

Buffalo Trace Education Box Lesson 13

Using the Bison as a Symbol

Purpose: Students will study the symbols on the Indiana state flag and the Indiana state seal. Students will create their own Buffalo Trace seal for their county.

Subject Areas: Social Studies, Art

Materials Needed: a photo (or the actual) Indiana State flag, a copy of the Indiana State Seal, paper plates (choose ones with the large middle surface for artwork), art supplies
Optional: a copy of the Indiana Historic Pathways sign, National Park Service, U.S. Department of the Interior (all have a bison on the sign/seal)

INDIANA STATE FLAG

The Indiana General Assembly adopted the Indiana state flag in 1917. The flag was designed by Paul Hadley of Mooresville as part of Indiana's centennial celebration flag design contest. The flag has a blue background with yellow symbols. The torch in the middle of the flag represents liberty and enlightenment. The rays illustrate their far-reaching influence. There are a total of 19 stars on the flag, with the outer circle representing the 13 colonies. The stars in a semi-circle stand for the states admitted to the Union prior to Indiana. The star directly above the torch symbolizes Indiana, the 19th state.

Background Information about the Indiana state seal:

Indiana State Code: IC 1-2-4-1

The official seal for the state of Indiana shall be described as follows: A perfect circle, two and five eighths ($2 \frac{5}{8}$) inches in diameter, enclosed by a plain line. Another circle within the first, two and three eighths ($2 \frac{3}{8}$) inches in diameter enclosed by a beaded line, leaving a margin of one quarter ($\frac{1}{4}$) of an inch. In the top half of this margin are the words "Seal of the State of Indiana".

At the bottom center, 1816, flanked on either side by a diamond, with two (2) dots and a leaf of the tulip tree (*liriodendron tulipifera*), at both ends of the diamond. The inner circle has two (2) trees in the left background, three (3) hills in the center background with nearly a full sun setting behind and between the first and second hill from the left.

There are fourteen (14) rays from the sun, starting with two (2) short ones on the left, the third being longer and then alternating, short and long. There are two (2) sycamore trees on the right, the larger one being nearer the center and having a notch cut nearly half way through, from the left side, a short distance above the ground. The woodsman is wearing a hat and holding his ax nearly perpendicular on his right. The ax blade is turned away from him and is even with his hat.

The buffalo is in the foreground, facing to the left of front. His tail is up, front feet on the ground with back feet in the air, as he jumps over a log.

The ground has shoots of blue grass, in the area of the buffalo and woodsman.

Steps:

1. Start with a discussion about familiar symbols, such as restaurants, clothing brands and sport teams. Look for symbols in the classroom and school. Make a classroom definition for "symbols."

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2. Display the state flag. (If possible, show the actual flag.) Discuss the symbols and meanings for the colors, torch and stars.
3. Display the state seal. Discuss, using background information, each item: the pattern, colors, trees, hills, sun, rays, woodsman, ax and the buffalo (bison).
4. Display any other signs or seals with the bison (such as Indiana Historic Pathways). Discuss: What would the bison represent on the state seal? What words could be used along with symbol of the bison?
5. Before starting the art project, discuss symbols for Indiana (for example, cardinal, and tulip tree). Name some possible symbols for your county and the Buffalo Trace.
6. Students should select colors, patterns and at least three symbols for their Buffalo Trace seal. Sketch on the plate first, before using any other art supplies.
7. After finishing their project, have students write captions about their seal. Tell about the significance of the colors, patterns and explain why they chose each of the symbols.

Extensions:

- Have a display of the Buffalo Trace seals, along with the captions. Invite other classes, family and community members to view the projects. Serve bison-shaped and decorated cookies.
- Provide students with an outline of a bison on paper. At home, students decorate the bison to celebrate Indiana's "Bison-ennial."

Resources:

- For an article about teaching symbols to fourth graders, check out "They Mean Something More: Teaching About Symbols Using Balanced Integration," [Social Studies and the Young Learner, 2012](#). The authors and the art teachers (from University Elementary School, Bloomington) integrated their social studies and art so that the fourth graders could make their own presidential plates. The article can be found at socialstudies.org/system/files/publications/yl/2501/250110.pdf
- Indiana Historic Pathways
- The first Thursday in November is National Bison Day. Go to votebison.org and beardsforbison.org for information about the National Bison Legacy Act and a fun beard template. Search for a DIY project for a bison headband.
- On the site DuluthPack.com, find some interesting comments about the bison used as a symbol.