

Moundbuilders Background Information Sheet

Moundbuilders

This term is used to describe those ancient Native Americans who built large earthen mounds. They lived from the Great Lakes to the Gulf of Mexico and the Mississippi River to the Appalachian Mountains. The earliest mounds date from 3000 B.C. in Louisiana. It is believed that these mounds were used for burial, religious ceremonies, and as governmental centers. The mounds averaged 65 ft. in height and were constructed entirely by manual labor. Moundbuilders lived in dome shaped homes made with pole walls and thatched roofs. Important buildings were covered with a stucco made from clay and grass. These people grew native plants like corn, pumpkins, and sunflowers. They supplemented this by hunting, fishing, and gathering nuts and berries. Tools and weapons were made from bone, wood, stone, and clamshells. Copper, mica, and clamshells were used to make decorative objects. Moundbuilders also made pottery, wove baskets, carved canoes, and sewed clothing from animal hides and plant fibers. The dead were either buried or cremated; in either case, the body or ashes were buried with personal objects. Moundbuilder society was divided into two groups. The elite class controlled government and religion; they were the ruling class. The common class was the food producers and the labor force used to build the mounds. The Moundbuilder culture began to decline after European contact due to disease and warfare with neighboring peoples. Some of the modern tribes who are descendants of the Moundbuilders include the Cherokee, Creek, Fox, Osage, Seminole, and Shawnee.

Adena

Moundbuilder culture can be divided into three periods. The first is the Adena. The Adena lived in the Ohio River Valley from 1000 B.C. to 200 B.C. Although they lived in villages, they did not farm. They got their food from hunting, fishing, and gathering. The Adena traded copper and mica objects with other tribes. They are best known for making stone tobacco pipes that were up to ten inches long. The Adena also made pottery; decorative objects from copper, bone, antler, and clamshell; and tools and weapons from stone and flint. Their mounds came in two forms. The most common was the burial mound that was cone shaped and contained a wooden burial chamber. The largest of these is the Grave Creek Mound in West Virginia. It is 295 ft. wide and 69 ft. tall. The others were mounds that took the shape of an object. These were probably ceremonial mounds designed to illustrate an idea or story. The most famous of these is the Great Serpent Mound near Hillsboro, Ohio. It is not clear why the Adena declined, but they were absorbed by a second group of Moundbuilders, the Hopewell.

Hopewell

The Hopewell came from central Ohio. At their height, their culture spread from western New York to Missouri, Wisconsin to Mississippi. Like the Adena, they lived along the river systems and built mounds. Unlike the Adena, they used farming to supplement their food sources from

hunting, fishing, and gathering. Their mounds were for burial and were larger than the Adena. The mounds were also in various geometric shapes, such as squares, rectangles, and octagons. They were also surrounded by one or two rings of mounds. They also built ceremonial mounds in the shape of animals. The Hopewell were master artisans, making objects from copper, mica, silver, and iron. They also used flint and obsidian to make tools. Hopewell pottery was fired and more decorative. An extensive trade network stretched from the Rocky Mountains to the Chesapeake Bay, the Great Lakes to the Gulf of Mexico and the Blue Ridge Mountains of North Carolina. This trade brought them the raw materials they fashioned into objects that could be traded for more resources. This abundance in resources appears to have created a society where there were no class distinctions. The Hopewell culture existed from 200 B.C. until 500 A.D., when it began to fade out. This may have been due to disease, resource depletion, and warfare. They, too, are ancestors of modern Native American tribes.

Mississippian

The Mississippian period is the peak of Moundbuilder culture. From 500 A.D. until European contact in the 1540's, they were the dominant Native American culture along the Ohio and Mississippi Rivers and across the southern United States to the Atlantic coast. They are believed to be the first to cultivate maize in this area. Their trade network stretched from the Rocky Mountains to the Atlantic Ocean, the Great Lakes to the Gulf of Mexico. The Mississippian were skilled artisans producing objects made of shell, ceramics, pipestone, and copper. Mississippian society was complex with power resting in the hands of an elite few. They formed chiefdoms that controlled defined areas from one settlement consisting of several mounds to several settlements. Mississippian mounds took many shapes and were used for several purposes. Circular mounds were for burial, rectangular platform mounds had the homes of the ruling elite on them, and step-pyramid mounds had temples on top. The land around these settlements was cleared and intensively farmed. Around 1400 A.D., Mississippian society began to fall part due to internal warfare and resource depletion. European contact brought a new danger, disease. After 1550 A.D., their sites were slowly abandoned. Some continued to be used by modern tribes who claim the Mississippian as ancestors.

Use the information you have highlighted to complete the chart on the next page.

Moundbuilders Summary Chart

Adena	Hopewell	Mississippian
Location:	Location:	Location:
Dates:	Dates:	Dates:
Characteristics:	Characteristics:	Characteristics:
Use of and Impact on the Environment:	Use of and Impact on the Environment:	Use of and Impact on the Environment:

Moundbuilders Summary Chart-Answer Key

Adena	Hopewell	Mississippian
Location: Ohio River Valley	Location: Ohio River Valley and along Mississippi River	Location: Ohio and Mississippi Rivers, southern United States
Dates: 1000 B.C.-200 B.C.	Dates: 200 B.C.-500 A.D.	Dates: 500 A.D.-1540's A.D.
Characteristics: Lived in villages Hunted and gathered Traded with other groups Made stone pipes, pottery, decorative objects, tools, and weapons Burial mounds were cone shaped Ceremonial mounds were in the shape of an object	Characteristics: Farmed Hunted and gathered Burial mounds were in geometric shapes Ceremonial mounds were the shape of animals Made decorative objects, tools, weapons Pottery was fired Extensive trade network	Characteristics: First to grow maize Large trade network Made objects from shells, clay, pipestone, and copper Formed chiefdoms Burial mounds were circular Rectangular mounds had homes on top Step pyramids had a temple on top Farmed
Use of and Impact on the Environment: Hunted and gathered Mined copper and mica Used clay to make pottery Used stone to make tobacco pipes Used copper, bone, antler, and clamshell to make decorative objects Used stone and flint to make tools and weapons	Use of and Impact on the Environment: Used copper, mica, silver, iron, flint, and obsidian Farmed Hunted and gathered Used up their resources	Use of and Impact on the Environment: Farmed Used shells, pipestone, copper, and clay to make objects Used up their resources

Moundbuilder Assessment

Name _____

Determine whether each statement below is True or False by placing a T or F in the space provided before it.

- _____ 1. Moundbuilder culture began along the Ohio River.
- _____ 2. Mounds were only used for burial.
- _____ 3. Moundbuilders had a vast trade network.
- _____ 4. Mounds came in many shapes as sizes.
- _____ 5. Moundbuilders were hunters and gatherers with no knowledge of farming.
- _____ 6. Warfare, disease, and resource depletion all contributed to the decline of Moundbuilder culture.
- _____ 7. Moundbuilders created art objects from stone, shell, and copper.
- _____ 8. Moundbuilders died out with no modern descendants.
- _____ 9. Moundbuilder culture was found in only a small area.
- _____ 10. Moundbuilder culture existed for a long period of time.

Answer Key-Moundbuilder Assessment

1. T
2. F
3. T
4. T
5. F
6. T
7. T
8. F
9. F
10. T

Moundbuilder Writing Prompt

You have been asked by the local education channel to write a public service announcement about the Moundbuilders. It can last for no more than three minutes. Be sure to include who they were, where they were, and why they were an important Native American culture. Your announcement will be graded on ideas and content, organization, and conventions. Use the checklist below to guide your writing.

I have a topic sentence_____

I have named the 3 Moundbuilder cultures_____

I have stated where each Moundbuilder culture was located_____

I have given 2-3 characteristics for each Moundbuilder culture_____

I have stated why the Moundbuilders were important_____

I have a concluding statement_____

I have used correct spelling, punctuation, capitalization, and grammar in my essay_____

Moundbuilders Map Worksheet

Directions: On the Moundbuilders Map, using a blue marker or colored pencil, trace the rivers. Then use the map to answer the questions below.

1. What pattern do you see concerning the locations of Moundbuilder sites?
2. Give 3 reasons the Moundbuilders would choose to settle in those areas?
3. Name 3 resources that could be found in these areas?
4. Explain how the Moundbuilders could use each of the resources mentioned in the previous question.

Moundbuilder Map Worksheet-Answer Key

1. by or near rivers
2. answers will vary but here are some: water, transportation, fishing
3. answers will vary but here are some: water, farmland, fishing, clay
4. answers will vary but here are some: water for transportation; farmland to grow crops, fish for food; clay for pottery