

Importance of the Buffalo **Sunni Stuber**

I. Background Information

Grade Level: 3rd-5th

Objective/Student Understanding: The students will:

1. Learn the history of the First Peoples (Ulm Pishkun) Buffalo Jump
2. Describe the components of the buffalo jump
3. Describe the importance that the buffalo played in Blackfeet culture
4. Understand the importance of the buffalo runners job

Purpose:

1. To write a descriptive short story, placing themselves into the role of a Blackfeet Indian, preparing for a buffalo hunt or else their own creation story about how the buffalo jump came to be
2. To allow the students the opportunity to act out being the 'buffalo runner'
3. To educate students on the importance of the buffalo with the Blackfeet culture

Montana Standards for Social Studies:

- *Content Standard 6:* Students demonstrate an understanding of the impact of human interaction and cultural diversity on societies.

IEFA Essential Understandings:

- *Essential Understanding 1:* There is great diversity among the 12 tribal Nations of Montana in their languages, cultures, histories and governments. Each Nation has a distinct and unique cultural heritage that contributes to modern Montana.

C3-Framework:

- **D2.Geo.8.3-5.** Explain how human settlements and movements relate to the locations and use of various natural resources.
- **D2.Geo.9.3-5.** Analyze the effects of catastrophic environmental and technological events on human settlements and migration.

II. Materials

1. Book called *The Buffalo Jump*, written by Peter Roop and illustrated by Bill Farnsworth
2. Map of Ulm Pishkun Buffalo Jump
3. Stop Watch
4. Roll of tape
5. Piece of 40 foot yarn or measuring tape
6. Roll of tape to mark where the runner starts and stops
7. Pencil

8. A large area for running and measuring 50-100 yards
9. Worksheet (some questions were adapted from Indian Education for All. (2010). *Buffalo and the Blackfeet*. Retrieved from www.stateparks.mt.gov/learn-with-us/indianEducationFromOpi.html?prompt=0
10. Article located in Attachment A.
Foster, L. M. (2008). The Piegan Blackfeet and the Pishkun (Buffalo Jump). Retrieved from <http://montanaarchaeology.blogspot.com/2008/01/piegan-blackfeet-or-pikuni-in-their-own.html>
11. Diagram—Attachment B
<http://www.thecanadianencyclopedia.ca/en/article/blackfoot-siksika/>
12. PowerPoint

III. Procedure

- **Introduction:** (10 minutes). Introduce the First Peoples Buffalo Jump State Park which was formally called ‘Ulm Pishkun’. Use a PowerPoint to show pictures of the park and pass out maps so each student can see where it is located in Montana. Ask “does anyone know what a buffalo jump is?” Give a brief history of the First Peoples Buffalo Jump. Split students into groups of two (or they can work alone if there are enough computers/iPads).
- **Content:** (1 hour)
 - Hand out worksheet. Students will explore the following websites:
 - <http://www.lewisandclarktrail.com/section3/montanacities/greatfalls/ulmpishkun/>
 - <http://stateparks.mt.gov/first-peoples-buffalo-jump/>
 - In the first website, students should read about Lewis’s account of how the buffalo jump was practiced which is an excerpt from his journal. Students will answer the questions on their worksheet
 - Come together as a class and go over the history and questions on the worksheet.
 - Go over the general account of how a buffalo jump worked: To start the drive a buffalo runner would wear a wolf or buffalo skin as a disguise. The buffalo runner would get the attention of the lead cow and try to lure it closer. The curiosity of the new animal would make the lead cow follow it bringing the herd with her. As the lead cow got closer the buffalo runner would begin to move quickly away. When the buffalo herd moved closer to the cliff, the buffalo runner would discard the calf robe and run or jump to safety. Additional runners circled in the back and sides of the herd to frighten them towards the cliff by shouting, waving arms, and shooting arrows. As the buffalo stampeded towards the cliff they could not stop the momentum and by the time they realized their demise, it was too late.
 - Hand out the article; *How the Blackfeet got the Buffalo Jump* (Attachment A). Students will read both accounts of the Blackfeet story. Next, students will briefly compare how the two stories are alike. Once students have completed

this portion of the worksheet, they will create their own version of how the Blackfeet came to get the Buffalo Jump. Or they have the option to create their own creative story about what life is like as a Blackfoot hunter and the buffalo jump. (Students can finish this portion of the assignment at home).

- **Next Day: Content**

- (45 minutes -1 hour) The Buffalo Runner
 - Read the story *The Buffalo Jump*, written by Peter Roop. Discuss the importance of the 'Buffalo Runner' and what his job entailed. Move the class outside where you have set up a measuring tape (or piece of yarn, measured out in 1 foot intervals).
 - Discuss with the class how students have the option to be one of the following jobs:
 - a runner: be timed to see how far they can run
 - a timer: hold a stopwatch and tell the runner when to start and when to stop after 10 seconds are up.
 - A referee: to follow the runner and mark the spot where the runner reached in 10 seconds
 - The group then works together to measure how far the runner made it
 - Other jobs depending if more are needed:
 - Someone to write down the name of the student and how far they ran
 - You can have students taking turns with the stopwatch if there are multiple students who do not want to run
 - Once you have collected all of the data of your buffalo runners, return to class and recap about who would be a good buffalo runner. (**it is important you know your class and the students within the class. If you can foresee some students getting their feelings hurt if they do not 'win' or run the farthest, adapt the game to something else.)

- **Next Day: Content**

- (30 minutes) Role of the Buffalo
 - Read excerpts from the following books:
 - *Blackfeet* by D. King and
 - *The Blackfeet: Raiders of the Northwestern Plains* by J. Ewers
 - Discuss the importance of the buffalo and the many uses. Hand out the diagram (Attachment 2) for each student. Have the students write a brief paragraph, describing at least 10 different uses the Blackfeet had for the buffalo.
 - Review as a class and go over the many uses once complete. Refer to website, <https://blackfeettribe.wordpress.com/>, for additional information.

IV. Assessment

1. By filling in the worksheet, students will be able to express that they understood what the project goals and intentions were
2. Students will be able to express their creativity by creating their own unique creation story

3. Students will engage in a 'buffalo run' and discuss the importance of the buffalo. The final task of writing about the uses of the buffalo will show their understanding of the project goal.

V. References and additional resources

1. Ewers, J. C. (1958). *The Blackfeet: Raiders of the Northwestern Plains*. Norman, OK: University of Oklahoma Press, Publishing Division of the University.
2. Harrold, B. (n.d). *Mathematics model teaching unit: Buffalo runner*. Retrieved from www.opi.mt.gov/Programs/IndianEd/curricsearch.html
3. Indian Education for All. (2010). *Buffalo and the Blackfeet*. Retrieved from www.stateparks.mt.gov/learn-with-us/indianEducationFromOpi.html?prompt=0
4. King, D. C. (2010). *The Blackfeet*. Tarrytown, NY: Marshall Cavendish Corporation.

Attachment A

The [Piegan Blackfeet](#) (or Pikuni in their own language) of Montana were the southernmost branch of the Blackfeet Confederacy, which also included the Siksika (Blackfoot proper) of Saskatchewan and the Blood or Kainah of Alberta in Canada. They are linked with the Late Prehistoric archaeological culture called the Old Women's Tradition and probably also the even older Besant Culture.

The Blackfeet were of the Algonquian linguistic family, and were warlike toward most of their neighboring tribes, since they had horses for raiding and were supplied with guns and ammunition by their Canadian sources. Piegans also displayed hostility toward white explorers and traders. Several smallpox epidemics decimated their population, and their old way of life ended with the destruction of the buffalo herds on which they relied. Now they are gathered on reservations on both sides of the border.

The Helena Valley (aka Prickly Pear Valley) where I live was once part of the lands the Blackfeet hunted. They reportedly called this valley "Tomah" or "Tona" which meant "game pocket" or "game cache" as game animals like buffalo, elk, deer, and pronghorn antelope were always plentiful here. One Blackfeet man had a vision while camping here about the future and the coming of the white man. And we all grew up learning a story about the Sleeping Giant on the northern horizon...someday when the world is about to end, the Giant will rise from his earth-bed, shake the mountain crumbs away, and stride across the land. I heard this one when I was a boy in 5th grade here in Helena

How the Blackfoot got the Buffalo Jump (Piskun)

VERSION I

by Hugh Welch

Awa chopsi pono Ka me ta (Horse Crazy)

One day Napi was out on the Plains and became hungry and pleaded to the Great Spirit to help him and give him something to eat. The Great Spirit heard his prayers and said " Alright Napi, mound up the dirt as big as you can eat".

Napi started mounding up the dirt and the more he worked the hungrier he got, until he had a big mound and was tired out as he wasn't used to working so hard for something to eat, as the Creator usually fed him when he asked.

The Creator said " I see you have become greedy with me helping you too much so I will make the mound of dirt something you can eat, but you will have to learn to kill it", with that the Great Spirit turned the big mound of dirt into a Buffalo which charged Napi and he started running,

more in fear of his life than thinking how to kill it, he ran across the plains, the Buffalo close behind him. Finally he saw a tree and thought if I can make it to the tree I can get away from this beast and then plan how to kill it.

As he neared the tree he saw a big branch sticking out, low enough for him to reach but high enough to get away from the Buffalo. He was running as hard as he could and the Buffalo was gaining on him, just as he reached the tree and swung up the Buffalo ran under him and disappeared. After he got over his fright and came down from the tree he found that the tree was on the edge of a cliff and the Buffalo has ran off it and was laying at the bottom.

The Great Spirit spoke to him and said "Now Napi your greed almost got you hurt but I will give you another chance, I will put Buffalo on the Plains if you share your kills with your brothers the meat eaters and your people". Which he did and showed the people how to use the Buffalo Jump. One is at Two Medicine River, another on Milk River as well as many others all over the Blackfoot Hunting Grounds.

VERSION II

When the buffalo first came to be upon the land, they were not friendly to the people. When the hunters tried to coax them over the cliffs for the good of the villages, they were reluctant to offer themselves up. They did not relish being turned into blankets and dried flesh for winter rations. They did not want their hooves and horn to become tools and utensils nor did they welcome their sinew being used for sewing. "No, no," they said. We won't fall into your traps. And we will not fall for your tricks." So when the hunters guided them towards the abyss, they would always turn aside at the very last moment. With this lack of cooperation, it seemed the villagers would be hungry and cold and ragged all winter long.

Now one of the hunters' had a daughter who was very proud of her father's skill with the bow. During the fullness of summer, he always brought her the best of hides to dress, and she in turn would work the deerskins into the softest, whitest of garments for him to wear. Her own dresses were like the down of a snow goose, and the moccasins she made for the children and the grandmothers in the village were the most welcome of gifts.

But now with the hint of snow on the wind, and deer becoming more scarce in the willow breaks, she could see this reluctance on the part of the buffalo families could become a real problem.

Hunter's Daughter decided she would do something about it.

She went to the base of the cliff and looked up. She began to sing in a low, soft voice, "Oh, buffalo family, come down and visit me. If you come down and feed my relatives in a wedding feast, I will join your family as the bride of your strongest warrior."

She stopped and listened. She thought she heard the slight rumbling sound of thunder in the distance.

Again she sang, "Oh, buffalo family, come down and visit me. Feed my family in a wedding feast so that I may be a bride."

The thunder was much louder now. Suddenly the buffalo family began falling from the sky at her feet.

One very large bull landed on top of the others, and walked across the backs of his relatives to stand before Hunter's Daughter.

"I am here to claim you as my bride," said Large Buffalo.

"Oh, but now I am afraid to go with you," said Hunter's Daughter.

"Ah, but you must," said Large Buffalo, "For my people have come to provide your people with a wedding feast. As you can see, they have offered themselves up."

"Yes, but I must run and tell my relatives the good news," said Hunter's Daughter. "No," said Large Buffalo. No word need be sent. You are not getting away so easily."

And with that said, Large Buffalo lifted her between his horns and carried her off to his village in the rolling grass hills.

The next morning the whole village was out looking for Hunter's Daughter. When they found the mound of buffalo below the cliff, the father, who was in fact a fine tracker as well as a skilled hunter, looked at his daughter's footprints in the dust.

"She's gone off with a buffalo, he said. I shall follow them and bring her back."

So Hunter walked out upon the plains, with only his bow and arrows as companions. He walked and walked a great distance until he was so tired that he had to sit down to rest beside a buffalo wallow.

Along came Magpie and sat down beside him.

Hunter spoke to Magpie in a respectful tone, "O knowledgeable bird, has my daughter been stolen from me by a buffalo? Have you seen them? Can you tell me where they have gone?"

Magpie replied with understanding, "Yes, I have seen them pass this way. They are resting just over this hill."

"Well," said Hunter, would you kindly take my daughter a message for me? Will you tell her I am here just over the hill?"

So Magpie flew to where Large Buffalo lay asleep amidst his relatives in the dry prairie grass. He hopped over to where Hunter's Daughter was quilling moccasins, as she sat dutifully beside her sleeping husband. "Your father is waiting for you on the other side of the hill," whispered Magpie to the maiden.

"Oh, this is very dangerous," she told him. These buffalo are not friendly to us and they might try to hurt my father if he should come this way. Please tell him to wait for me and I will try to slip away to see him."

Just then her husband, Large Buffalo, awoke and took off his horn. "Go bring me a drink from the wallow just over this hill," said her husband.

So she took the horn in her hand and walked very casually over the hill.

Her father motioned silently for her to come with him, as he bent into a low crouch in the grass. "No," she whispered. The buffalo are angry with our people who have killed their people. They will run after us and trample us into the dirt. I will go back and see what I can do to soothe their feelings."

And so Hunter's daughter took the horn of water back to her husband who gave a loud snort when he took a drink. The snort turned into a bellow and all of the buffalo got up in alarm. They all put their tails in the air and danced a buffalo dance over the hill, trampling the poor man to pieces who was still waiting for his daughter near the buffalo wallow.

His daughter sat down on the edge of the wallow and broke into tears.

"Why are you crying?" said her buffalo husband.

"You have killed my father and I am a prisoner, besides," she sobbed.

"Well, what of my people?" her husband replied. We have given our children, our parents and some of our wives up to your relatives in exchange for your presence among us. A deal is a deal."

But after some consideration of her feelings, Large Buffalo knelt down beside her and said to her, "If you can bring your father back to life again, we will let him take you back home to your people."

So Hunter's Daughter started to sing a little song. "Magpie, Magpie help me find some piece of my father which I can mend back whole again."

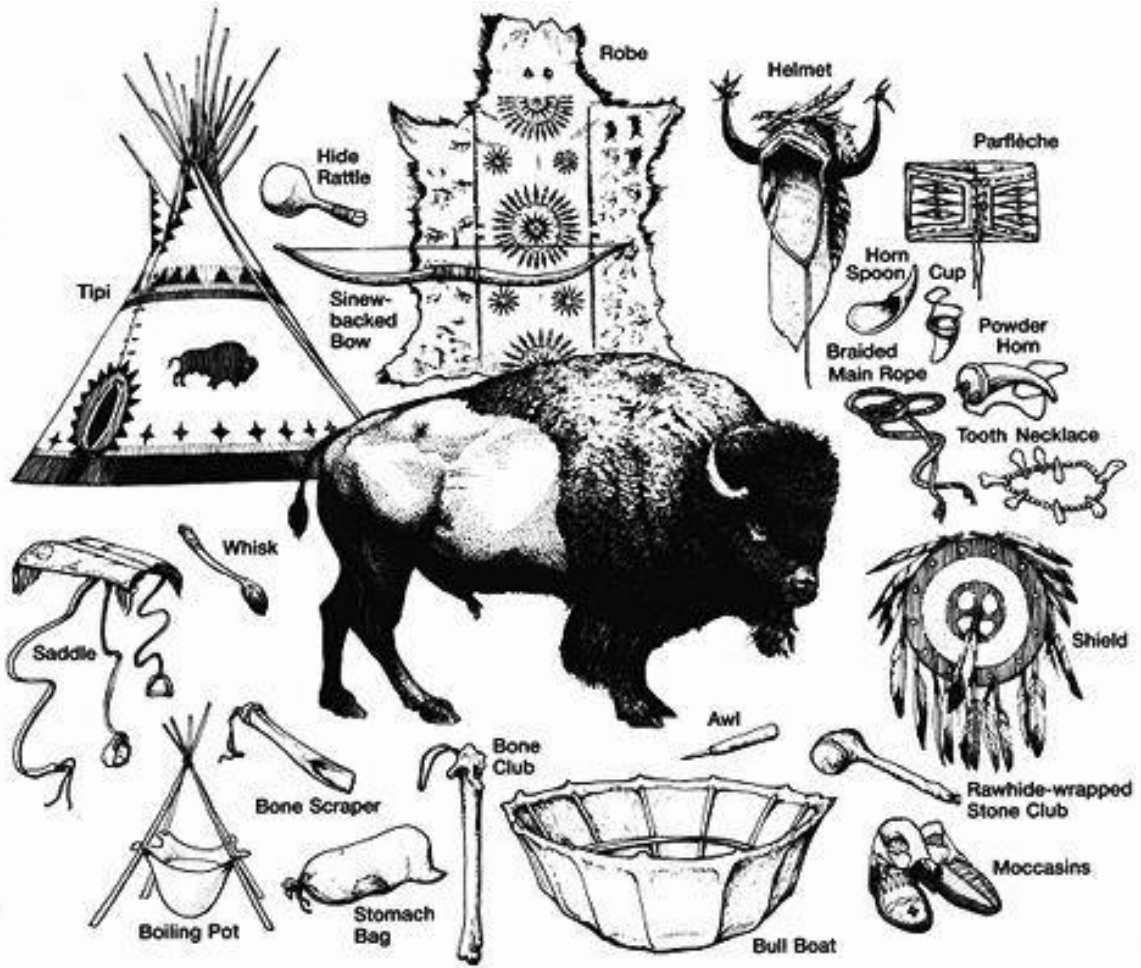
Magpie appeared and sat down in front of her with his head cocked to the side.

"Magpie, Magpie, please see what you can find," she sang softly to the wind which bent the grasses slightly apart. Magpie cocked his head to the side and looked carefully within the layered folds of the grasses as the wind sighed again. Quickly he picked out a piece of her father that had been hidden there, a little bit of bone.

"That will be enough to do the trick," said Hunter's Daughter, as she put the bone on the ground and covered it with her blanket.

And then she started to sing a reviving song that had the power to bring injured people back to the land of the living. Quietly she sang the song that her grandmother had taught her. After a few melodious passages, there was a lump under the blanket. She and Magpie looked under the blanket and could see a man, but the man was not breathing. He lay cold as stone. So Hunter's Daughter continued to sing, a little softer, and a little softer, so as not to startle her father as he began to move. When he stood up, alive and strong, the buffalo people were amazed. They said to Hunter's Daughter, "Will you sing this song for us after every hunt? We will teach your people the buffalo dance, so that whenever you dance before the hunt, you will be assured a good result. Then you will sing this song for us, and we will all come back to live again."

Attachment B



Attachment C

Name: _____

Date: _____

A. What is a pishkun?

B. List the 5 parts of a buffalo jump and describe the purpose of each one:

1.

2.

3.

4.

5.

C. Who used the buffalo jump?

D. When was it used as a buffalo jump and for how long?

E. Compare the two stories about how the Blackfeet learned to use a buffalo jump. How are they different or alike? (You may use the back of this page if you need more space to answer this question.)

F. Plains Indian tribes, like the Blackfeet, had many kinds of uses for the buffalo. Using the diagram provided, write a paragraph describing at least 10 different uses the Blackfeet had for the buffalo. (You may use the back of this page).