

Primary Sources:

Letters and Notes on the Manners, Customs, and Conditions of the North American Indians and Selected Paintings, George Catlin (1832-1859)

Introduction

George Catlin (1796-1872) was a self-taught painter famous for his images of Native America life in the Great Plains in the 1830s. Catlin's early projects included painting miniature portraits in Philadelphia and capturing images of upstate New York during the construction and opening of the Erie Canal in 1825. Between 1830 and 1836, Catlin was based out of St. Louis. He made five trips into the Great Plains and documented his visits with eighteen Native American tribes. During the 1840s and 50s, Catlin assembled his paintings, some 600 hundred in all, into a single collection he called the Indian Gallery. He gave public showings of his work in major cities such as Pittsburg, Cincinnati, New York, London, Paris, and Brussels. He also published his letters and notes from his journeys in *Letters and Notes on the Manners, Customs, and Conditions of the North American Indians*.

Images Source: georgecatlin.org

When viewing the pictures, start by thinking of the context in which these sources were produced:

- What was happening in the United States in the 1830s, particularly in terms of the government's policy toward Native Americans?
- Where was the line of the frontier, the place where Euro-American settlement dropped off?

From there, consider these paintings as primary sources:

- What information about hunting practices can we draw from these visual sources? What questions do you have about Native American bison hunting practices that remain unanswered?
- What biases are evident in these visual sources? What, if any biases are eliminated when moving from a textual to a visual source?
- In what ways can we hear the voices of indigenous people in these visual sources? In what ways do their voices remain silenced?

George Catlin

**Sioux Indians
Hunting
Buffalo, 1835**



George Catlin

***Hunting
Buffalo
Camouflaged
with Wolf
Skins, 1832***



George Catlin

***The Buffalo
Chace,
"Singling Out"***



George Catlin

***Prairie
Meadows
Burning***



George Catlin

Buffalo Hunt



George Catlin

***Hunting
Buffalo on
Snow-shoes***



George Catlin

***Buffalo Hunt,
Surrounded, c.
1832***

