

A Thematic Approach to Understanding the Exhibition

Theme: River

Sub-Themes:

Trade, Travel, and Exploration:

The voyage from St. Louis to the upper Missouri River in 1833-1834 was one of the most notable parts of Prince Maximilian and Karl Bodmer's journey across America. In St. Louis, the two explorers connected with John Jacob Astor's American Fur Company, a successful trading operation that had established forts along the river, reaching as far as present-day Montana. Each year, the American Fur Company's steamboats, laden with European trade items such as beads, blankets, copper and brass kettles, vermilion dye, knives, axes, guns, ammunition, and alcohol, headed up the Missouri in early spring. In late fall, after the heavy trading season, the boats would travel back down to St. Louis carrying furs and hides acquired from the Indians. The company's introduction of the steamboat into this area brought an increased interest in the trade of large, heavy buffalo hides. Only pelts of smaller animals were considered manageable by individual traders before this time.

The Mandans, Hidatsa, and the Missouri:

Maximilian and Bodmer chose to travel with the Fur Company because frequent stops at government and commercial trading posts ensured friendly contact with Native Americans in the area. At Fort Clark, they met the Mandans and Hidatsa, agricultural tribes living in the area of present-day North Dakota along the Missouri, and trading at the fort year-round. To the Mandans and Hidatsa, the river was a valuable resource providing protection, food, and shelter. Men of the tribes fashioned the frames of substantial earth-covered lodges from large trees growing in nearby wooded areas; and supporting rafters were made from driftwood available during the Missouri's spring flooding. The river also provided protection for summer villages, such as Mih-Tutta-Hang-Kusch, as seen in *Mih-Tutta-Hang-Kusch, a Mandan Village*. Surrounded by water on three sides, the village was strategically located on a large cliff, limiting access by attacking enemies. In winter, both tribes left their summer villages to find protection from harsh winters in heavily wooded areas along lowland areas near the river.

Living along the Missouri enabled women of these agricultural societies to plant and harvest crops of corn, squash, beans, and sunflowers in the rich soil of lowland areas near their village. Although hunting was the tribe's primary means of acquiring buffalo, the river also provided the carcasses of animals trapped in the icy river during winter or caught in spring floods. Both Mandan and Hidatsa used the hide of the buffalo to make, among other things, buffalo robes. Robes, tanned on one side with the hair remaining, were worn during colder months for warmth. Robes worn by men were often painted with images depicting war exploits. Mandan women also used the hide of the buffalo to make bullboats. These small, tub-shaped boats were made by stretching the hide of a buffalo over a structure of willow branches. Bullboats were used by the Mandan women to transport crops and goods across the river.

Fantastical Formations on the Upper Missouri:

From Fort Clark, Bodmer and Maximilian traveled by keelboat to Fort McKenzie. The difficult passage upstream, which was impossible by steamboat, took almost five weeks. It was during this part of the journey that the two explorers encountered the magnificent and sometimes bizarre rock formations that lined the banks of the upper Missouri. Maximilian describes in his journal: “here on both sides of the river, the most strange formations are seen, and you may fancy that you see colonnades, small round pillars with large globes or a flat slab at the top, little towers, pulpits, organs with their pipes, old ruins, fortresses, castles, churches, with pointed towers...” The large towering rock known as Cathedral Rock is actually a volcanic rock formation. The massive stone walls, documented by Maximilian and Bodmer as they traveled on the upper Missouri, are outcroppings of white sandstone. From Fort McKenzie, Maximilian had intended to travel further west to the Rocky Mountains. After hearing about the dangers of such a journey he decided, instead, to return downriver to Fort Union and then on to Fort Clark where they spent the winter with the Mandans.

Trade, Travel, and Exploration:

During their journey from St. Louis to the upper Missouri, Maximilian and Bodmer witnessed a thriving fur trade, then the primary contact between Euro-American and Plains Indian cultures, flourishing at a U.S. government post in Bellevue, and the Fur Company post of Fort Pierre, Fort Clark, Fort Union, and Fort McKenzie. Trading posts were centers for economic and cultural exchange between the Native Americans of the Plains and the fur-trading Americans. The traders came to the area in search of pelts and hides, and sought the Indians as trading partners because of their skills as hunters and suppliers of fur. In the summer and winter, smaller bands of nomadic Indians traveled across the Plains hunting buffalo. In the spring and fall these bands came together to trade at the Company’s forts. The winter hunt for buffalo brought the heavy hides of the buffalo cow which could be made into warm winter robes; summer hunts brought a major supply of meat as well as hides suitable for tanning.

As the market for fur increased, however, the number of buffalo and fur-bearing animals whose hides were a valuable trade commodity, decreased. This reduction in the Plains Indians’ resource-base was one of the major factors that lead to shifts in Native American culture. Disease also brought drastic changes to the peoples along the Missouri. Just three years after Maximilian and Bodmer visited Fort Clark, an epidemic of smallpox reached the Mandan villages near the fort by way of the trader’s steamboat, nearly decimating that tribe. Four Bears, a Mandan chief and friend to Maximilian and Bodmer, said after his contraction of smallpox:

*Four Bears never saw a white man hungry, but what he gave him to eat...and
how have they repaid it!...I do not fear death...but to die with my face rotten,
that even the wolves will shrink...at seeing me and say to themselves, that is
Four Bears, the friend of the whites.*

Maximilian’s written accounts and the art of Karl Bodmer caught the upper Missouri River in the midst of profound transformation. Their observations are the foundation of much of our knowledge and memory of that changing time and place.

Discussion and Activities:

TRADE:

Related Works of art by Bodmer:

Bellevue, Mr. Dougherty's Agency on the Missouri

Bellevue was one of the government outposts set up along the Missouri River to regulate trade and keep peaceful relations with the Native Americans living in the area. Major Dougherty, whose post was located near present-day Omaha, Nebraska, was the Indian agent to the Omaha, Ponca, Pawnee, and Iowa Indians.

What is trade? Who was trading in the 1830s? Why were the fur-traders interested in trading with the Native Americans? What effects did the fur trade have on the Plains Indians? Why would the Native Americans want to trade with the fur traders?

Who was Major Dougherty? Was his post owned by the American Fur Company? If not, who owned the post? Why would the government want to have outposts along the Missouri? What groups of Native Americans did Major Dougherty work with?

How was Maximilian and Bodmer's journey influenced by the American Fur Company's trade operation along the Missouri River? How did it affect where they traveled? How did it determine what people they came in contact with?

Activities:

Imaginary Trade:

Distribute various “imaginary” trade items such as an apple, box of raisins, pencils, or straws among students. Explain that each person has something they will be able to trade. Ask students to identify the items they would most like to have and then approach the person holding that item to see if they would like to trade. Explain to students that they will have to come to an agreement with the other person before the trade exchange takes place. After a short time of “imaginary trade,” ask students to explain what was necessary before trading could occur. How many people were involved in the trade? Did each of these people have to agree on the items that would be traded? Was it difficult to find someone who wanted to trade for the item you were given? Were there some items that everyone wanted? How did this demand for the item affect its trade value?

Charting the Flow of Goods:

Using a map of the world, chart the flow of goods from the approximate location of the American Fur Company’s trading posts in the American West to Europe and then back again. On the lines drawn from Europe to America, list the trade items coming from Europe and the items coming from the West. (A list of European trade items may be found in the first paragraph of this theme.) How did the demand for fur in Europe affect the American Fur Company’s trade operation along the Missouri? What environmental effects did the demand for fur have on the West? What effects did it have on the Native Americans living in the West?

TRAVEL:

Related Works of art by Bodmer:

Snags (Sunken Trees) on the Missouri

The Yellow-Stone, used by the American Fur Company to transport goods up and down the Missouri River, was also Maximilian and Bodmer's first means of travel into the frontier. This scene was first sketched by Bodmer as the Yellow-Stone journeyed from St. Louis to Fort Union. Spring flooding brought many trees and limbs into the water, one of the many treacherous obstacles the travelers faced.

What major rivers were used for trade and travel in the west?
What were the common modes of transportation in the 1830s?
Why was travel by steamboat the best mode of transportation in this area?
How did travel by steamboat affect exploration and the developing trade industry?

Activities:

The Captain of the Yellow-Stone:

Imagine you are the steamboat captain of the Yellow-Stone traveling along the Missouri for the American Fur Company. You keep a journal of your daily life on the river. What would you record? Create a journal entry based on the work *Snags (Sunken Trees) on the Missouri*.

EXPLORATION:

Related Works of art by Bodmer:

The Travellers meeting with Minatarre Indians near Fort Clark

This work shows many examples of European goods traded with American Indians. Ornamental beads, colored scarves, European-style hats, and guns are a few items worn or carried by the Minatarre men greeting Maximilian and Bodmer just outside of Fort Clark.

Matò-Tope, A Mandan Chief

Matò-Tope (Four Bears) was a Mandan chief who died in a smallpox outbreak just three years after Maximilian and Bodmer's journey. Four Bears was a great warrior who was highly respected by the Mandan people for his many war exploits.

How did Maximilian and Bodmer obtain and record information about the people and places they experienced on their journey up the Missouri River?

What major changes occurred in the area along the Missouri after Maximilian and Bodmer's expedition?
Is the work produced by these two explorers useful for historians, today? Why?

Activities:

Creating a Journal with Illustrations:

Students can create their own journal with illustrations: Have you ever written in a journal while you were on a trip? What experiences did you write about? Did you make sketches of things you saw? Explain to students that Maximilian was a scientific explorer, who, along with Bodmer, recorded the plants, animals, and native peoples on their expedition across America.

Ask students to create a small journal from white paper and/or colored construction paper. Then ask them to go outside and describe what they see, smell, and hear, recording their observations in the journal. As they write about the area, students can pretend they are from another part of the world or from another planet and they are visiting the area for the first time. How would you describe the area to people on your home planet? How would you visually record the plants, animals, and people that you see? Today we would use a camera, but in 1832 when Maximilian and Bodmer came to America, there were no cameras. Maximilian had to rely on Bodmer's skills as an artist to accurately record what the two men saw. Make drawings in your journal illustrating what you have seen.

Cause and Effect:

Discuss the events that took place in the West in the 1800s. Of the events or facts discussed, which one occurred first? What kind of effect did this event have on later events? What caused a certain event to take place? Ask students to list some events that took place around the time of Maximilian and Bodmer's journey. Ask them to order these events according to "cause and effect."

For Example:

Good European market for fur causes fur traders to come into the area American Fur Company begins, causes trading forts to be established, causes travel by steamboat to be introduced, causes buffalo hides to be easily transported to St. Louis, causes increase in the market for furs, causes increase in the slaughter of buffalo.

Make a Time Line:

Make a time line based on events before, during and after Maximilian and Bodmer's expedition. Discuss how their journey fits into the history of the United States. Illustrate the time line using icons that describe these major events.

THE MANDANS, THE HIDATSA, AND THE MISSOURI:

Related works of art by Bodmer:

Winter Village of the Minatarre

During the winter, the Hidatsa tribe left their summer villages to live in more protected areas found in the forested lowland areas along the river. Winter Village shows people wrapped in thick buffalo robes watching a hoop and pole game played by young men.

What Plains Indian tribes lived in long term villages on the upper Missouri?
How did Maximilian and Bodmer come in contact with these tribes? How did the river provide protection for these tribes during harsh winters? What did the people wear to stay warm? How did their lifestyle change during colder months?

Describe what your family does to stay warm in the winter. Do you move to another location? Do you wear special clothes? Do you participate in special winter activities? What are you not able to do during colder months?

Activities:

Want to Play?

The men in *Winter Village of the Minatarre* are playing a hoop and pole game. This popular game was played by throwing a long wooden pole at a netted hoop that was rolled on the ground or tossed in the air. Players scored points based on how the pole fell in relation to the hoop. How do you play the game seen in this work by Bodmer? What materials were used to make the game equipment? Do we have any games today that are similar to the hoop and pole game? If you have the right materials available, the class can put together a version of the hoop and pole game and attempt to play.

The Hidatsa created games from materials that were readily available to them. Ask students to create a game using a selection of found objects. Some possibilities include: straws, corks, recycled Styrofoam “popcorn,” pencils, paper, paper clips, balloons, plastic bottles, strawberry baskets.

Some questions to think about as the game is designed and created: What is the object of the game? Who can play? How many players can participate in the game? Is this a game that can only be played indoors or out? Are there certain times of year that you would not be able to play the game? How does your game compare to the Hidatsa hoop and pole game? How do you score? Is there a winner?

The culmination of the project could be a time for each student to present their game to the class.

FANTASTICAL FORMATIONS ON THE UPPER MISSOURI:

Related works of art by Bodmer:

The Citadel Rock on the Upper Missouri

This scene was rendered by Bodmer while traveling from Fort Union to Fort McKenzie on the upper Missouri. On the left is an eroded, castle-like, sandstone rock formation. Further in the background, outcroppings of white sandstone form the massive stone walls that line the river banks.

On a map, find the general location where Maximilian and Bodmer encountered unusually shaped rock outcroppings. What did the two explorers think that these rocks looked like? What types of rock were these formations?
What is erosion? What causes erosion? Why would some rocks erode faster than others?

Activities:

Drawing from Life:

Ask students to collect small, jagged rocks with interesting shapes. Next, ask them to arrange several of the rocks in some kind of configuration. They may want to place rocks on top of or beside each other. Then, on a large sheet of paper, students can draw their rock configuration, filling the page as if it were a larger landscape. Ask students to incorporate other topographical elements such as a river or trees into their scene.

Note: The River theme incorporates information from virtually every resource listed in the Bibliography. For detailed citations, please see the Bibliography at the end of the packet.

Theme: Buffalo

Sub-Themes:

In Pursuit of Buffalo:

In the 1830s the buffalo was the staff of life for the Plains Indians, providing food, clothing, and shelter. A full-grown bull at eight to ten years old measured six feet tall at the shoulder, ten feet long from nose to rump, and could weigh as much as 2,000 pounds. Throughout the year, smaller herds of 15 to 150 buffalo grazed close to other herds, forming larger groups of more than 1,000 that moved across the Plains in search of food. Maximilian and Bodmer witnessed a large number of buffalo moving toward the river while traveling from Fort McKenzie to Fort Union. Bodmer captured the scene in *Herds of Bison, On the Upper Missouri*.

The Native American tribes living on the Plains were either nomadic, meaning the tribe traveled around the Plains following the buffalo herds' natural, seasonal movement; or semi-nomadic, meaning the tribe sent groups of men out to hunt at certain times of the year from an established village. The type of shelters used by a particular tribe usually reflects which of these two particular types of lifestyles the community followed.

While visiting Fort Union on their way up the Missouri River, Maximilian and Bodmer recorded the life of the Assiniboin, a nomadic tribe encamped in the area. Maximilian visited the Assiniboin camps, observing the women at work, a curing ceremony, and other aspects of tribal life. He describes in his journal their patterns of nomadic movement and methods of hunting:

The Assiniboin, being hunters, live in movable leather tents....Their chief subsistence [is derived] from the herds of buffaloes, which they follow in the summer, generally from the rivers, to a distance in the prairie; in the winter, to the woods on the banks of the rivers, because these herds at that time, seek...shelter and food among the thickets. They are particularly dexterous in making what are called buffalo parks, when a tract is surrounded with scarecrows, made of stones, branches of trees...and the terrified animals are driven into a narrow gorge, in which the hunters lie concealed...On such occasions the Indians sometimes kill 700 to 800 buffaloes.

The men of Plains Indian tribes were responsible for hunting buffalo and other animals, and the women prepared the meat, hides, bones, horns and other parts for various ceremonial and utilitarian functions. Nearly every part of the buffalo was used. Before the introduction of the horse and firearms by Europeans, buffalo were either hunted one at a time on foot with bows and arrows and spears, or in herds using age-old methods, such as the buffalo jump. The buffalo jump is a technique used to gather large amounts of buffalo. During these larger hunts, a man dressed as a decoy lures the lead cow in the direction

of a cliff. With the rest of the herd following behind, the decoy brakes into a run and jumps over the cliff onto an overhang; the buffalo follow, plunging to their death. A successful buffalo jump could provide a winter's supply of meat for an entire tribe.

According to Maximilian, at the time of the expedition, Mandan men hunted buffalo with bow and arrow on horseback. He writes:

The men general go hunting in a body, on horseback, in order to be the more secure against a superior force of their enemiesIn the summer time, if the herds of buffaloes are dispersed to great distances in the prairie, the chase, of course, requires more time and exertionOn these hunting excursions the Indians often spend eight or ten days; generally they return on foot, while the horses are laden with the spoil. The buffaloes are usually shot with arrows, the hunters riding within ten or twelve paces of them.

Bodmer's work, *Indians Hunting the Bison*, reflects this method of hunting.

The Buffalo as Life-Source:

Following a successful hunt, women of the tribe stepped in to gather and prepare the meat, skins, and other parts of the buffalo. Meat was cleaned from the animal and then cooked immediately or cured for later consumption. Buffalo hides were tanned on both sides to make lightweight robes, or to be sewn into other clothes or tipi covers. Winter robes were tanned on the inner side only, the heavy hair left to provide warmth to the wearer. In the tanning process, skin was stretched on a flat area of ground and wooden spikes were driven into the edges to hold it in place. The hide was then scraped, washed, and softened using a paste of buffalo brains and liver applied to the surface. Tougher rawhide made shields, drum heads, bags, and the Mandan bullboats. Buffalo horns were carved or boiled and shaped into cups, spoons and ladles; hooves of the buffalo were cooked into glue; and bones were made into tools such as awls for piercing and sewing hides together, and hoes for working the soil. Buffalo skulls were used for ceremonial purposes. Maximilian collected and Bodmer depicted some of the items made by hand from the buffalo. In the work *Indian Utensils and Arms*, Bodmer includes a shield made from rawhide, and a parfleche container fashioned from buffalo rawhide and used to carry food, clothing, or other items.

Ritual, Ceremony and Celebration:

Religion and rituals were an essential part of American Indian life on the Great Plains. Tribes had intricate mythology stories and developed belief systems, ideas which are revealed in ceremonies and celebrations. One important aspect of Plains Indian religion is the animistic belief that everything contains a spirit. With this said, it is believed that all animals, plants, and even rocks, are living. Additionally, fundamental to Plains Indians beliefs is the philosophy behind a circular shape. The circle, according to Plains beliefs, is an important, sacred shape, symbolizing unity and harmony, and is replicated in all aspects of life (the

sun, moon, stems of plants, human individuals, ect, are all circular in shape). This sacred shape is also seen replicated throughout Plains Indian life: camps are generally organized in a circular shape, tipis have a circular construction, and for ceremonies, individuals always gather in a circle. During the Sun Dance, for example, a ceremony devoted to reconnecting individuals with both the spirit and natural world, participants gather around the central pole, or axis mundi, in a circle, as they perform the sacrificial piercing. Big ceremonies like the Sun dance often incorporate sweat lodges and the peace pipe, both of which are spiritual cleansing mechanisms, and are important practices of Plains Indians. (Please see external material, such as *The Buffalo Hunters*, and other books listed in the Bibliography, for more information on the sun dance, sweat lodges, and the peace pipe).

Rituals and ceremonies filled many purposes on the Great Plains, often revolving around food and health, such as praying for a good harvest season, or an abundance of buffalo. For tribes who depended on the buffalo for food, it became an important symbol in ritual practices. Some parts of the buffalo, including the skull, horns, tail and hide, were even used by many Plains tribes in a variety of ceremonies. Maximilian and Bodmer witnessed one such ceremonial dance, a Mandan Buffalo Bull Dance, while visiting Fort Clark in the spring of 1834 [Bison-Dance of the Mandan Indians, in front of their Medicine Lodge, in Mih-Tutta-Hangkusch]. This ceremony, performed by the prestigious Buffalo Bulls Society, the second highest warrior society in the Mandan tribe, was intended to pay respect to the buffalo and enable society members to draw on the animal's strength and power. Two of the bravest men were chosen to wear a full buffalo head mask; the other members wore headdresses made from buffalo hide and horns, and a trailer sometimes fashioned from a buffalo tail.

Other ceremonies centering on the buffalo were held before winter or summer hunts. Because harsh winters could make hunting difficult, Mandan women in the White Buffalo Society performed a ceremony to draw buffalo into the wooded river valleys, close to winter villages. During warmer months, many tribes held ceremonies to honor the buffalo before large communal hunts.

Larger tribes broke up into smaller nomadic bands during most of the year in order to survive and efficiently utilize natural resources. In late summer, after the hunting season, these smaller bands gathered together to socialize, hold ceremonies, and trade with other members of their tribe. It was a time to celebrate intertribal war and hunting success, to give thanks, honor ancestors, and share annual rites. The modern-day Plains powwow, featuring both religious and social dances of the Plains Indians, grew out of this traditional celebration. While on their historic journey, Bodmer rendered a large group of Piekann (Blackfoot) Indians camped outside Fort McKenzie on the upper-most part of the Missouri during their five-week stay there. His work, *Encampment of the Piekann*, was initially sketched in August 1834 and is described by Maximilian in his journal as an encampment of some 400 tipis, suggesting this type of celebratory congregation.

Maximilian and Bodmer witnessed large herds of buffalo moving across the plains; Native American ceremonies and shrines honoring the buffalo; hunting parties gathered at the forts to barter; and Native Americans'

efficient and sometimes ingenious use of the animal. They also witnessed the beginning of the destruction of the Plains Indians' most significant natural resource. Maximilian notes in his journal the large number of buffalo being consumed at the time of their journey:

It is difficult to obtain an exact estimate of the consumption of this animal, which is yearly decreasing and driven further inland. In a recent year the fur company sent 42,000 of these hides down the river; which were sold, in the United States, at four dollars a piece. Fort Union alone consumed about 600 to 800 buffaloes annually, and the other forts in proportion. The numerous Indian tribes subsist almost entirely on these animals, sell their skins after retaining a sufficient supply for their clothing, tents....and the agents of the Company recklessly shoot down these noble animals for their own pleasure, often not making the least use of them, except taking out the tongue.

The later expansion of the railroad and new settlement on the Plains brought further declines in the number of buffalo. In search of larger numbers of hides, Americans began hunting the buffalo themselves, killing whole herds and shipping the skins back to processing plants in the East. Buffalo were diminishing in large numbers, and the future was not looking promising for the buffalo population.

Today, though, there is a resurgence of buffalo, and a movement of wanting to bring back the Buffalo to the Plains. Advocates believe that buffalo is the natural animal on the Plains, because it has naturally evolved with prairie grasses and other animals for hundreds of years. Buffalo meat is a continually growing industry. Many enjoy the experience of eating the meat that American Indians have enjoyed here on the Plains for hundreds of years.

Discussion and Activities:

FOLLOWING THE BUFFALO:

Related works of art by Bodmer:

Indians Hunting the Bison

Herds of Bison, on the Upper Missouri

Encampment of the Piekkann Indians

Indian Utensils and Arms

Describe how Maximilian and Bodmer witnessed the movement of the buffalo on their journey. How did the buffalo's seasonal movements affect the nomadic Indians living on the Plains? How did it influence where and when they traveled? What methods did the nomadic Indians utilize to obtain food while they were traveling? What methods did they use to carry their homes around with them?

How did the Native Americans' yearly routine affect when, where, and under what circumstances Maximilian and Bodmer came in contact with them? What nomadic tribes did the two explorers document? Where did they meet these tribes?

How did Bodmer document the Assiniboin? How did Bodmer document the Piegan (Blackfoot)? How are these two tribes similar?

Are there any people today who travel most of the year in order to provide for their families? (Examples: pilot, trucker, salesman, corporate executive). Why do they travel? How do they compare to the nomadic Indians of the 1830s?

In *Indians Hunting the Bison*, Bodmer captures the intense drama of a buffalo hunt on horseback. Discuss how and why Bodmer depicts a moment during the buffalo hunt instead of before or after. How would our perception of a buffalo hunt have changed if Bodmer had chosen to depict the scene before or after the hunt? How does Bodmer convey the intense action in the buffalo hunt?

In *Indians Hunting the Bison*, Bodmer captures the intense drama of a buffalo hunt on horseback. Discuss how and why Bodmer depicts a moment during the buffalo hunt instead of before or after. How would our perception of a buffalo hunt have changed if Bodmer had chosen to depict the scene before or after the hunt? How does Bodmer convey the intense action in the buffalo hunt?

Activities:

Action-Packed Drama:

Students can better understand Bodmer's depiction of action by creating their own dramatic sequence of events. Ask students to think of an intense event that they would like to draw. Now ask them to think of the moments leading up to, during, and after that event. Talk to students about how they might depict this sequence of events visually.

Give students a large piece of paper and ask them to divide the paper into three to six squares (depending on age and ability) by folding the paper into equal parts. Now ask students to draw scenes within each square that depict moments "before, during, and after" the event. Students may want to look at comic strips to spark their imagination about how to break the event down into several scenes.

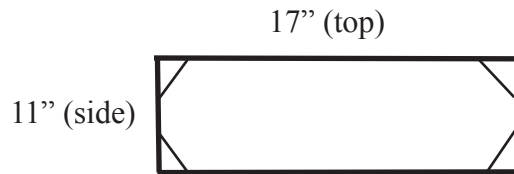
Create a Parfleche:

A parfleche is a thin, rectangular-shaped envelope made from buffalo hide, designed to hang from the side of a saddle and carry food, clothing, or other articles. The parfleche was one of a number of containers used by nomadic Indians to store important items as they traveled. Women of the tribe could produce two parfleches from one buffalo hide. While the hide was still stretched on the ground with spikes, colorful geometric designs were painted onto it using natural minerals and porous buffalo bone "brushes." The two painted rectangles were cut and folded, and rawhide strips were attached to fasten it closed. The parfleche pictured in the print *Indian Utensils and Arms* measures nearly 3' across.

Discuss why people would need to carry food, clothing, or other necessities with them as they travel. Does a parfleche remind you of anything you have used to store items while on a trip? How is it similar to a suitcase? How is it different?

Students can make smaller versions of a parfleche using a sheet of 11" x 17" paper, markers, colored pencils or crayons, and leather shoe laces or string. Directions for creating a parfleche are provided below.

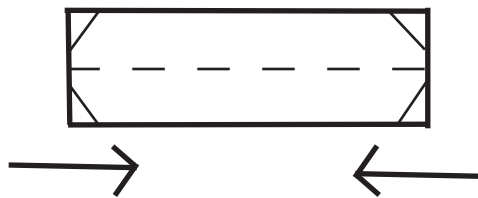
1. Take one sheet of 11" x 17" paper and cut off the corners at an angle as shown by the dotted lines below.



2. Next, fold the top and bottom (17" sides) of the paper inward so that the edges overlap about $\frac{1}{4}$ "



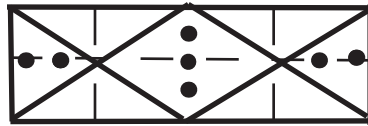
3. Fold the sides of the paper toward the middle so that the edges overlap about $\frac{1}{4}$ "



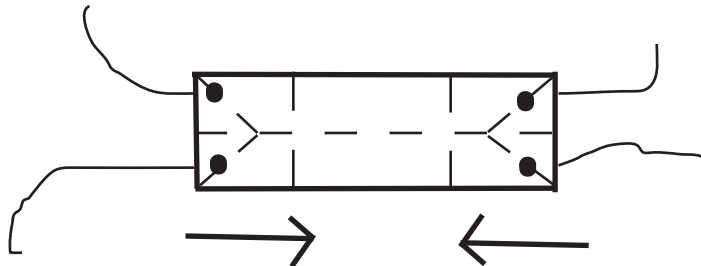
4. Unfold the sides. Your paper should now have two creases that divide the paper into three sections (see below).



5. Next, turn the paper over and draw a simple, geometric design in pencil on the outside of the parfleche. (Sample designs are included on the next page). Look at and discuss some of the patterns used by Native Americans on parfleches. What shapes were used to create each design? How do the shapes create a pattern? Are the designs symmetrical?



6. Trace over the design with black marker and then color it with crayon, marker or colored pencil. A parfleche was usually painted with a few bright paint colors made from vegetable or mineral sources. Encourage students to choose four colors to repeat throughout. After completing the design, turn the paper over. Refold the paper along the original interior creases by pulling the shorter ends toward the middle paper. Finish the parfleche by punching two holes in the two shorter ends and threading a leather strip through all four holes.



Older students may want to try painting their parfleche design with some kind of bone (chicken, turkey) like the original technique used by Native American women.

THE BUFFALO AS A LIFE SOURCE:

Related works of art by Bodmer:

Indians Hunting the Bison

Herds of Bison, on the Upper Missouri

Encampment of the Piekkann Indians

Indian Utensils and Arms

How did Native Americans on the Plains utilize natural resources to meet their needs? How did they utilize the buffalo? How did their dependence on the buffalo and other natural resources affect the way they lived? How did it affect where they lived? How do you think it affected their attitude toward the environment?

Can you think of anything that is used by our society today that is as important as the buffalo was to the Native Americans? Think about what would happen if one of our most precious resources was taken away (such as important food products such as wheat and corn, animals such as chickens and cows, or even non-food resources such as electricity and plastic.) Take electricity, for example. Make a list of all the things you use on a daily basis that run on electricity. How would your life change if there was no more electricity?

How did the European-American settlers in the 1830s view the natural resources in the Plains? How did it affect their actions toward the environment and toward the Native Americans living there? What did Maximilian and Bodmer record about the Native Americans' use of the buffalo? What observations did Maximilian make about the number of buffalo being killed during the time of his expedition?

Activities:

Painted Buffalo Robes:

Robes were made from the hide of the buffalo and were worn by Plains men and women throughout the year. Lighter summer robes were made from a buffalo cow hide that was tanned on both sides with the hair removed; and winter robes were tanned on one side with the hair remaining to provide warmth.

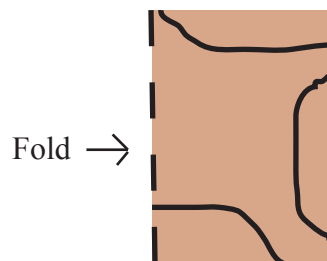
The robes of women were often decorated with geometric designs such as the box-and-border style seen on the robe of the Dakota Woman and Assiniboin Girl. The term “box-and-border” refers to a design pattern that includes a continuous geometric border running around the edge of the hide, as well as a central box filled with geometric shapes. The use of geometric designs to decorate women’s clothing may stem from the traditions of Native American basketry or quill-work which lends themselves to hard-edged shapes and patterns. Basketry and quillwork were women’s arts.

Native American men painted their robes with representations of victories in warfare figures and symbols of personal and/or sacred meaning. In order for a Plains Indian man to win the respect of his tribe, he was required to perform feats of bravery. When brave deeds were accomplished, they could be recorded on a buffalo robe. Just as soldiers in the United States military wear medals signifying courageous acts today, Plains Indian warriors in the 1800s displayed their outstanding battle achievements on buffalo robes, tipis, or horses (see the horse in the work *Travelers meeting with Minatarre Indians near Fort Clark*). Sometimes the representative figures and signs painted on a man’s robe were combined with geometric pattern such as a feathered circle (a circular sun-like pattern with tapered lines radiating from the center).

Students can create their own smaller representation of a painted buffalo robe and decorate the robe with their own geometric designs and/or drawings representing personal accomplishments.

1. Begin by soaking a brown paper bag in water for up to ten minutes. The seams of the bag should come unglued. Next, remove the soaked brown paper, carefully open it, and gently squeeze the water out of the paper. Then spread the paper out onto a sheet of newspaper and let it dry overnight. This will give the paper a leathery texture.

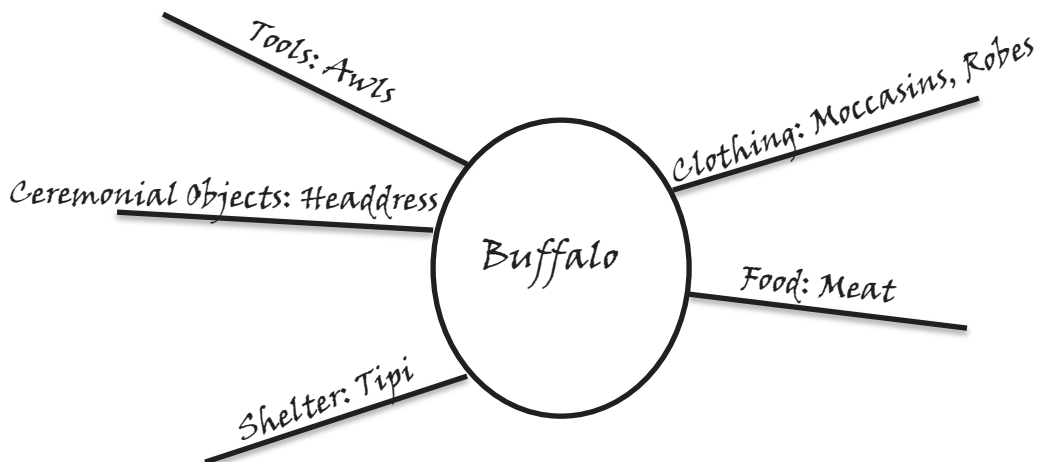
2. After the brown paper is completely dry, fold it in half lengthwise and then tear the paper along the dotted lines, creating the shape of a buffalo hide. (see diagram below)



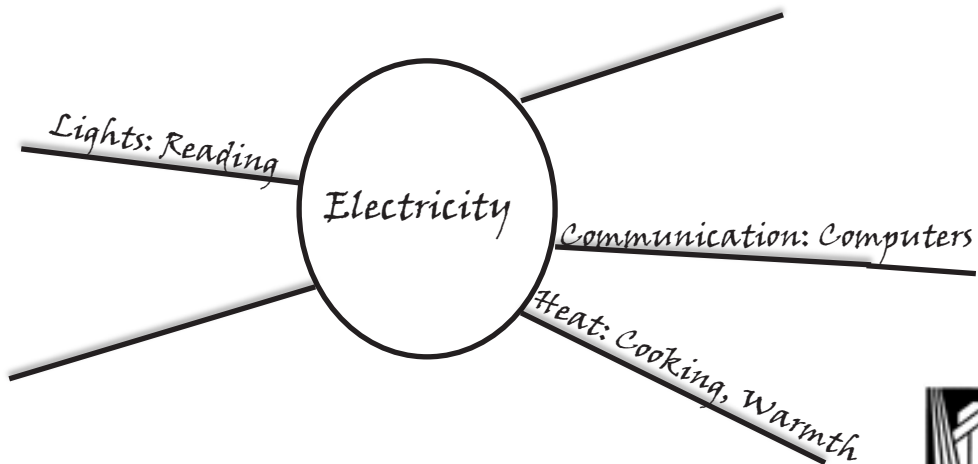
3. Open the paper and draw a geometric design or symbols representing one of your own personal accomplishments. Outline your drawing with black felt-tip pen and then color the design with crayons.

A Web of Provision:

The buffalo provides many important resources for the Plains Indians. Identify various parts of the buffalo and describe how these parts were utilized by Native Americans in the 1830s. Make an “attribute web” that describes what the buffalo provided for the Plains Indians.



Make another web that describes one thing in our society that provides many of your daily necessities



CEREMONY AND CELEBRATION:

Related Works of Art by Karl Bodmer:

Bison-Dance of the Mandan Indians in front of their Medicine Lodge

Boye Ladd, champion Winnebago fancy dancer and historian, states in *Powwow Country*, that “songs and dances evolved around the imitation of animals and natural forces and were held sacred” in earlier times. Historically, dances were most often reserved for male warrior societies such as the Buffalo Bulls, who performed their Buffalo Dance during Bodmer and Maximilian’s stay at Fort Clark in 1834.

Today, however, most ceremonial dances are performed at powwows, and are much more open, including men, women, and young boys and girls. Like the older gatherings, the powwow is a time to gather, celebrate and share elements of the Native American growing tradition with younger generations. As explained by Phillip Paul, a traditional dancer and Flathead Indian, in Chris Roberts’ book *Powwow Country*, “powwows are a celebration of life. We dance, sing, and gather to be happy that we are alive. Happy that we can still see, eat, walk, run, and enjoy family and friends that have gathered for this celebration. The opening of the powwow is a prayer that we will learn from and share with one another. Our dance outfits are made to reflect the wearer’s personality. Our songs are sung to show pride in our tribe and our talents. This makes us dance to our best ability. Powwows have been with us a long time. This is a time to celebrate our survival.”

Powwows are also an important time to reconnect with individuals own spiritual heritage. Boy Ladd, a Winnebago Fancy and Exhibition Dancer, explains: “there is an old story that says that at one time all Indian people were in harmony with nature. They spoke the same language. It is said that our ceremonies, songs and dances are derivatives and interpretations of what we learned from nature. We were able to speak with animals and learn from them. We still hold that tie today. This is where we get those animal behavioral type dances that are part of our sacred ways. Even in the powwow there is an open line, a connection between man and nature.”

An array of public events also goes on during this time. There are drum and dancing contests, ceremonials, princess pageants, parades, rodeos, sport events, gambling, craft fairs, and more. Similarities between the historic and the modern celebrations include: athletic competitions, horse races, special ceremonies, the honoring of relatives, opportunities to buy and trade, and the re-newing of friendships and family ties. Like their ancestors, contemporary Native American dance and ceremony participants spend the winter months making and decorating clothing that will be worn during the many small and large tribal powwows that are typically held between Memorial Day and Labor Day.

What yearly patterns do you have in your own life? How does the contemporary tradition of the school year create a pattern for you? Do you have any annual celebrations that stem from this pattern? How does your yearly schedule influence when and where you see certain family members or friends?

When and where did Maximilian and Bodmer witness a Buffalo Dance? What time of year was it?

Describe a time when your family comes together to celebrate. Is this celebration at a certain time of year? What preparations do you make before this celebration? Do you usually wear special clothing? Why? How is this celebration similar to a powwow?

Have you ever been to an American Indian Powwow? What did you do there? What did you see?

Activities:

Researching your family, community, or national celebrations:

Ask students to interview older family or community members to find out about a special event or day celebrated by their family, community, or country. Students should try to research a celebration that may be unique to their family, religion, community or country. Some questions to think about include:

Why do we celebrate this day or event? What time of year does the celebration occur? Has the celebration been passed down from older generations, members of the community or country? Do you know when

it started? How has the celebration been passed down to your family or community? How does your family or community prepare for this celebration? Who comes to the celebration? Do you wear special clothing? Do you eat special food during the celebration?

Ask students to bring in pictures or draw pictures that depict their family, community, or national celebration. Students could write an essay based on their interviews of family or community members and then make collages illustrating the celebrations. Each student could make a class presentation on the work that they have done.

Note: The Buffalo Theme incorporates information from virtually every resource listed in the Bibliography. For detailed citations, please see the Bibliography at the end of the packet.