

Buffalo Trace Education Box Lesson 1

Bison or Buffalo?

Purpose: Students will discover the differences between American bison and buffalo.

Subject Areas: Language Arts (compare and contrast), science (facts about the bison)

Materials Needed: compare and contrast graphic organizer (such as Venn diagram or T-chart), access to internet or books with bison facts (as well as photos of bison and buffalo), buffalo nickel, American bison nickel, index cards (two for each student), pencils

Steps:

1. Background Information: The animal we call a buffalo is actually an American bison. Buffaloes (often called cape or water buffalo) are found in Asia and Africa. The bison is in North and South America. Bison have humps, sharp and small horns, thick fur, a beard, weigh 700-2200 pounds, live 13-21 years, eat grass and hay, and can be aggressive when threatened. Buffalo do not have humps, have long horns, light fur, no beard, weight anywhere from 800-2600 pounds, live 25-30 years and eat grass; the water buffalo can be domesticated as a work animal.
2. Go to diffen.com for comparisons of bison vs. buffalo. The comparisons provided are physical characteristics, habitats, life span and temperament. If internet is not available, provide books with facts and photos.
3. Use the information to complete a graphic organizer or make a three-flap 3-D organizer (two outer flaps for differences and the middle flap for similarities).
4. As an informal assessment, have students write “bison” and “buffalo” on the index cards. As you say one of the characteristics, the student holds up the index card for bison or buffalo. Discuss after each response for any misconceptions.
5. Try comparing the 1913 buffalo nickel and the 2005 American bison nickel. Use the same site (diffen.com) The comparisons provided are diameter, thickness, design, reverse and obverse (front). Have the actual coins, if available.

Resources:

- The internet site diffen.com can be used to compare anything. Just type in the two things you want to compare.
- For graphic organizers, try smekenseducation.com for numerous options.
- The internet site usmint.gov has information on the bison coins, history and coloring pages.
- Comparing Animal Traits Series (Lerner Publishing Group, lernerbooks.com) is for grades 2-4. Students can analyze what makes animals similar and different.
- Where did the adage “don’t take any wooden nickels” originate? In 1931, the bank of Tenino, Washington, printed up the first wooden money because of a shortage of change. Go to wooden-nickel.com for a video on how wooden nickels are still made today and the world’s largest wooden nickel. A bison is on that nickel!
- Dinah Zike has many 3-D graphic organizers. For a researched article and examples of these, read “‘Hands On’ Doesn’t Mean ‘Minds Off’” by Nancy Frey (boostconference.org).