

Explore More—Then and Now

Directions: Listen to your teacher talk about the changes taking place in the Great Plains today. Think about how the present is connected to the past, and how some things change over time and some things stay the same. Circle any words you don't understand. Underline or highlight important ideas in the text. Write notes in the margins to help you understand key points. Then answer the questions in your own words.

Why were bison important to the early Plains Indians?

The Plains Indians who lived around the 1400s needed bison for food, tools, clothing, and shelter. When a scout spotted a herd of bison, the whole camp moved. It was hard work to kill the bison, but the Indians' lives depended on it. The Plains Indians used every part of the bison for their survival.

How many bison lived on the Great Plains?

In the 1700s, there were 60-70 million bison living on the Great Plains. Indians killed many bison, but as you learned, they did not do this for fun. They needed the meat, skins, and bones from the bison in order to survive.

What happened to the bison when Europeans arrived in the Great Plains?

Both the bison and the Plains Indians were nearly destroyed after Europeans began coming into the Plains. Europeans often killed bison for fun. They also carried diseases such as measles and smallpox that killed many Indians. By 1900, most of the Plains Indians had been forced onto reservations and only a few hundred bison remained. With the loss of the bison, the Indians lost their major food supply.

Continued on next page

What is happening in the Great Plains today?

Things are changing! Both the bison and the Plains Indians are beginning to return to the area they once called home. During the last two decades, white farmers began to leave the Great Plains. The land has not been as good for farming as they thought it would be. As the white farmers leave, members of the Sioux and other tribes are returning to the lands of their ancestors. The returning Indians are raising bison, and there are now more than 300,000 in the area.

Are the Great Plains changing in other ways?

Yes, the land is changing in other ways, too. When settlers came to the Plains, they disturbed the natural habitat of many native plants and animals. Now, not only are Indians and bison returning, but native grasses and wildflowers are growing again. Prairie dogs, black-footed ferrets, and burrowing owls are back, too. ❖

YOUR TURN!

1. How does this story illustrate how the past is connected to the present?

2. Write what you know about the Great Plains during three different time periods by completing the chart below.

Great Plains before Europeans Arrive	Great Plains after Europeans Arrive	Great Plains Today

3. Look at the chart you completed for Question #2. Choose two periods of time. How are they the same? How are they different? Complete the chart below.

Similarities	Differences