

Métis Camp Circle: A Bison Culture Way of Life

Author and Illustrator: Leah Marie Dorion
Translator: Norman Fleury

Overview of Story: During much of the nineteenth century, bison hunting was integral to Métis social, economic, and political life. As “People of the Buffalo,” the Métis were bison hunters of excellence. In *Métis Camp Circle: A Bison Culture Way of Life*, author and artist Leah Marie Dorion transports young readers back in time when bison were the basis of Métis life-ways on the Plains. Vibrantly illustrated and infused with important cultural teachings, this charming book skillfully informs us about this important part of Métis history.

Themes in this book:

- Bison/Buffalo
- Métis
- Hunting
- Governance
- Métis lifestyle
- Relationship between animals and humans
- Métis worldview
- Seasons
- Teachings
- Meat
- Transportation

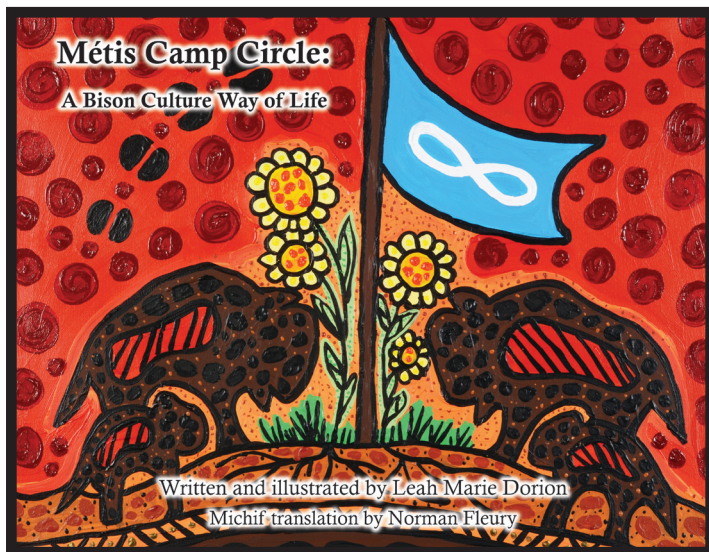
Possible Curriculum Connections:

Language Arts

- Listen purposefully to a range of texts from a variety of cultural traditions.
- Social responsibility (teamwork)

Art

- How arts expressions from various groups and communities are a reflection of their unique environment.
- Investigate, analyze, and describe features (e.g., media, techniques, use of symbols and imagery) of Métis arts expressions.
- Métis artists express cultural identity in contemporary work.



Social Studies

- Sustainable management of the environment (loss of bison).
- Cultural change over time.
- Laws of the hunt.

Science

- Interdependence of plants and animals with humans.
- Habitats and communities.
- Simple machines (Red River cart).
- Characteristics and behaviours of mammals.
- Indigenous knowledge of ecosystems.



Before Reading/Listening:

Discuss what the students know about Indigenous peoples and their relationship with the bison.

Introduce the idea that sometimes animal behaviors are imitated by humans. Can you think of anything? E.g.: Store food for winter, etc. Can you think of other ways humans mimic animal behaviors?

As the story is read, keep this in mind. How did the Métis mimic bison behaviors?

In addition to this, record or sticky note where the author tells you about the various items made from the bison.

During Reading:

Each time you come upon a way that humans mimic bison behaviors, jot it down or mark it with a sticky note.

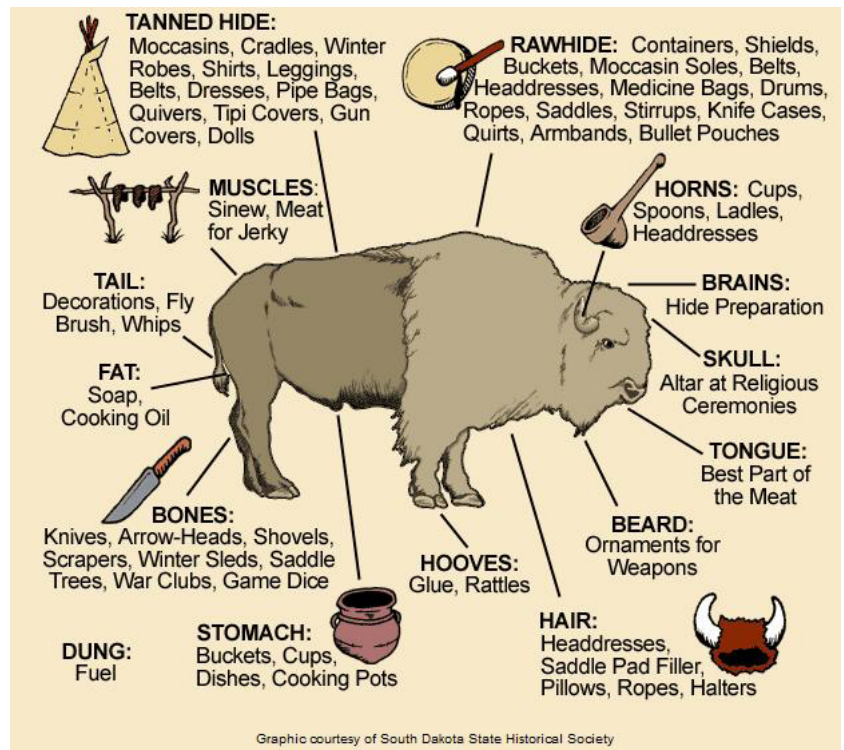
When you come to the section on where the author tells you about the various items made from the bison, jot them down or put a sticky note.

After Reading:

Let's discuss what you found during reading about how the Métis mimicked the bison (share what is on their sticky notes). What makes these such good teachings?

Let's draw a simple bison in the middle of the page. Now draw an arrow to the different parts of the bison and list what item was used from that part of the bison. If you don't have all of the parts covered, research additional uses. Check page 37 to add to your page and read page 42 where Patrice Fleury tells about the bison hunts.

Is there an animal you particularly like? List some teachings you might have from that animal.



Additional Activities for this book:

1. Art styles: Look at the illustrations. They are a particular style of art that Leah has created. Look at other books and art pieces of Leah's and describe her style. Can you replicate it by drawing a bison(s) and decorating it in Leah style?

2. Now research Simone McLeod paintings. Simone's art style is a bit different. She is also an Indigenous artist. Simone cuts out templates and does a form of printmaking.
 - a. First draw a fairly large bison on an 8.5" X 11" piece of heavy stock paper (any pose). You just need the outline, not all the details inside the drawing.
 - b. Make a hole with your scissors in the middle of your bison outline, then cut out the inside of the bison carefully (The outside of the paper should not be cut).
 - c. Cut up sponge pieces into smaller pieces. Use the sponge pieces to dab the paint with.
 - d. Place the cutout of the bison on another piece of paper. You might want to paperclip all four sides so it doesn't move or slip.
 - e. Now you can begin sponge painting. Take a sponge piece and dab it in paint of your choice, dab the excess on paper towel a couple times to get the extra paint off, then dab (not paint like with a brush) on the inside of the bison template. You can repeat this process as many times as you want on the paper but just make sure your bison is dry before you set up for the next colour.
 - f. To mimic Simone's style, wait until your paint has dried, then take a new clean sponge and dab in black paint, dab it off on paper towel, then carefully dab just the outer part of the bison so it will be outlined when the template is taken off.
 - g. Do additional cutouts and repeat the process if you want. Perhaps you want to add a wolf or a sun or trees?

3. On page 27 it says, "Through the bison teachings, the Metis created laws to never let the children, Elders, the sick or the infirm go without food or care. Sharing made the Metis camp circle very welcoming and comfortable for all."

In your community there are people less fortunate than many of us. Let's list some ways in which we can help others, then we will vote on which one (or break into groups) and carry out the task. Let's try and live by the teachings of the bison. (<https://blog.prepscholar.com/129-examples-of-community-service-projects>) has lists of ways in which you can help others including animals.

4. This story gives examples of different ways the Métis monitored their people and camps to keep everyone safe. What pages tell you about this? (Pages 9, 11, 13, 27, 31, 38). Discuss how the Métis kept everyone safe. How is it similar or dissimilar to today's ways? What can we learn from this way of life?

