

American Bison

The Seed Snare

What you need!

- Wool socks and mitts
- Forceps or tweezers
- Magnifying glass

Many of the plants that grow "where the buffalo roam" depend on the bison to disperse them. These plants grab on to bison fur and go for a ride. Put on some woolen 'fur' and see what rides on you.



What you do



1. Put on your wool socks or mitts and tuck your pant legs into the socks. Don't worry about fashion, this is science.
2. Now go for a walk in a wild place with long grass and other weedy things
3. When you get back, look on your socks and mitts for seeds.

4. With the tweezers and magnifying glass, check out the seeds that caught a ride.
5. Try to figure out where the seeds came from and how they stick to the wool.



Ask yourself

- Observe and carefully draw the seeds that stick to your socks and mittens.
- What do you think makes the seeds stick to the wool?
- How many different types are there? Can you sort them into groups?
- Try to identify which plants the seeds came from.
- Compare your seeds to a partner's seeds, or to those collected by the rest of your class.
- Make a graph showing the type of seeds and the numbers collected.
- What might happen to a plant if there were no bison to spread the seeds?

American Bison

The Seed Snare

What did you learn?

Different plants have different ways to spread their seeds. Some use the wind, some use squirrels and birds, and some, like the ones stuck onto wool, catch a ride on you and on large animals like bison. The velcro-like hooks on the burrs and seeds of these plants grab on to bison fur. When bison shed their fur, the seeds go into the ground and wait for spring to germinate.

These plants have evolved to be so dependent on large mammals that they can only survive when they share the same habitat. Bison actually eat a great many of these plants while they are green and fleshy so the relationship between plants and bison is mutually beneficial.

Specific Learner Expectations (SLE)

Grade 1 Topic E: Needs of Animals and Plants.

SLE 10: Students will give examples of ways in which animals depend on plants and ways in which plants depend on animals: e.g., particular plants may serve as a source of food and shelter, animals may help spread pollen or seeds.