



LESSON PLAN
CAHOKIA and MISSISSIPPIAN CULTURE
ELEMENTARY

AIM

How do we learn about things in the past when there are no written records?

GUIDING QUESTIONS/OBJECTIVES

What is a source? What are the 2 types of historical sources other than written records? What is the name for a professional who uses artifacts? What are artifacts that were found at Cahokia? What do they tell us about the city? How do our ideas about “history” change?

KEY VOCABULARY

Source—Something from which you can obtain something else

Fossil—remains of living things (plants, animals, humans)—examples include bones, imprints in rocks

Artifact—an object made by a human being.

Archaeologist—someone who tries to figure out what life was like in the past by looking at artifacts

COMMON CORE STANDARDS AT END

ACTIVITY

1. What is a source? How do sources inform us about the past?
 - a. What are different kinds of historical sources?
 - i. Written records
 - ii. Fossils
 - iii. Artifacts
2. What is an archaeologist? How does one differ from a historian or a paleontologist?
3. For fun (optional): [The most famous \(albeit fictional\) archaeologist, Indiana Jones](#) (2 minutes)
4. Students can read basic information about Archaeology [HERE](#) The first 8 topics are enough for a basic introduction.
5. What is the archaeological evidence from Cahokia? Go to Kiddle [HERE](#)
 - a. Working as a class, in groups, in pairs or independently, students can go to the Kiddle site and use the information there to answer the questions below.



- i. NOTE: Depending on how much time you have, you may wish to divide these up so not all students are reading all sections. Or assign this some other way.

QUESTIONS ON CAHOKIA

1. MONK'S MOUND section
 - a. Just how big was Monk's Mound?
 - b. What did the archaeological excavation on the top of it tell us?
2. URBAN LANDSCAPE section
 - a. What was the Grand Plaza used for?
 - b. Why was the Rattlesnake Causeway built with a relationship to the moon?
 - c. What do you think it means that the central district of Cahokia was protected by a 2 mile long palisade (fence)?
 - i. What does it mean when it says this central district was "high status?"
3. MOUND 72 section
 - a. Why do archaeologists think the man found buried here was an important ruler?
 - b. What is meant when it says that the birdman or falcon warrior was a "common motif" for the Mississippians?
 - c. What do the arrowheads found on Mound 72 tell us about how big an area the Mississippian culture covered?
4. CAHOKIA WOODHEDGE section
 - a. Why do some say that this was a very lucky discovery?
 - b. What can we infer from the fact that the locations of the Woodhenge posts are related to very important solar times, the solstices and equinoxes?
 - c. Why do the events held nowadays on the site to mark these times not have any celebrations or rituals?

DISCUSSION QUESTION:

Why might Native Americans be unhappy or critical of the fact that so much digging has taken place at the site that was the city of Cahokia?

Possible Answers:

Disturbance of Sacred Sites:

- Many Native Americans view Cahokia as a sacred place and believe that excavating burial mounds and other parts of the site disturbs the spirits of their ancestors.



Native Ed

- There are concerns that the handling and display of human remains or grave goods disrespects their traditions.

Colonial Legacy of Archaeology:

- Some Native Americans see archaeological practices as part of a broader history of colonialism, where their ancestors' remains and cultural artifacts were treated as objects of study rather than as sacred.

Lack of Consultation:

- In the past, archaeologists often conducted excavations without consulting or involving Native communities, leading to mistrust.

EXIT TICKET

Do you think that the study of Cahokia and the Mississippian culture should be a part of American history even though it was hundreds of years before the United States of America was formed? Why or why not?

EXTENSION LESSON

How does history “change?” In other words, what can change our ideas about what happened in the past?

1. New evidence is found. These can be written records, artifacts or fossils, but regardless of the type, new evidence can make huge changes on our ideas about the past.
2. A change in the method of looking for sources results in new sources. For example, history was once written largely by focusing on sources about “great men.” In the last 60+ years, however, “social history” has looked at more common people, resulting in many new sources that led to new ideas.
3. The people studying and writing history have changed. For a long time, these were almost exclusively white men. However, as new kinds of historians moved into the field, they brought with them new perspectives. For example, women historians began to study women’s history. African American historians focused on Black history. And so on...
4. New technology has resulted in both the finding of new sources and new ways of assessing existing sources. For example, DNA testing, Carbon 14 testing, and many more.



COMMON CORE STANDARDS

1. History/Social Studies

- **CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RI.3-5.2**
Key Ideas and Details: Determine the main idea of a text and explain how it is supported by key details; summarize the text.
 - **Application: Students will summarize the information gathered from the Kiddle site about Cahokia and Mississippian culture, highlighting key details about artifacts, mounds, and other archaeological findings.**
- **CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RI.3-5.3**
Key Ideas and Details: Explain the relationships or interactions between two or more individuals, events, ideas, or concepts in a historical text.
 - **Application: Students will explore how different elements of Cahokia, such as Monk's Mound, the Grand Plaza, and Mound 72, contributed to understanding the structure and significance of the city.**
- **CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RI.3-5.7**
Integration of Knowledge and Ideas: Use information gained from illustrations and the words in a text to



demonstrate understanding of the text.

- **Application: Students will use images and text from the Kiddle website to help understand the archaeological sites and their significance to Mississippian culture.**

2. Civics/Government

- **CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RI.3-5.8**
Integration of Knowledge and Ideas: Describe how an author connects and explains the relationship between two or more ideas or concepts.
 - **Application: Students will learn how different pieces of archaeological evidence (artifacts, mounds, and fossils) help us understand the way the Mississippians lived and how these ideas connect to modern understandings of history.**

3. Cultural Understanding

- **Standard 5: Culture**
 - **How culture is expressed through art, religious practices, and other societal structures.**
 - **Application: Students will explore how artifacts and features like the Woodhenge and mounds reveal**



aspects of the Mississippian culture, including social, religious, and ceremonial practices.

Common Core Literacy Standards for Speaking and Listening

1. CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.SL.3-5.1

Speaking and Listening: Engage effectively in a range of collaborative discussions with diverse partners on grade-level topics and texts, building on others' ideas and expressing their own clearly.

- **Application: Students will participate in discussions about the significance of Cahokia, the artifacts found there, and how they inform our understanding of Mississippian culture.**

2. CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.SL.3-5.4

Speaking and Listening: Report on a topic or text, tell a story, or recount an experience with appropriate facts and relevant, descriptive details, speaking clearly at an understandable pace.

- **Application: In groups or individually, students will present the findings of their research on specific aspects of Cahokia, providing clear and concise descriptions based on the archaeological evidence.**

Writing Standards



1. CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.3-5.2

Text Types and Purposes: Write informative/explanatory texts to examine a topic and convey ideas and information clearly.

- **Application: Students will write an exit ticket in which they explain their opinion on whether Cahokia and the Mississippian culture should be included in American history education, drawing on evidence from the lesson.**

2. CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.3-5.8

Research to Build and Present Knowledge: Recall information from experiences or gather information from provided sources to answer a question.

- **Application: Students will gather information about Cahokia from the Kiddle website and other resources to answer questions about the archaeological site and its significance to Mississippian culture.**