

Fieldnotes of an Archaeologist

Today you are an archaeologist. Examine the artifacts at the museum as clues to learn about Native American Indian cultures that have lived in the Illinois River Valley. Each question section relates to an exhibit area with the same title.

3rd FLOOR

OBSERVATION DECK (weather permitting)
Signs point to archaeological sites in the area.

2nd FLOOR

HUNTING AND GATHERING

1. Find the Mastodon tooth and spear point on the left side of the Hunting and Gathering case. If archaeologists find these artifacts together, what does it tell them?

2. Find the dog bones on the right side of the Hunting and Gathering case. What evidence tells us that humans had a special relationship with this animal?

GARDENING

3. Many objects, like plants, decompose or rot over hundreds of years. Look at the 1,500-year-old fabric fragment on the left side of the Gardening case. What happened to help preserve it?

4. Find the marine shell in the back of the case. It is a natural resource from the Gulf of Mexico (between Mexico and Florida), but archaeologists found it used as a special ceremonial cup here in Illinois. How do you think it got here several hundreds of years ago?

5. Art can tell archaeologists about a people's lifestyle and beliefs. Look for the pot with a footprint and other decorations in the back of the Gardening case. What story might these pictures be telling?

FARMING

6. In the Farming picture, the Mississippian Indians are watching a special ceremony in which dancing warriors are dressed in falcon costumes. Falcons are a type of hawk, a "bird of prey." Why do you think the warriors admired this bird?

CONFLICT AND CHANGE

7. When Illinois Indians began trading with the French, they were still making their own pottery, but they stopped within 30 years. What kind of containers did they start using and why?

LIFEWAYS (look for the hut in the next room to the left)

8. Trash can reveal a great deal about a culture. Look at the trash pit under the "Toolmaking" sign and other objects in and around the hut. Based on these clues, what do you think the Mississippian Indian's liked to eat?

CHIEF CASE (this is on the right side of the last room)

9. Why is the sun symbol often found on objects belonging to the chief?

LARSON SITE MAP (on the side wall)

10. Find the Larson site on the map. Why would people choose to settle on a blufftop between two rivers?

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HUNTING AND GATHERING

1. Find the Mastodon tooth and spear point on the left side of the Hunting and Gathering case. If archaeologists find these artifacts together, what does it tell them?

Answer: People lived in the area at the same time as the now extinct Mastodon and hunted these animals.

2. Find the dog bones on the right side of the Hunting and Gathering case. What evidence tells us that humans had a special relationship with this animal?

Answer: The dog is buried in a grave that is shaped to accommodate its body.

GARDENING

3. Many objects, like plants, decompose or rot over hundreds of years. Look at the 1,500-year-old fabric fragment on the left side of the Gardening case. What happened to help preserve it?

Answer: The fabric fragment had been burned.

4. Find the marine shell in the back of the case. It is a natural resource from the Gulf of Mexico (between Mexico and Florida), but archaeologists found it used as a special ceremonial cup here in Illinois. How do you think it got here several hundreds of years ago?

Answer: The Indians in Illinois probably got the marine shell through trade and interaction with other cultures. There were trade routes along the Illinois River that is a tributary of the Mississippi River which runs into the Gulf of Mexico.

5. Art can tell archaeologists about a people's lifestyle and beliefs. Look for the pot with a footprint and other decorations in the back of the Gardening case. What story might these pictures be telling?

Answer: *Answers may vary. Archaeologists theorize that this is perhaps a story of an important event or belief. In American Indian art, wavy lines often symbolize water. The footprint suggests someone's journey. The gardening people believed in a life after death. The designs on this pot may tell a story about one's spiritual journey after death.*

FARMING

6. In the Farming picture, the Mississippian Indians are watching a special ceremony in which dancing warriors are dressed in falcon costumes. Falcons are a type of hawk, a "bird of prey." Why do you think the warriors admired this bird?

Answer: *Falcons are swift, silent, and powerful hunters.*

CONFLICT AND CHANGE

7. When Illinois Indians began trading with the French, they were still making their own pottery, but they stopped within 30 years. What kind of containers did they start using and why?

Answer: *The French explorers and traders introduced metal (brass, iron, and copper) cooking kettles that could heat food better and would not break as easily.*

LIFEWAYS (look for the hut in the next room to the left)

8. Trash can reveal a great deal about a culture. Look at the trash pit under the "Toolmaking" sign and other objects in and around the hut. Based on these clues, what do you think the Mississippian Indian's liked to eat?

Answer: *The Mississippian Indians liked to eat deer, mussels, fish, duck, nuts, corn, squash, beans, and sunflower seeds.*

CHIEF CASE (this is on the right side of the last room)

9. Why is the sun symbol often found on objects belonging to the chief?

Answer: *The leader of the Mississippian community was the foremost member of an elite group who claimed authority from a sun god through a line of past rulers.*

LARSON SITE MAP (on the side wall)

10. Find the Larson site on the map. Why would people choose to settle on a blufftop between two rivers?

Answer: *Living on a blufftop would provide added protection against enemies and flooding waters. The rivers provide many wonderful natural resources such as water, fertile soil, food, and means for transportation.*