



*The Buffalo Hunter*



Unknown American Primitive Painter

*The Buffalo Hunter*, ca. 1844

Oil on canvas

SBMA, Gift of Harriett Cowles Hammett Graham in memory of Buell Hammett

**Grade/Level:** 3-5

**Subjects:** Language Arts, Social Studies, Visual Arts

**Time Required:** One to two class periods

**Students will learn:**

**To use vocabulary precisely**

**To observe and describe**

**To analyze and articulate** visual clues, and their connection to **cause and effect.**

**To identify sensory details**

How artists **communicate information**

How to **form conclusions** based on visual evidence

How to **generate alternative endings**

**Discussion Questions:**

**What do you see? Describe this scene.**

What does your eye see first? *The Indian and his horse.*

Why do we notice them first? *The artist has put them in the center of the painting; the horse is white and our eye is drawn to lighter colors.*

Who or what is the other main character in the painting? *The buffalo.*

How does the artist draw our eye from the Indian to the buffalo?

*The diagonal line of the arrow takes our eye from the Indian to the buffalo.*

*So does the horse's white tail!*

Describe the poses: what is each of the three main "characters" doing?

### **Observe and Describe Sensory Details**

Describe the setting: where are they?

What time of year? What time of day is it? How do we know?

What about the light? Does it look real? What about the light behind the Indian's head?

If you were in this picture, what sounds would you hear?

If you were to create music to go along with this scene, what would it sound like?

### **How Artists Communicate Information**

#### **Understand Cause and Effect**

What do you think the artist wants us to think about this American Indian?

Who is the main character? What words would you use to describe the Indian?

Is he young or old? Does he look in good shape? How do we know? Does the artist want us to think he is brave? What clues lead you to this conclusion?

How do the visual clues communicate the artist's message?

#### **Fact and Opinion**

Does this painting represent a historical fact?

*Yes, in the mid-1800s buffalo were still plentiful in the American West and were a main source of food, clothing, and shelter for the American Indians who hunted them.*

#### **Creating a Visual Story or Myth**

Do these characters look real to you? Does the setting look real?

If yes, why?

If no, why not?

*Look at the way the forms are painted: each figure is very simple, almost like cut-outs.*

What about the horses legs? Do they look strong enough to hold him up? What about the Indian? Does he look like a real person --like a portrait of someone you could recognize? *You can't really see his face, but there isn't much detail, so he looks more like a "type" or an idea of an Indian than a real person.*

What about scale? How big do you think a real horse would be in relation to a real buffalo? *Buffalos weighed around 2,000 pounds and were huge. The horses were for the most part pintos (not white stallions), a fraction the size and weight of the buffalo.*

Discuss the poses: why do you think the artist chose these poses? *The horse is heading away from the buffalo, the Indian is turning around to shoot sideways, and the buffalo is kicking up his heels.*

Do you think this is how a real buffalo hunt looked?

*The artist shows each of the three figures in "characteristic" poses where we can see the entire figure—almost like an Egyptian painting.*

#### **Forming Conclusions**

Adding up all the things you have observed and described, would you conclude that this scene looks realistic, or imaginary?

#### **Alternative Endings**

How do you think the action in this painting will end?

What will happen when the Indian shoots his arrow?

What do you think would happen if the Indian didn't have a horse?  
How would the subject be different if there were lots of Indians and lots of horses and lots of buffalo?

**Writing Activity: *Make up a story***

Imagine that you are this young hunter. Tell us in your own words about your life, and the people of your tribe. What is like to be all alone trying to hunt a buffalo? Have you ever killed a buffalo before? Are you afraid? Tell us about your family. Are they worried about you? Proud of you? What are your hopes and dreams for the future?

**Art Activity: Buffalo Hunter Collage**

**Materials:** Line drawing of *Buffalo Hunter* provided with lesson plan; copy paper, pastels or crayons, scissors and glue sticks.

**Instructions:** Give each student:

1. A sheet of 8 ½" x 11" white paper
2. A photocopy of the *Buffalo Hunter* line drawing.

Ask them to use the white paper to draw a landscape background. Their compositions can be very simple shapes and colors indicating the foreground, middle ground, and background. Once their landscape setting is done, have them put it aside. Next, color the individual elements in the *Buffalo Hunter* line drawing: the hunter, the horse, clouds, etc. As they are coloring these individual collage elements, ask them to think about their compositions – where they would like to place the characters and how their location within the setting changes the story. Finally have students cut out the collage elements and glue them onto their landscape background.

**Optional: Compare and Contrast**

1. Compare with prints by George Catlin (1841) and F. Darley (1844).
2. Compare with Frederick Remington's **Fight Over a Water Hole**, 1897 (SBMA, Gift of Barbara D. Dupee).

**Standards Addressed**

**Language Arts**

Third Grade

**2.0 Writing Applications**

2.1 Write narratives:

- a. Provide a context within which an action takes place
- b. Include well-chosen details to develop the plot
- c. Provide insight into why the selected incident is memorable

2.2 Write descriptions that use concrete details to prevent and support unified impressions of people, places, things, or experiences.

**Fourth Grade**

**2.0 Writing Applications**

2.1 Write narratives:

- a. Relate ideas, observations, or recollections of an event or experience.
- b. Provide a context to enable the reader to imagine the world of the event of experience.
- c. Use concrete sensory details.
- d. Provide insight into why the selected event or experience is memorable.

## **Fifth Grade**

### **2.0 Writing Applications**

#### **2.1 Writing Narratives**

- a. Establish a plot, point of view, setting, and conflict.
- b. Show, rather than tell, the events of the story.

## **Visual Arts Standards**

### **Third Grade**

#### **1.0 Artistic Perception**

1.3 Identify and describe how foreground, middle ground, and background are used to create the illusion of space.

1.5 Identify and describe elements of art in works of art, emphasizing line, color, shape/form, texture, space, and value.

#### **2.0 Creative Expression**

2.3 Paint or draw a landscape, seascape, or cityscape that shows the illusion of space.

#### **5.0 Connections, Relationships, Applications**

5.2 Write a poem or story inspired by their own works of art.

### **Fourth Grade**

#### **1.0 Artistic Perception**

1.5 Describe and analyze the elements of art (e.g. color, shape/form, line, texture, space, value, emphasizing form, as they are used in works of art and found in the environment.

#### **4.0 Aesthetic Valuing**

4.5 Describe how the individual experiences of an artist may influence the development of specific works of art.

### **Fifth Grade**

#### **2.0 Creative Expression**

2.6 Use perspective in an original work of art to create a real or imaginary scene.

#### **Artistic Perception**

#### **3.0 Aesthetic Valuing**

4.1 Identify how selected principles of design are used in a work of art and how they affect personal responses to and evaluation of the work of art.

## **Background Information for Teachers**

This primitive painting by an unknown artist was the first painting to be acquired for the Santa Barbara Museum of Art. It came into the Museum at the time of its founding in 1941.

Although we do not know who the painter was, he was probably someone who had never seen a real buffalo hunt. Our painting seems to have been inspired by the works of two other artists: George Catlin, and F. Darley. Catlin actually lived among the Sioux Indians during the 1820s and 1830s; his drawings and prints represent Indian life as he observed it firsthand. They became the sources for many later prints and paintings of Indian life by

other artists. Our painting was probably inspired ultimately by Catlin, but through a second artist name F. Darley.

**Post-Script: the End of the Buffalo**

By the late 1880s, after thirty years of indiscriminate slaughter, there were only about 400 wild buffalo left on the Plains, and the Indians were nearly gone as well. Later artists who painted this subject did so with a nostalgic backward look at a way of life that was no more. Our *Buffalo Hunter*, painted by an unknown “celebrant of a national landscape and mythology,” shows a happier, more innocent time, which rejoiced in the grace and freedom of the men and beasts of the American wilderness.