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Buf·fa·lo  (bŭf ə-lō')

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A city of western New York at the eastern end of Lake Erie on the Canadian border. It is a major Great Lakes port of entry and an important manufacturing and milling center.

Buf·fa·lo ni·an *adj. & n.*

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buf·fa·lo  (bŭf ə-lō')

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n. pl. **buffaloor** **buf·fa·loes** or **buf·fa·los**

1.

a. Any of several large African and Asian ruminant mammals of the family Bovidae, such as the water buffalo and the African buffalo.

b. The American bison (*Bison bison*).

c. The flesh of the American bison, used as food.

2. Any of several North American suckers of the genus *Ictiobus*, having a dark body and an arched back. Also called *buffalo fish*.

tr.v. **buf·fa·loed**, **buf·fa·lo·ing**, **buf·fa·loes**

1. To intimidate or frighten, as by a display of authority: “*The board couldn't buffalo the federal courts as it had the Comptroller*” (*American Banker*).

2. To confuse or deceive: “*Too often ... job seekers have buffaloed lenders as to their competency and training*” (*H. Jane Lehman*).

[Italian *bufalo* or Portuguese or Spanish *búfalo*, from Late Latin *būfalus*, from Latin *būbalus*, antelope, buffalo, from Greek *boubalos*, antelope, perhaps from *bous*, cow; see **gʷou-** in the Appendix of Indo-European roots.]

Word History: When most Americans hear the word *buffalo*, they probably think of the American bison. In fact, *buffalo* originally referred to the water buffalo (an animal that was introduced to western Europe from Asia in late antiquity) and other large bovid animals of Eurasia and Africa. The history of *buffalo* begins with the Greek word *boubalos*, “antelope.” The Romans borrowed this word as *būbalus*, “antelope.” In his work on natural history, however, the Roman author Pliny the Elder notes that the common people used *būbalus* to refer to the aurochs, the huge wild ox (now extinct) that once roamed northern Europe, and Pliny considered this to be a mistake. Eventually the Latin word, in its Late Latin form *būfalus*, became the name for the water buffalo when it was introduced to Europe. *Būfalus* developed into *bufalo* in Italian and *búfalo* in Portuguese and Spanish, and then English borrowed *buffalo*, with the sense “any of various species of large bovine animals,” from one or more of these languages. How did the word *buffalo* come to be the popular name for the American bison? When the English first began to visit and settle in North America, it is likely that most of them had never seen the European bison, or wisent, the closest relative of the American bison. The wisent had mostly vanished from western Europe in the Middle Ages, the victim of hunting and deforestation. The English were probably much more familiar with domestic water buffalo, and they may even have heard of the aurochs, and so when they encountered the American bison, many of them called it by the name of the

largest bovine animal they had known before, the buffalo. Already in 1625, English writers were using *buffalo* to describe the bison of America.

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Indo-European & Semitic Roots Appendices

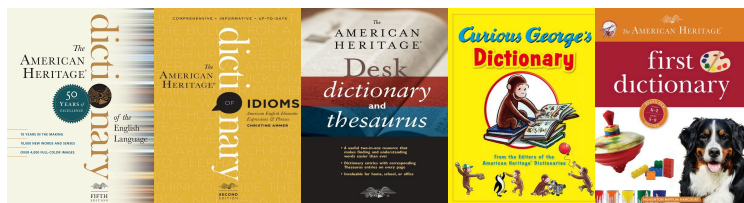
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The Indo-European appendix covers nearly half of the Indo-European roots that have left their mark on English words. A more complete treatment of Indo-European roots and the English words derived from them is available in our [Dictionary of Indo-European Roots](#).

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