

# Life as a Herder: The Steppes of Asia

## Teacher Guide

Grade Levels: 1 – 3

### Program overview

The program will begin with a general discussion about the Great Plains of North America and its similarities the steppes of Asia. Students will identify the five critical animals in steppe life by examining museum objects. After gaining a basic understanding of the constraints of life in a grassland environment, the class will divide into two “families” to make decisions about their herds, their income, and their movements throughout the year. The class will conclude with the “families” building a yurt and “moving in. “

### P.A.S.S.

#### Grade 1

Social Studies 3.1, 4.1, 4.2, 4.3, 5.1

#### Grade 2

Social Studies 4.1, 4.2, 5.1

#### Grade 3

Social Studies 4.1, 4.4, 5.2

### Objectives/Student Learning Outcomes

After participating in this program, students will be able to:

- Discuss climate, plants and animals that are typical of grasslands.
- Recognize some of the constraints on lifestyle imposed by the prairie or steppe environment.
- Recognize that decisions have consequences for the survival of individuals and families.
- Discuss how the environment impacts housing and economic options.

### Background

#### The Basics of Life on the Steppes: Food and Animal

##### Food

**Cheese** –Special bacterial cultures are added to milk from goats, sheep, or other animals to produce specific types of cheese.

**Jerky** – Meat that is cut into thin strips and dried or smoked. Jerky will last for several years.

**Kumiss** – Fermented milk from a mare (female horse). This is the most valued drink on the Central Asian steppes, and provides most of the food during the summer.

**Milk** – Female mammals give milk while they have young to feed. Over time, people have developed breeds of sheep, goats, cattle, camels, and horses that give more milk than their young need. While milk spoils readily, it can be made into cheese and yogurt that do not spoil.

**Yogurt** – Milk that is fermented by special bacteria to make it thicker. Yogurt can be eaten fresh, made into a drink, or freeze-dried into a solid that will keep without being in a refrigerator.

### Animals

**Bactrian Camel** – This is the two-humped or Asian camel. The Bactrian camel can tolerate cold as well as drought and live on plants that other grazing animals cannot eat. It can carry a larger load than a horse or be used to pull a cart.

**Goat** – This animal is usually pastured with sheep. Goat hair is spun into yarn and the females are milked. Goats are less important than sheep. Young goats are called kids.

**Horse** – This animal is most valued by the Central Asian nomads. Horses are usually ridden, not used to pull carts, and all men, women and children ride. Female horses are called mares while young male horses are called colts and females are called fillies.

**Sheep** – This is the most economically important animal in Central Asia since it can be used for wool, meat and milk. The needs of the sheep for pasture and water shape the lives of the Central Asian Nomads.

**Yak** – Yaks, look like large, furry, cattle. Yaks can be milked, ridden, or used to pull carts. In some areas their wool is important for weaving.

### VOCABULARY

**Felt**- a fabric made by using moisture and pressure to mat wool fibers together. It is not woven. Traditional felt is 1/2 inch thick, and very warm.

**Steppes / Prairie** - Steppe and Prairie are informal words that refer to extensive grasslands. In general, grasslands receive an average of 10"-30" of rain a year and form a transition between forests and deserts. Both areas are surrounded by large landmasses, which makes their climates hot and dry in the summer and cold and windy during the winters.

**Yurt or Ger**- This is the traditional house used on the steppes. It is constructed with a collapsible circular framework of wooden poles and covered with wool felt. Suburbs of yurts have grown up around many modern cities.

## At the Museum

In the Natural Wonders Gallery, there is a large diorama on prairie animals, including buffalo (bison). The prairie in America and the steppes of Asia both have hot summers, cold winters, and less than 20 inches of rain per year. The dominant vegetation in both areas is grass, rather than trees. The native peoples in both areas relied on animals and animal products to make their living. The bison was the most valuable animal to the Native Americans on the Great Plains. Sheep are the most useful animal to people living on the steppes of Asia. Have students complete the worksheet at the end of the Teacher Guide.

**Answers for student worksheet:** Both sheep and bison have hooves with two toes, live in groups, graze, are used for food by people, and have thick curly hair. They are different because bison are much larger, (6 feet high at the shoulder), and are wild, rather than being raised by people. People drink sheep milk, but nobody milks a bison.

## Supplementary/Enrichment Activities

### Language

1. Have students complete the crossword puzzle at the end of the Teacher Guide.

### Geography

1. Map Exercise 1: The Great Plains of the Continental United States (See worksheet at end of Teacher Guide)
2. Map Exercise 2: Countries of the Central Asian Steppes (See worksheet at end of Teacher Guide)

### Art

1. **Making a Traditional Mongol Hat** (Adapted from Faces: Central Asia, the Crossroads of Civilization) Boots, hats, saddle blankets and tent covers were made from felt. To make a traditional Mongol hat, just follow the directions at the end of the Teacher Guide. You can make your hat out of felt and sew the seams together, or make it of construction paper and staple the seams.

## Additional Resources

### Early Elementary

"Central Asia" *Faces: the Magazine About People*,  
December 1996

Published by the American Museum of Natural History,  
New York, New York

<http://www.cobblestonepub.com/magazine/FAC/>

"The Mongols" *Calliope: World History for Young People*,  
Nov.-Dec. 1993

Cobblestone Publishing, Peterborough, NH

<http://www.cobblestonepub.com/magazine/CAL/>

### For Teachers

"Central Asia Unveiled"

*National Geographic*, February 2002, pp. 108-125

*The Changing World of Mongolia's Nomads*

Melvyn Goldstein and Cynthia Beall, University of  
California Press, Berkeley, 1994

*Fields on the Hoof: Nexus of Tibetan Nomadic Pastoralism.*

Ekvall, Robert, Case Studies in Cultural Anthropology, Stanford  
University, Palo Alto.

"Mongolian Crossing: Is Time Running Out on Timeless  
Migration?," *National Geographic*, October 2003.

"Lord of the Mongols, Genghis Khan," *National Geographic*, December 1996.



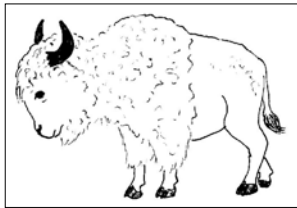
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## At the Museum: Natural Wonders Gallery Activity

### Directions

Draw a line from the bison to the facts that are true for it. Draw a line from the sheep to the facts that are true for it.

Great Plains of  
America



**Hooves with two toes**

**6 feet high at the shoulder**

**Lives in a group**

**People raise and sell them**

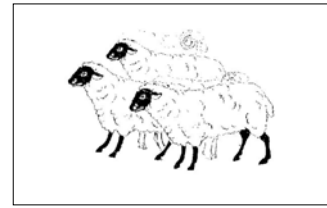
**Grazer (eats grass)**

**People use them for food**

**People drink their milk**

**Thick, curly fur**

Steppes of Asia

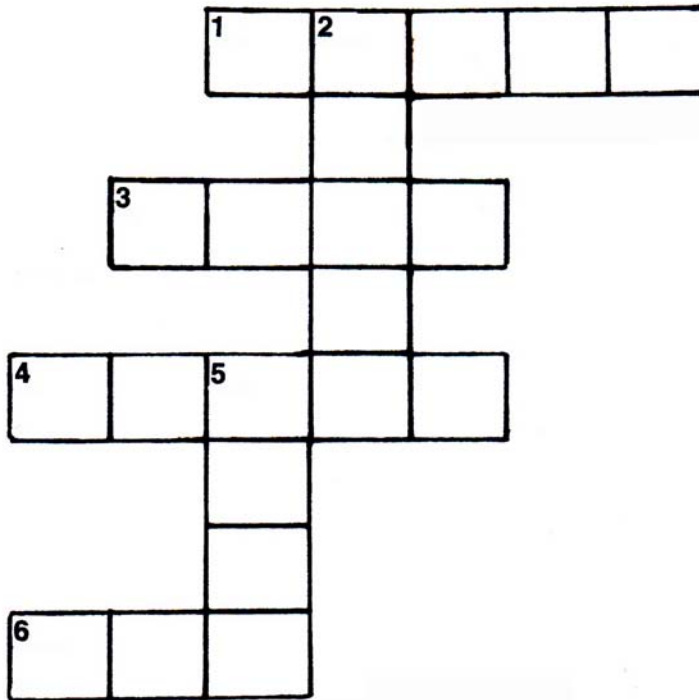


### Discussion Questions

1. How are these two animals the same and different?
2. Did people use these two animals in exactly the same way?

# Life as a Herder: The Steppes of Asia Crossword Puzzle

## Animals of the Steppes



### Across

1. We get wool from this animal
3. A mother or female horse.
4. This animal can have one or two humps on its back.
6. This animal's name can mean "to talk a lot".

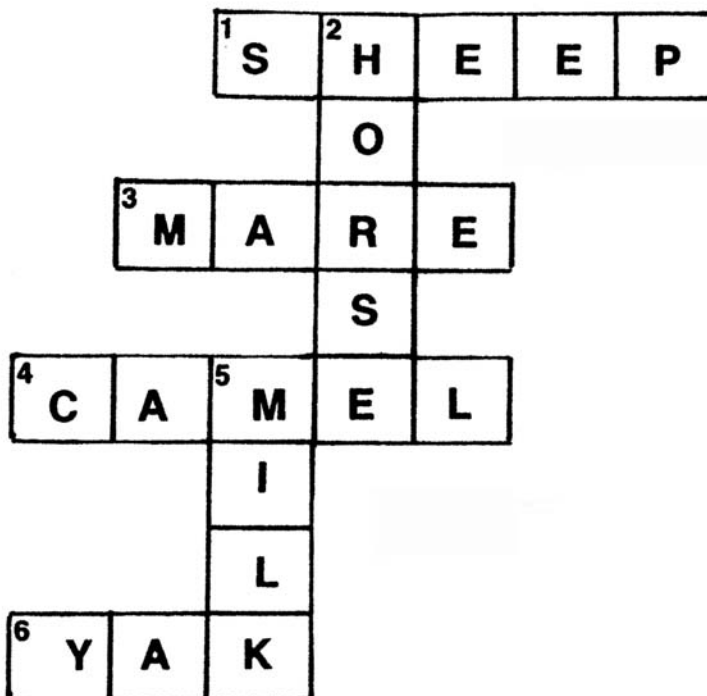
### Down

2. This is the best animal to ride.
5. All mammal mothers give this to their babies.

# Life as a Herder: The Steppes of Asia

## Crossword Puzzle Answers

### Animals of the Steppes



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# Life as a Herder: The Steppes of Asia

## Map Exercise 1: The Great Plains of the Continental United States

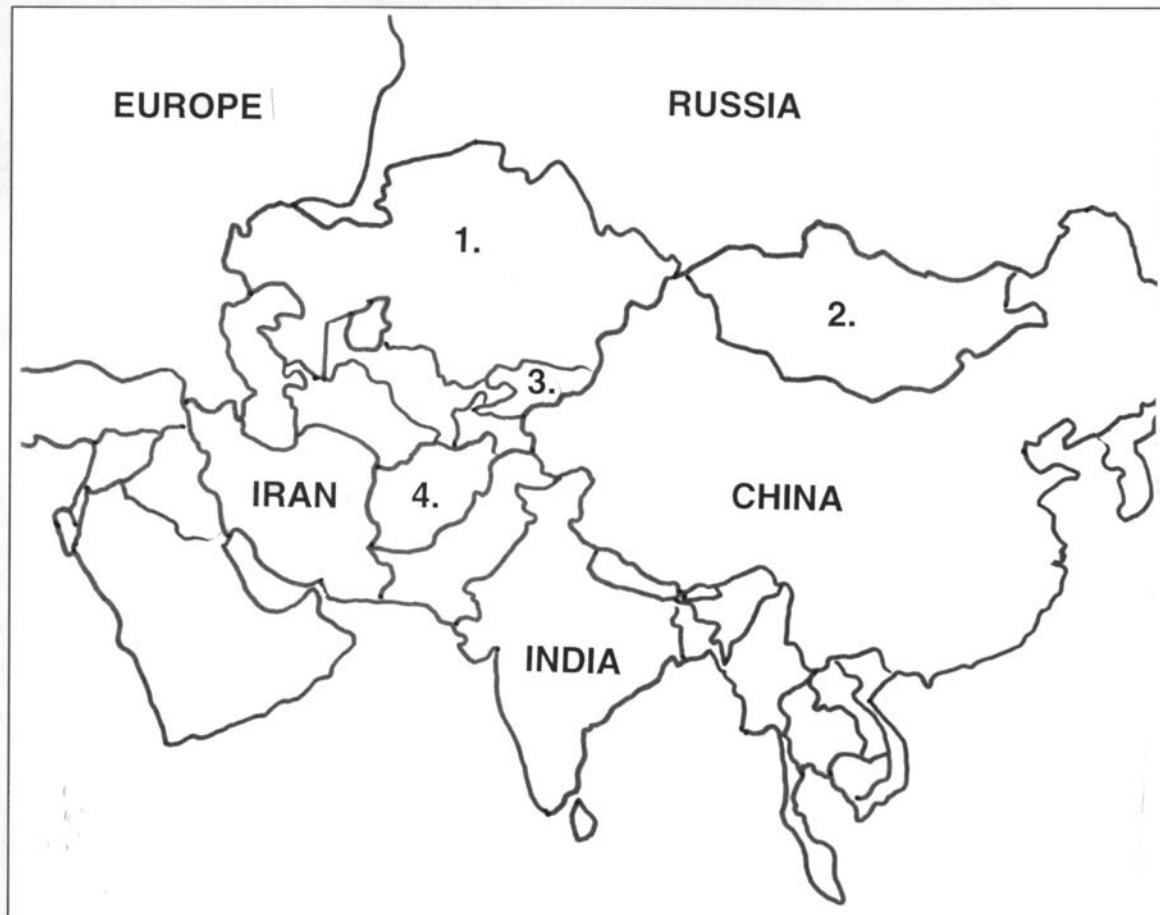
**Directions:** Use an atlas to find the Great Plains. Name and label four states that are part of the Great Plains. Color the Great Plains yellow.



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## Map Exercise 2: Countries of the Central Asian Steppes

**Directions:** Using an atlas for reference, find and label the countries numbered 1-4. Draw and label one mountain chain and one river on the map.



**You should know:** The suffix “stan” is a Persian word for “place” or “land of,” so that Kyrgyzstan means “land of the Kyrgyz” and Turkmenistan means “land of the Turks.”

# Life as a Herder: The Steppes of Asia

## Making a Traditional Mongol Hat

(Adapted from Faces: Central Asia, the Crossroads of Civilization)

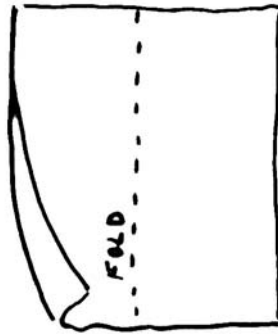
### Directions:

Boots, hats, saddle blankets and tent covers were made from felt. To make a traditional Mongol hat, just follow the directions at the end of the Teacher Guide. You can make your hat out of felt and sew the seams together, or make it of construction paper and staple the seams.

### Materials:

- Four pieces of piece of felt or paper that are 9" by 12".
- Pen, ruler, scissors,
- Either a needle and thread or a stapler

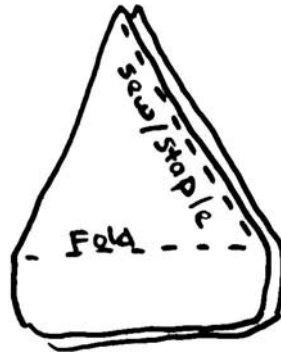
1. Fold each piece of felt / paper in half the long way.



2. Draw a line beginning 3 1/2" up from the bottom edge and ending at the top corner. Cut along the line (cutting off the corner as shown).



3. Place two pieces of felt / paper on top of each other. Leave a 1/4" seam allowance and sew the slanted edges together along one side. If you are using paper, staple this edge. Cut the curves on the corners as shown.



4. Add a third piece of felt, sewing or stapling along one slanted edge. Add the fourth piece of felt and sew or staple both slanted edges. You should now have a complete hat.



5. Fold up the bottom 3 inches of your hat. Wear the seams on the outside of your hat. Traditional Mongol hats were embroidered with brightly colored designs but you may decorate your hat with markers.



Traditional Mongol Hat