

# LESSON # 9: BUFFALO MEAT & WOUNDED KNEE

(Grade 11/US History)

Written by Kris McIntosh

**Summary:** In this lesson, students analyze, through paintings, photographs, and letters, how a major change in the Native American's way of life, the loss of the buffalo, was a partial cause of the Battle of Wounded Knee. This activity is intended to be used with other Social Studies lessons to provide a comprehensive study of Westward Expansion.

**Objective:** By analyzing primary and secondary source material, including paintings, photographs and letters, students will

- discover and describe some causes of the Wounded Knee Massacre.

**TEKS:**

**(US 9A) Geography.** The student is expected to analyze the effects of physical and human geographic factors on major events.

**(US 2A) History.** The student understands the political, economic, and social changes in the United States from 1877 to 1898. The student is expected to analyze political issues such as Indian policies.

**(US 24) Social studies skills.** The student applies critical-thinking skills to organize and use information acquired from a variety of sources including electronic technology. The student is expected to use primary and secondary sources such as biographies, interviews, and artifacts to acquire information about the United States.

**Time Required:** Two class periods

**Materials Needed:**

Copies of Sid Richardson Museum paintings *Wild Man's Meat (Redman's Meat)*, *Indians Hunting Buffalo*, *The Buffalo Hunt (Wild Meat for Wild Men)*, *Buffalo Hunt*, and *The Buffalo Runners*, by Charles M. Russell

Edwin Curtis photograph "As it was in the old days"

NARA Photograph of "Rath & Wright's buffalo hide yard"

Photograph of "Gathering up the dead of the battlefield of Wounded Knee S.D."

Photograph of "Burying the Dead"

Account of the Massacre at Wounded Knee, 1890

Letters of correspondence by John W. Noble, Secretary of the Interior:

"Letter to the President from John W. Noble, Secretary of the Interior, November 29, 1890", "Letter to the Commissioner of Indian Affairs from John W. Noble, Secretary of the Interior, December 1, 1890", "Letter to the Honorable Secretary of War from John W. Noble, Secretary of the Interior, December 2, 1890", "Letter to the Honorable Secretary of War from John W. Noble, Secretary of the Interior, December 3, 1890", and, "Letter

to the Honorable Secretary of War from John W. Noble, Secretary of the Interior, December 11, 1890”

Statement of General Nelson Miles

Magnifying glasses

NARA Photo Analysis Sheet

**Procedure:**

- Have a discussion with students about cafeteria food. “What would happen if your only choice for lunch was cafeteria food furnished by the school? There are no off-campus privileges. First lunch gets hamburger, French fries and corn. By second lunch you have some French fries but mostly corn for those students at the end of the line. What do you do? Run off campus? Write letters to the school board? Bring your own sack lunch? Food fights?”
- Pass out the NARA Photo Analysis Sheet. Share the paintings of Indians hunting buffalo. This can be done in small groups or with the entire classroom. “Why are the Indians killing buffalo? What role did buffalo play in the lives of Indians?” Ask students to create a list of all the ways that the buffalo parts could be used for survival and enjoyment by the Indian.
- Show the photograph by Edwin Curtis and read his quote to the class.
- Show the NARA photograph of the 40,000 hides at Dodge City, Kansas. Ask the students, “When the settler or businessman kills the buffalo, how did he use the carcass? As an Indian, what will you do when the buffalo are all gone? What is the position of the U.S. Government, and the status of the Native American on the Plains, by the late 1800s?”
- Invite students to research the conditions on the Pine Ridge Reservation in South Dakota and the position of the government that might have contributed to the Battle of Wounded Knee, December 29, 1890. Pass out the letters (four letters are transcribed) written by John W. Noble, Secretary of the Interior, 1889-1893. After students have read the letters, ask them what inferences may be made about the condition of the Indians and the position of the U.S. Government in the month before the battle. Pass out the description of the battle. Ask students to consider the position of the authors of these documents, and to share what they have learned from their readings.
- In the coming months the U.S. Government would investigate this battle. Read the report given by General Nelson Miles. Ask students, “How does General Miles letter compare to the letters written by Secretary John Noble? List the reasons General Miles gives for the Indian’s plight. Can these reasons be substantiated?”

Assignment – Assign students to write an editorial for the local newspaper, relating the causes of the Battle of Wounded Knee, December 29, 1900 for the anniversary of the event.



*Wild Man's Meat (Redman's Meat)*, by Charles M Russell, 1889,  
Pencil, Watercolor, and Gouache on Paper  
Sid Richardson Museum, Fort Worth, Texas





*Indians Hunting Buffalo*, by Charles M Russell, 1894, Oil on Canvas  
Sid Richardson Museum, Fort Worth, Texas



*The Buffalo Hunt (Wild Meat for Wild Men)*, by Charles M. Russell,  
1899, Oil on Canvas  
Sid Richardson Museum, Fort Worth, Texas





*Buffalo Hunt*, by Charles M. Russell, 1901, Oil on Canvas  
Sid Richardson Museum, Fort Worth, Texas



*The Buffalo Runners*, by Charles M. Russell, 1892, Oil on Canvas  
Sid Richardson Museum, Fort Worth, Texas

Description by Edward S. Curtis:

*In early days, before white men invaded the Great Plains and ruthlessly slaughtered them by the hundreds of thousands, bison were of prime importance to the hunting tribes of the vast region in which those animals had their range. The bison was not only the chief source of food of the Plains Indians, but its skin was made into clothing, shields, packs, bags, snowshoes, and tent and boat covers; the horns were fashioned into spoons and drinking vessels; the sinew was woven into reatas, belts, personal ornaments, and the covers of sacred bundles; and the dried droppings, "buffalo-chips," were used as fuel. So dependent on the buffalo were these Indians that it became sacred to them, and many were the ceremonies performed for the purpose of promoting the increase of the herds.*





“As it was in the old days” (The North American Indian; v.19) c. 1927, by Edward S. Curtis. Repository: Northwestern University, Evanston, IL The Library of Congress, American Memory. Online version on November 2, 2006, available at: <http://hdl.loc.gov/loc.award/iencurt.cp19001>





RATH & WRIGHT'S BUFFALO HIDE YARD IN 1878. SHOWING 40,000 BUFFALO HIDES. DODGE CITY, KANSAS  
FROM A PHOTOGRAPH

"Rath & Wright's buffalo hide yard in 1878, showing 40,000 buffalo hides, Dodge City, Kansas".  
Records of the National Park Service, 1785 – 2004, Record Group 79; Still Picture Records  
LICON, Special Media Archives Services Division (NWCS-S), National Archives at College Park,  
MD.

Online version on November 2, 2006, available at:

<http://www.archives.gov/research/american-west/images/091.jpg>

ARC Identifier: 520093

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November 29, 1890

45  
The Honorable, The Secretary of War.

I have the honor to transmit herewith, for your information, a copy of a communication of this date from the Commissioner of Indian Affairs, embodying copy of a joint telegram from the Agent of the Pine Ridge Agency, S.D., and Special Agent Cooper, of the Indian Service, relation to Rosebud Indians destroying property & houses of peaceable Pine Ridge Indians, etc, also copy of Indian Office to Pine Ridge and Rosebud Agents in relation thereto. The matter is submitted without recommendation.

I have the honor to be,

9700 Ind. Div. '90  
One enclosure.

Very respectfully,

John W. Noble, Secretary.

November 29, 1890

A. E. L.  
~~The President~~

I have the honor to acknowledge the receipt of the within memorial purporting to be signed by 103 Sioux Indians of the Rosebud Agency, S.D., setting forth their destitute condition.

The matter having been referred to the Commissioner of Indian Affairs for report, I have the honor to enclose herewith his reply, together with the accompanying papers.

Statement A, gives the quantities of subsistence

Letter to the President from John W. Noble, Secretary of the Interior, November 29, 1890 (Page 1); Letters Sent by the Indian Division of the Office of the Secretary of the Interior, 1859-1903; National Archives Microfilm Publication M606, Roll 68; Records of the Office of the Secretary of the Interior, Record Group 48, National Archives, Washington, D.C.



purchased for each of the five Sioux Agencies out of the \$750,000 appropriated by Congress for the "Support and Civilization" of all the Sioux Agencies.

Statement B. shows the amount expended for Subsistence, clothing, implements, etc., and for Agency and School employes at the Sioux Agencies.

The Commissioner states that the quantity of rations issued on all reservations is as large as the appropriations made by Congress will admit.

He invites attention to the fact that \$150,000 the interest at 5% on the permanent fund of \$3,000,000 created by the Act of March 3, 1855 (23 Stat. 884) has been appropriated, and suggests whether one half of this sum, if deemed not wise to be paid to them per capita, might not be used in the purchase of such additional supplies, if the necessities shall be found to require it, but that he is very reluctant to recommend this money for additional subsistence, unless there is such an emergency as is absolute to require it, and to keep the Indians from actual distress by reason of hunger.

He also states that he has submitted in a separate communication a report requesting that Congress be asked to make an appropriation of \$100,000 to be available in the purchase of additional ~~hay and medicine~~ supplies in the latter part of the winter and in the early spring as the necessities of these Indians shall be found to require.

I have the honor to be

Very respectfully,

Your obedient servant,

11/29/90 Ind. Div. No.

John W. Noble.

Four enclosures

Secretary



December 1, 1890.

The Commissioner of Indian Affairs.  
Sir:

You will convey to the several Agents on duty among the Sioux, the following order, which is hereby made:

485 During the present Indian troubles you are instructed that while you shall continue all the business, and carry into effect the educational and other purposes of your Agency, you will, as to all operations intended to suppress any outbreak by force, co-operate with and obey the orders of the military officer commanding on the reservation in your charge.

Very respectfully,  
John W. Noble,  
Secretary.

Letter to the Commissioner of Indian Affairs from John W. Noble, Secretary of the Interior, December 1, 1890; Letters Sent by the Indian Division of the Office of the Secretary of the Interior, 1859-1903; National Archives Microfilm Publication M606, Roll 68; Records of the Office of the Secretary of the Interior, Record Group 48, National Archives, Washington, D.C.





December 3, 1890.

52  
 The Honorable  
 The Secretary of War  
 Dear Sir:

There is herewith respectfully transmitted to you a copy of letter from the Acting Commissioner of Indian Affairs, of the 2d instant, giving in detail the names of Indians to be arrested at Pine Ridge Agency when it is deemed this action should take place. I have to-day

written the President that in my judgment if we issue the increased rations without arresting the Indians guilty of present disturbances, we shall cause the Indians to give credit to the bad Indians instead of the good ones.

I am strongly of the opinion, as I have said to the President, that the arrests should be made as soon as possible, ~~as~~ General Miles has requested, and I have agreed to supply the rations, and this is now beyond recall.

1890 Ind. Div. 90.

Enclosure

Yours most respectfully,  
 John W. Noble, Secretary.

Letter to the Honorable Secretary of War from John W. Noble, Secretary of the Interior, December 3, 1890; Letters Sent by the Indian Division of the Office of the Secretary of the Interior, 1859-1903; National Archives Microfilm Publication M606, Roll 68; Records of the Office of the Secretary of the Interior, Record Group 48, National Archives, Washington, D.C.



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N.E.C.

December 11, 1890.

The Honorable

The Secretary of War.

Sir:

I have the honor to transmit herewith for your information, copy of a communication of 10<sup>th</sup> instant, from the Commissioner of Indian Affairs, enclosing a copy of a letter from Agent Charles A. Bartholomew, of Southern Ute and Jicarilla Agency, of 1st instant, in response to a circular letter of the 22<sup>nd</sup> ultimo, calling for information as to the condition and temper of his Indians in connection with the ghost dance, in which he states that his Indians are free from any excitement on the subject.

5090 Ind. Div. '90.

Two inclosures.

Very respectfully,  
John W. Noble.  
Secretary.

Letter to the Honorable Secretary of War from John W. Noble, Secretary of the Interior, December 11, 1890; Letters Sent by the Indian Division of the Office of the Secretary of the Interior, 1859-1903; National Archives Microfilm Publication M606, Roll 68; Records of the Office of the Secretary of the Interior, Record Group 48, National Archives, Washington, D.C.

Transcriptions (Letters Sent by the Indian Division of the Office of the Secretary of the Interior, 1859-1903; National Archives Microfilm Publication M606, roll 68; Records of the Office of the Secretary of the Interior, Record Group 48, National Archives, Washington, D.C):

November 29, 1890

*The President:*

*I have the honor to acknowledge the receipt of the written memorial purporting to be signed by 103 Sioux Indians of the Rosebud Agency setting forth their destitute condition.*

*The matter having been referred to the Commissioner of Indian Affairs for report, I have the honor to enclose herewith his reply, together with the accompanying papers.*

*Statement A gives the quantities of subsistence purchased for each of the five Sioux Agencies out of the \$950,000 appropriated by Congress for the "Support and Civilization" of all the Sioux Agencies. Statement B shows the amount expended for subsistence, clothing, implements, etc, and for Agency and School employee at the Sioux Agencies.*

*The Commissioner states that the quantity of rations issued on all reservations is as large as the appropriations made by Congress will admit.*

*He invites attention to the fact that \$150,000, the interest at 5% on the permanent fund of \$3,000,000 created by the Act of March 2, 1888 (23 Stats 888) has been appropriated, and suggests whether one half of this (illegible), if deemed not wise, to be paid to them per capita, might not be used for the purchase of such additional supplies, if the necessities shall be found to require it, but that he is very reluctant to recommend this money for additional subsistence, unless there is such an emergency as is absolute to require it, and to keep the Indians from actual distress by reason of hunger.*

*He also states in a separate communication requesting that Congress be asked to make an appropriation of \$100,000. To be available in the purchase of additional beef and such other supplies in the latter part of the winter and in the early spring as the necessities of these Indians shall be found to require.*

*I have the honor to be*

*Very respectfully,*

*Your obedient servant,*

*John W. Noble,*

*Secretary (of the Interior)*

December 1, 1890

*The Commissioner of Indian Affairs*

Sir:

*You will convey to the several Agents on duty among the Sioux, the following order, which is hereby made:*

*During the present Indian troubles you are instructed that while you shall continue all the business, and carry into effect the educational and other purposes of your Agency, you will, as to all operations intended to suppress any outbreak by force, co-operate with and obey the orders of the military officers commanding in the reservation in your charge.*

Very respectfully,

*John W. Noble*

*Secretary (of the Interior)*

December 2, 1890

*The Honorable, The Secretary of War,*

Sir:

*I have the honor to transmit herewith for your information, copy of a communication of this date from the Commissioner of Indian Affairs, which contains a statement from the Special Indian Agent Lee, now at Pine Ridge Agency, South Dakota, to the effect that these Indians are not in a starving condition, though many suffer from hunger, (illegible) from their improvident habits, than from any lack of sufficient food.*

*I have the honor to be, Very respectfully,*

*John W., Noble, Secretary (of the Interior)*

December 3, 1890

*The Honorable, The Secretary of War*

Dear Sir:

*There is herewith respectfully transmitted to you a copy of letter from the Acting Commissioner of Indian Affairs of the names of Indians to be arrested at Pine Ridge Agency when it is deemed this action should take place. I have to-day written the President that in my judgment if we issue the increased rations without arresting the Indians guilty of present disturbances, we shall cause the Indians to give credit to the bad Indians instead of the good ones. I am strongly of the opinion, as I have said to the President, that the arrests should be made as soon as possible, since General Miles has requested aid and I have agreed to supply the rations and this is now beyond recall.*

*Yours most respectfully,*

*John W. Noble, Secretary (of the Interior)*



## "Massacre At Wounded Knee, 1890,"

*On the morning of December 29, 1890, the Sioux chief Big Foot and some 350 of his followers camped on the banks of Wounded Knee creek. Surrounding their camp was a force of U.S. troops charged with the responsibility of arresting Big Foot and disarming his warriors. The scene was tense. Trouble had been brewing for months.*

*The once proud Sioux found their free-roaming life destroyed, the buffalo gone, themselves confined to reservations dependent on Indian Agents for their existence. In a desperate attempt to return to the days of their glory, many sought salvation in a new mysticism preached by a Paiute shaman called Wovoka. Emissaries from the Sioux in South Dakota traveled to Nevada to hear his words. Wovoka called himself the Messiah and prophesied that the dead would soon join the living in a world in which the Indians could live in the old way surrounded by plentiful game. A tidal wave of new soil would cover the earth, bury the whites, and restore the prairie. To hasten the event, the Indians were to dance the Ghost Dance. Many dancers wore brightly colored shirts emblazoned with images of eagles and buffaloes. These "Ghost Shirts" they believed would protect them from the bluecoats' bullets. During the fall of 1890, the Ghost Dance spread through the Sioux villages of the Dakota reservations, revitalizing the Indians and bringing fear to the whites. A desperate Indian Agent at Pine Ridge wired his superiors in Washington, "Indians are dancing in the snow and are wild and crazy...We need protection and we need it now. The leaders should be arrested and confined at some military post until the matter is quieted, and this should be done now." The order went out to arrest Chief Sitting Bull at the Standing Rock Reservation. Sitting Bull was killed in the attempt on December 15. Chief Big Foot was next on the list.*

*When he heard of Sitting Bull's death, Big Foot led his people south to seek protection at the Pine Ridge Reservation. The army intercepted the band on December 28 and brought them to the edge of the Wounded Knee to camp. The next morning the chief, racked with pneumonia and dying, sat among his warriors and powwowed with the army officers. Suddenly the sound of a shot pierced the early morning gloom. Within seconds the charged atmosphere erupted as Indian braves scurried to retrieve their discarded rifles and troopers fired volley after volley into the Sioux camp. From the heights above, the army's Hotchkiss guns raked the Indian teepees with grapeshot. Clouds of gun smoke filled the air as men, women and children scrambled for their lives. Many ran for a ravine next to the camp only to be cut down in a withering cross fire. When the smoke cleared and the shooting stopped, approximately 300 Sioux were dead, Big Foot among them. Twenty-five soldiers lost their lives. As the remaining troopers began the grim task of removing the dead, a blizzard swept in from the North. A few days later they returned to complete the job. Scattered fighting continued, but the massacre at Wounded Knee effectively squelched the Ghost Dance movement and ended the Indian Wars.*

"Massacre At Wounded Knee, 1890," Eye Witness to History, [www.eyewitnesstohistory.com](http://www.eyewitnesstohistory.com) (1998). Online source available November 2, 2006 at:

[www.eyewitnesstohistory.com/knee.htm](http://www.eyewitnesstohistory.com/knee.htm)



“Gathering up the dead of the battlefield of Wounded Knee S.D”  
[1891? January 3]. Northwestern Photographic Co Jan 1st 1891 Chadron Neb.  
Library of Congress, History of the American West  
Western History/Genealogy Department, Denver Public Library. Online source available  
November 2, 2006 at:  
<http://photoswest.org/cgi-bin/imager?10031464+X-31464>



“Burying the Dead”, Denver Public Library, Western History Collection  
Burying Indian Dead at Wounded Knee. Online source available November 2, 2006 at:  
<http://americanhistory.si.edu/militaryhistory/exhibition/zoomify.asp?id=553&type=g&width=640&height=480&hideAlt=1>

## STATEMENT OF GENERAL MILES

*Cause of Indian dissatisfaction -- The causes that led to the serious disturbance of the peace in the northwest last autumn and winter were so remarkable that an explanation of them is necessary in order to comprehend the seriousness of the situation. The Indians assuming the most threatening attitude of hostility were the Cheyennes and Sioux. Their condition may be stated as follows: For several years following their subjugation in 1877, 1878, and 1879 the most dangerous element of the Cheyennes and the Sioux were under military control. Many of them were disarmed and dismounted; their war ponies were sold and the proceeds returned to them in domestic stock, farming utensils, wagons, etc. Many of the Cheyennes, under the charge of military officers, were located on land in accordance with the laws of Congress, but after they were turned over to civil agents and the vast herds of buffalo and large game had been destroyed their supplies were insufficient, and they were forced to kill cattle belonging to white people to sustain life.*



*The fact that they had not received sufficient food is admitted by the agents and the officers of the government who have had opportunities of knowing. The majority of the Sioux were under the charge of civil agents, frequently changed and often inexperienced. Many of the tribes became rearmed and remounted. They claimed that the government had not fulfilled its treaties and had failed to make large enough appropriations for their support; that they had suffered for want of food, and the evidence of this is beyond question and sufficient to satisfy any unprejudiced intelligent mind. The statements of officers, inspectors, both of the military and the Interior departments, of agents, of missionaries, and civilians familiar with their condition, leave no room for reasonable doubt that this was one of the principal causes. While statements may be made as to the amount of money that has been expended by the government to feed the different tribes, the manner of distributing those appropriations will furnish one reason for the deficit.*

*The unfortunate failure of the crops in the plains country during the years of 1889 and 1890 added to the distress and suffering of the Indians, and it was possible for them to raise but very little from the ground for self-support; in fact, white settlers have been most unfortunate, and their losses have been serious and universal throughout a large section of that country. They have struggled on from year to year; occasionally they would raise good crops, which they were compelled to sell at low prices, while in the season of drought their labor was almost entirely lost. So serious have been their misfortunes that thousands have left that country within the last few years, passing over the mountains to the Pacific slope or returning to the east of the Missouri or the Mississippi.*

*The Indians, however, could not migrate from one part of the United States to another; neither could they obtain employment as readily as white people, either upon or beyond the Indian reservations. They must remain in comparative idleness and accept the results of the drought—an insufficient supply of food. This created a feeling of discontent even among the loyal and well disposed and added to the feeling of hostility of the element opposed to every process of civilization.*

General Nelson A. Miles on the “Sioux Outbreak” of 1890, from the Report of the Secretary of War for 1891, Vol. I, pp, 133, 134, and 149. Online Source available at Archives of the West, 1887-1914, “New Perspective on The West”, PBS Online, on November 2, 2006 at:

<http://www.pbs.org/weta/thewest/resources/archives/>

## Written Document Analysis Worksheet

1.	TYPE OF DOCUMENT (Check one): <input type="radio"/> Newspaper <input type="radio"/> Letter <input type="radio"/> Patent <input type="radio"/> Memorandum <input type="radio"/> Map <input type="radio"/> Telegram <input type="radio"/> Press Release <input type="radio"/> Report <input type="radio"/> Advertisement <input type="radio"/> Congressional Record <input type="radio"/> Census Report <input type="radio"/> Other
2.	UNIQUE PHYSICAL CHARACTERISTICS OF THE DOCUMENT (Check one or more): <input type="checkbox"/> Interesting Letterhead <input type="checkbox"/> Handwritten <input type="checkbox"/> Typed <input type="checkbox"/> Seals <input type="checkbox"/> Notations <input type="checkbox"/> "RECEIVED" stamp <input type="checkbox"/> Other
3.	DATE(S) OF DOCUMENT:
4.	AUTHOR (OR CREATOR) OF THE DOCUMENT:  POSITION (TITLE):
5.	FOR WHAT AUDIENCE WAS THE DOCUMENT WRITTEN?
6.	DOCUMENT INFORMATION (There are many possible ways to answer A-E.) A. List three things the author said that you think are important:  B. Why do you think this document was written?  C. What evidence in the document helps you know why it was written? Quote from the document.  D. List two things the document tells you about life in the United States at the time it was written.  E. Write a question to the author that is left unanswered by the document:

**Designed and developed by the  
Education Staff, National Archives and Records Administration,  
Washington, DC 20408**

Written Document Worksheet, Online version on November 2, 2006, at:  
[http://www.archives.gov/education/lessons/worksheets/written\\_document\\_analysis\\_worksheet.pdf](http://www.archives.gov/education/lessons/worksheets/written_document_analysis_worksheet.pdf)

## Photo Analysis Worksheet

### Step 1. Observation

A. Study the photograph for 2 minutes. Form an overall impression of the photograph and then examine individual items. Next, divide the photo into quadrants and study each section to see what new details become visible.

B. Use the chart below to list people, objects, and activities in the photograph.

People	Objects	Activities

### Step 2. Inference

Based on what you have observed above, list three things you might infer from this photograph.

### Step 3. Questions

A. What questions does this photograph raise in your mind?

B. Where could you find answers to them?

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Education Staff, National Archives and Records Administration,  
Washington, DC 20408

Photo Analysis Worksheet, Online version on November 2, 2006, at:  
[http://www.archives.gov/education/lessons/worksheets/photo\\_analysis\\_worksheet.pdf](http://www.archives.gov/education/lessons/worksheets/photo_analysis_worksheet.pdf)