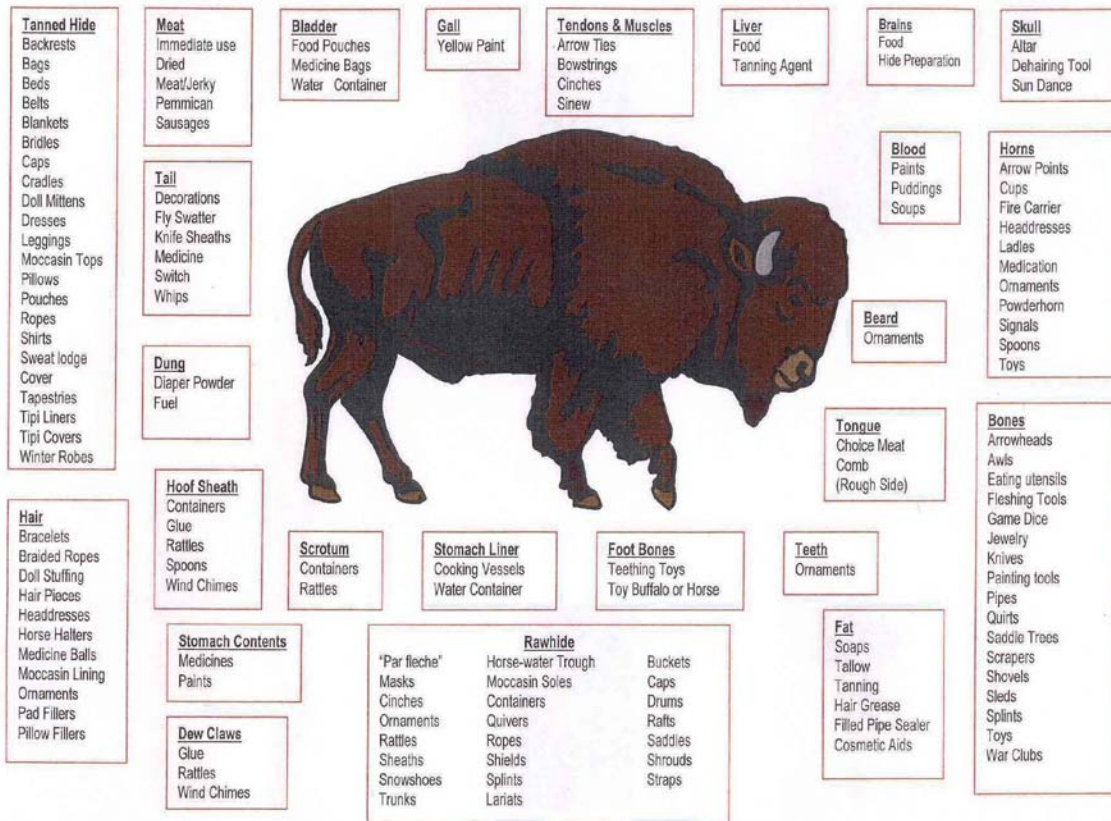
Meat; Dung for fires. Brains for tanning hides. Gallstones: yellow paint. Horns: cups & spoons. Sinew-bowstrings, thread. Tails-fly swatter. Hooves ; glue.	Untanned hide (rawhide) Because it is waterproof, it was used to fasten stone head to mallets and secure war clubs to their handles.	Fur/Hide uses Because it was waterproof, it was used for storing food and clothes, making portable water troughs for horses, and for covering circular boats.	Hide taken in late Fall. It had long winter hair which was used for mittens, warm bedding, moccasins, winter caps, and ceremonial headdresses.
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Today’s Uses of the Buffalo

Skulls are bleached and used for decorative purposes. Hair is manufactured into sweaters, coats and robes’ Horns are made into decorative polished costume jewelry & buttons	Hides are used for the manufacture of leather furniture. (Everything from foot stools to full size sofas). Bison leather is also used for the manufacture of hats, coats, vests, handbags, shoes and boots.
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Credits: bison basics.com; experienceculture.com;

Traditional Uses of the Buffalo



InterTribal Bison Cooperation, 2497 W.Chicago St., Rapid City, SD 57702
 Telephone: 605.394.9730 Fax: 605.394.7742
 E-mail: itbs@itbcbison.com Web: itbcbison.com