

## LESSON PLAN

### CAHOKIA and MISSISSIPPIAN CULTURE

High School and Middle School

#### AIM

How advanced was the Mississippian culture with its capital in Cahokia?

#### GUIDING QUESTIONS/OBJECTIVES

What were the different aspects of Mississippian culture? When examining these together, would this make it an advanced civilization? Why have so few Americans heard about Cahokia and the Mississippians? Why isn't the teaching of this an integral part of American history? When did "American history" begin?

#### KEY VOCABULARY

Civilization—a complex human society that is characterized by the development of cities, organized systems of government, writing, culture, technology, social structures, and often, a distinct form of religion or belief system.

Social structure/social stratification—the system by which society ranks people into different layers based on various factors like wealth, income, education, occupation, power, prestige, and social status.

Eurocentrism—view of histories and cultures from the perspective of Western Europeans and their descendents, emphasizing their superiority.

Historical Erasure—omitting certain people or groups from historical studies, often implicitly due to collective indifference.

Nationalism—belief that one's nation's interests are most important and loyalty to it above any other entity is essential.

#### ACTIVITY

1. Watch the Native Ed video on Cahokia
2. Divide the class into 5 groups to do additional brief research on the culture. The topics to research are as follows (NOTE: Resources are relatively simple to find, but some links are below if you wish to provide some):
  1. Social structures, including chiefdoms
  2. Belief system—the Southern Ceremonial Complex (SECC) or Southern Cult. Look at artwork associated with this as well.
  3. Food and Shelter—For food, look at the 3 sisters and how food production supported the large urban population. For shelter, just what kind of housing was typical.
  4. Trade—Transportation routes and methods, main trade goods, role of Cahokia.

5. The mounds–Cahokia mounds, but also others–Moundville, AL, Ohio, etc.
3. After about 10 minutes or so of research, have each group present their findings in a 3 minute presentation. Can use slides or not.
4. Once all groups have finished, discuss the following:
  1. Based on this information, would you characterize the Mississippian culture based in Cahokia as a civilization (see definition above)?
  2. Think about the American history that you have studied. Based on this, when would you say American history began?
    1. Possible answers: When the Europeans (Columbus) arrived. The Pilgrims/ Puritans in New England. The 13 colonies.
    2. Does anyone say it began when humans first arrived in the land that is now the United States of America?
    3. Why is American history typically taught beginning with the arrival of European immigrants?
    4. How does this relate to:
      1. Eurocentrism
      2. Historical erasure
      3. Nationalism
      4. The fact that the indigenous people who were here when European immigrants arrived now own only about 2% of the land in the United States.
  5. Should all students be learning about Cahokia and the Mississippians as part of American history?

## EXIT TICKET

Write a 30 second elevator pitch that you would give to someone who had never heard about Cahokia and the Mississippians.

[http://www.museum.state.il.us/muslink/nat\\_amer/pre/htmls/miss.html](http://www.museum.state.il.us/muslink/nat_amer/pre/htmls/miss.html)

<http://www.georgiaencyclopedia.org/articles/history-archaeology/mississippian-period-overview#Settlements>

<http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-srv/national/daily/march/12/cahokia.htm>

<http://ngm.nationalgeographic.com/2011/01/cahokia/hodges-text>

<https://www.npr.org/sections/thesalt/2017/02/10/513963490/1-000-years-ago-corn-made-this-society-big-then-a-changing-climate-destroyed-the>