



Time Warp to Pre-Columbian Time

Many of us take for granted all of the great things we have. Television, radio, video games and skateboards are items we all love to enjoy. But what would happen if time starts to fly backwards?

You watch as your television and radio fade away into nothing. Your skateboard and video games pop like bubbles. The world starts to spin, and everything becomes a blur. You close your eyes, hoping everything will turn out all right. Suddenly, the world stops spinning, and you slowly open your eyes. You are no longer in your room, but you are sitting outside on a hill. You are surrounded by grass, trees and bushes. When you stand up and look around, you notice mounds of dirt, some with buildings on top. You see a woman place a pottery bowl next to the fire and walk away. It's a beautiful black bowl with many strange markings and designs. Looking up, you see a few men walking toward the trees carrying bows and arrows, probably going to hunt for food.

You walk around admiring everything you see, when you suddenly come upon an open mound of dirt. People are placing a wooden coffin inside, along with many different artifacts: pottery, vases shaped into animals and many items made of copper. You are witnessing a burial ceremony.

Suddenly, a young woman pulls your arm. She is taking you toward the fields. You see rows and rows of corn, squash and beans. You see people hoeing the crops with tools made of stone and animal bone. The people continue to work as you wander toward a young man putting a boat on the river. There are

shells, items made of copper and green stone in the boat. It looks as if he is going somewhere to sell or trade these items.

You stare wide-eyed as the teachings you had from school flood your mind. You remember being taught that the buildings on top of the mounds were temples or homes for priests and other leaders. The common people built their homes around the mounds. The people buried inside the mounds were usually priests or leaders if they had many artifacts buried with them. Regular people weren't buried with as many items. The people were expected to pay taxes, but they paid using crops instead of money. The

culture was raised mostly on plants and crops, but they also hunted. You remember now! You realize that you have been transported back in time and are now standing in the middle of a Mississippian Culture in Alabama. Think hard about what else you have learned about them. (Hopefully, you will read this paper so that you can know how they worked and how they survived. Hurry! Open it up and read the amazing things about other cultures.)



Connections

Dismals Canyon—From Dinosaurs to Glowworms



In northwest Alabama, just south of Russellville, you'll find a place where it seems as if time has stood still. Dismals Canyon has waterfalls, natural bridges, cliffs and boulders that make it a mysterious and exciting place to visit. After twilight the canyon lights up with tiny creatures called Dismalites. These "glowworms" only live in a few places outside of New Zealand.

Archaeologists have evidence that Dismals Canyon was home to a tribe of Paleo

Indians about 10,000 years ago. In 1838, U.S. troops forced Chickasaw and Cherokee Indians from their ancestral lands and held them under guard in Dismals Canyon for two weeks. The troops then took them to Muscle Shoals where they started on a long journey, called the Trail of Tears, to Oklahoma.

Even outlaws like Jesse James hid out in Dismals Canyon. Its sunken forest, enormous caves, winding trails and huge boulders provided lots

of hiding places. Early settlers also called Dismals Canyon home. They built a water mill, cotton gin and sawmill. You can still see the remnants as you travel through the canyon.

Dismals Canyon was chosen as one of the shooting locations for the filming of the Discovery Channel special "When Dinosaurs Roamed America." The canyon was selected because the plant life and broad leaf trees are just like those that existed when dinosaurs roamed the Earth.



Pre-Columbian Natives

Woodland Indians

Some of American Indian history is organized according to what native cultures learned to do. For example, when the Archaic Indians learned to plant crops, create jewelry and clay dishes and build tricky traps to catch fish, their way of life changed so much that modern scientists gave them a whole different name. They call them the Woodland Indians. The Woodland period lasted a couple of thousand years, from 1000 B.C. to A.D. 1000. For these natives and their families, following herds of animals just wasn't in style anymore. The Woodland tribes grew crops and stayed in one place for long periods of time. They were still hunters. But, instead of moving the whole tribe wherever the game went, they just sent out hunting parties for a few days. The hunters brought back food for the village. It seemed easier to get the food to the tribe than to get the tribe to the food. These new tricks gave the Woodland Indians more time to be creative.

Mississippian Mound Builders

After A.D. 1000, the Woodland tribes made room for a new group that moved into their territory. These new natives were called



Mississippians. No one knows for sure where they first came from. They learned to work the land well enough to stay in one place, but these folks learned a new trick: They traded with other villages for things they needed. Today's archaeologists have found Mississippian artifacts (handmade objects representing a certain stage of a culture) hundreds of miles away from the villages where they started out. Their villages were well organized, with leaders, warriors, workers and even artists. The Mississippians mostly lived in huts built of cane (tall, thick stems of plants), covered with mud. They had big gardens, too. They grew lots of beans, corn, squash and pumpkins.

What's a Mound Builder?

Some people have a different name for the Mississippians. They call them the mound builders. Many Mississippian villages were built to surround huge rectangular piles of dirt, or mounds. Each mound was built using thousands of bucket loads of dirt. Some of the mounds were as high as 50 feet, and some of them still exist. People still wonder exactly what the mounds were for, but here are a few things they're pretty sure of: First, it seems that some of the leaders of the village lived on top of some of the mounds. Pretty good view, eh? Another thing is that at least one

mound in each village was known as the temple mound. The people would perform rituals on its wide, flat surface. What kinds of rituals? Here's an example: Every morning, one family in the village went to the temple mound and took a gift of food for the sun god.

Woodland Burial Customs

How did the Woodland Indians bury their dead? Some tribes burned the bodies of their fallen warriors or leaders and then covered them with Earth, making a little mound. As other people in the village died, their bodies were burned and laid on top of that same mound, with a new layer of Earth covering the remains. Sometimes, there were two or even three layers of bodies in one burial mound before the Woodland Indians felt that the mound was complete and started another one. Archaeologists have found all sorts of useful items in mounds like these—knives, pots and tools. The Woodland people included such items in their mounds because they thought these things might come in handy for the spirits of the dead in the afterlife.

Later Tribes of the Southeast

By the time the first European explorers arrived in Alabama, the ancient people who had always lived here had formed tribes with names of their own. The main tribes in Alabama were the Creek, Cherokee, Choctaw and Chickasaw. All these tribes left a lasting impression on our state. For example, many of the words we use to describe places in Alabama come from American Indian words, and that includes the name "Alabama" itself. Our state's name comes from a Choctaw word that means "clearers of the thicket." The early natives of Alabama have left us other gifts as well. One of them is a deep respect for nature. They cared for the land, cutting only as many trees and killing only as many animals as they needed for food and shelter. They figured that, if they took care of the world, the world would take care of them. Now, that's a lesson worth learning!



The most important of all crops... The Three Sisters

The Three Sisters were inside the wigwam. Who were these sisters? Actually, this is the natives' name for corn, bean and squash seeds.

The Three Sisters were inside all winter. They wanted to return to the Earth. They could not—not yet. The ground wasn't ready for them. The Earth was cold and wet. If the Three Sisters returned to the Earth, they would rot and die.

When would the Earth be ready? The oak leaves had the answer: When they were the size of a red squirrel's foot, the ground would be safe for the Three Sisters.

The ground got warmer and drier as the days got longer. The oak leaves continued to grow. In late May, the leaves were the size of a red squirrel's foot. It was time for the Three Sisters to leave the wigwam. The seeds had been soaked in medicine. The crows hated the medicine, so they would not eat fruit grown from seeds soaked in it. The women worked the fields, digging up hills of Earth with their sticks and placing each of the sisters—corn, bean and squash seeds—into the warm ground.

By summer the land was crowded with young crops. First the beans, then the squash, and finally the corn were harvested. The seeds were then dried and saved. They were taken to the wigwam. Once again, the Three Sisters rested together through another long winter.



Basket Makers

The natives gathered berries and shellfish from 6,000 to 4,000 B.C. Basketry was important during this era, as the need for containers developed. Duck decoys made of reeds are known from this era, and the natives made nets to catch fish and birds.

The Atlatl

An atlatl is a tool for throwing spears. Thanks to the atlatl, ancient hunters were able to kill more deer, because it made their throws stronger. It also made it easier for the hunters to hit the target. Scientists believe the atlatl was used by ancient hunters on every continent except Antarctica.

The Bow and Arrow

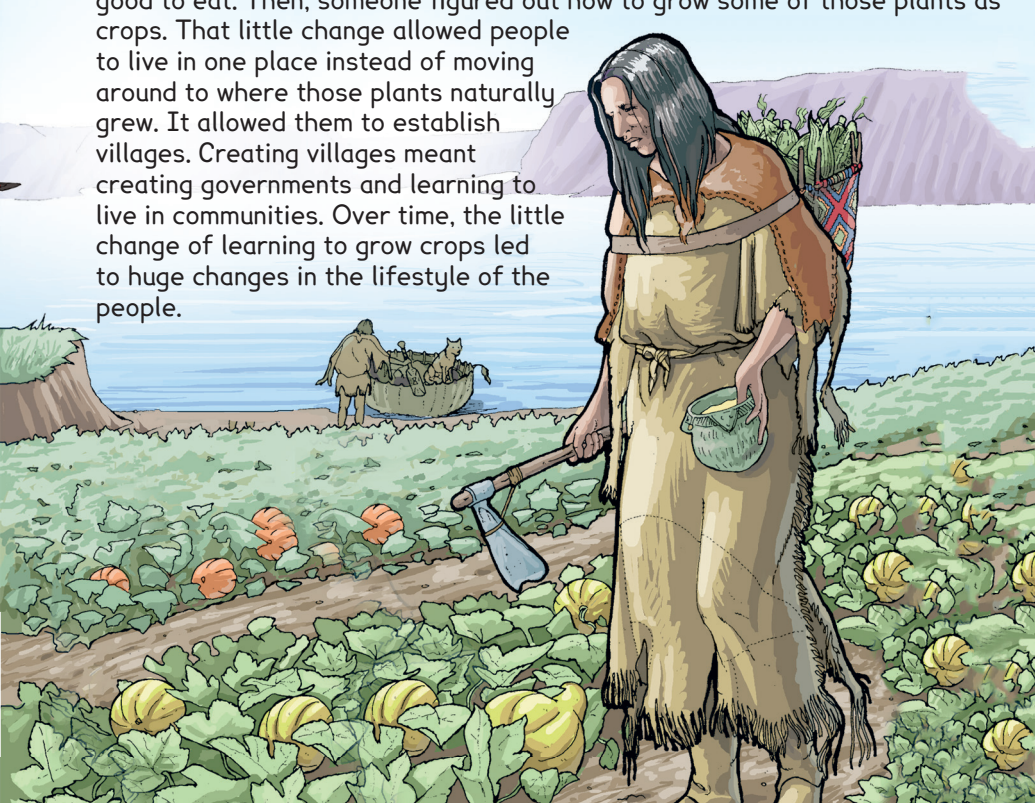
American Indians disguised themselves in deerskin in order to get close to living deer. The bow and arrow helped them kill their prey (hunted animals) from a greater distance than they could with the atlatl.



How did little changes affect the early people of our state?

This Week's Question

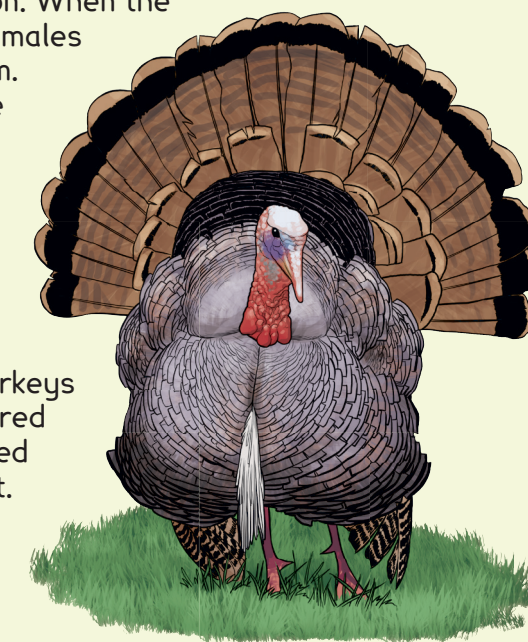
Little changes can sometimes make a big difference. Just as an experiment, switch your pencil from the hand you usually write with to the other hand. Try to write a letter or a poem. That wasn't a huge change, from one hand to the other, was it? But did it change how easy it was to write? Probably in a big way! Once upon a time, the early people of our state wandered from place to place, looking for plants and animals that were good to eat. Then, someone figured out how to grow some of those plants as crops. That little change allowed people to live in one place instead of moving around to where those plants naturally grew. It allowed them to establish villages. Creating villages meant creating governments and learning to live in communities. Over time, the little change of learning to grow crops led to huge changes in the lifestyle of the people.



Wild Turkey

Alabama Wildlife

Wild turkeys are classified as big game. With wingspans of 4 to 5 feet, wild turkeys can fly for short distances, but they mostly wander about on foot looking for food with other turkeys. They eat fruits, buds, seeds, insects, nuts and acorns. Turkeys nest on the ground, but they roost at night in large trees. During the spring mating dance, males fan out their beautiful tails to attract females. Usually, three to five females drop by to see what's going on. When the chicks are hatched, the males pay no attention to them. It's a good thing for the females that the young turkeys learn to look for food almost as soon as they're hatched. After only one month, the hatchlings can fly to Mama's favorite tree roost by themselves. Turkeys are mostly black with a red gullet, white head and red markings down the front.



Name _____



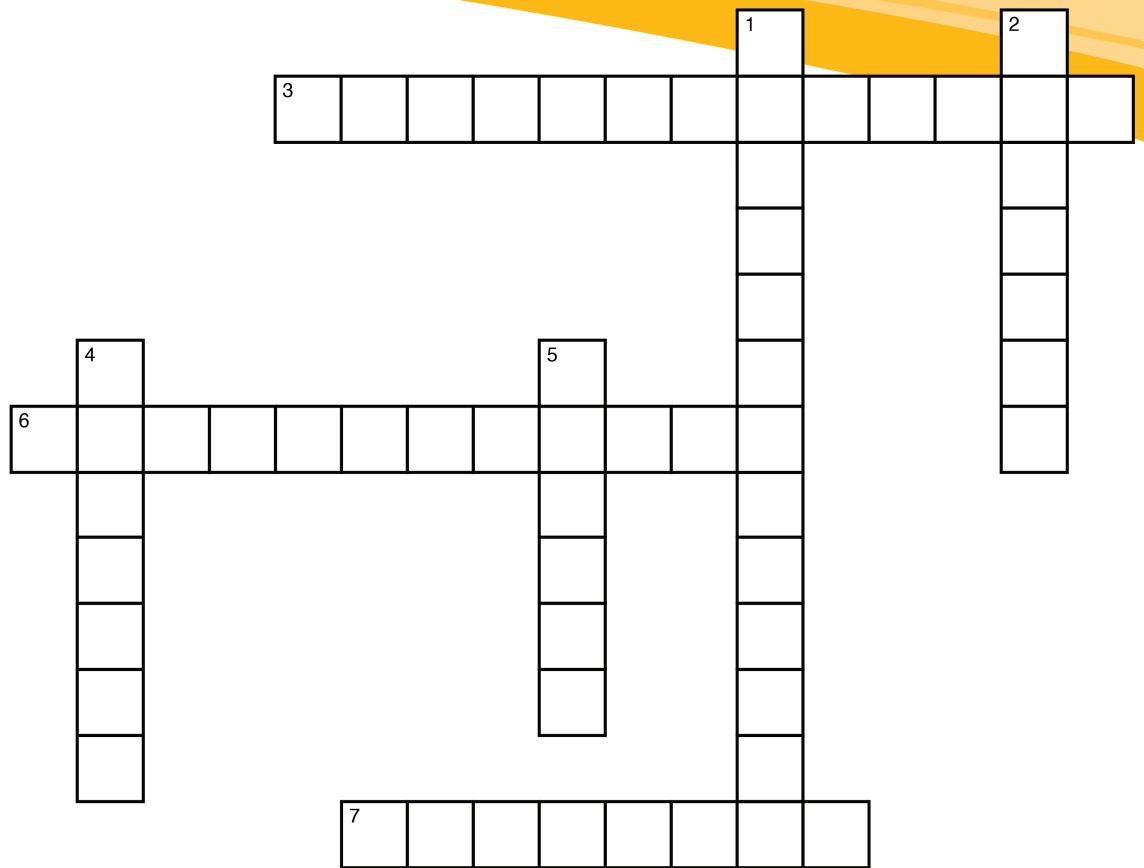
As you read this week's lesson, circle or highlight all proper nouns with any color pen or highlighter. This will help you find some of the crossword answers and get ready for this week's test.

ACROSS

- 3. another name for Mississippians
- 6. corn, beans and squash
- 7. American Indians who planted crops and made jewelry and clay dishes

DOWN

- 1. American Indians who came after the Woodland Indians: _____
- 2. American Indians who came before the Woodland Indians
- 4. "Alabama" means "clearers of the thicket" in this tribe's language.
- 5. a tool for throwing spears



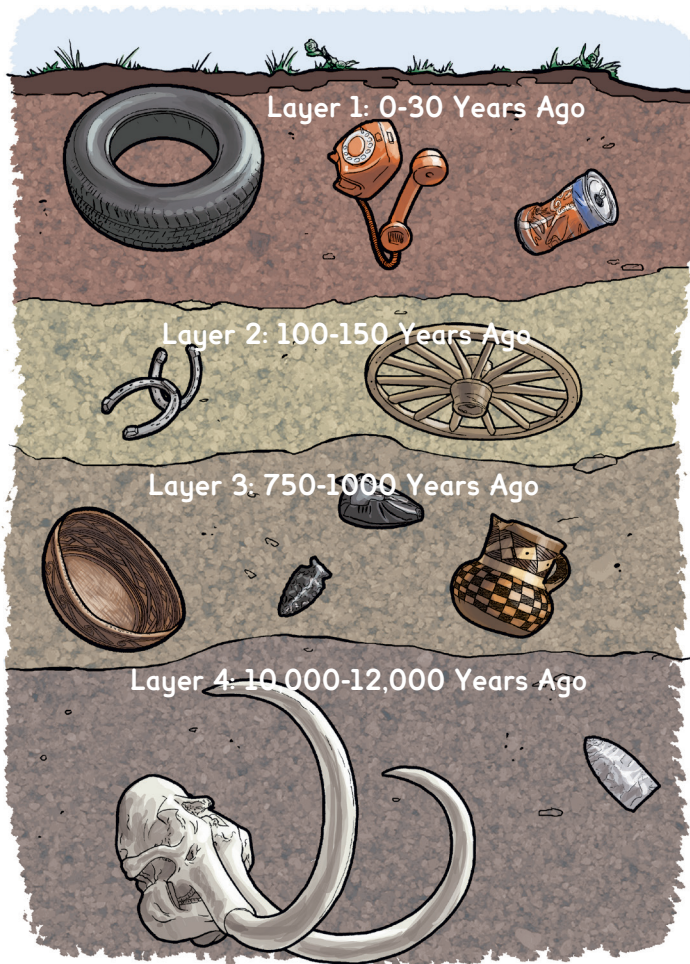
Be an Archaeologist!

Study the picture. It represents layers of dirt that have been laid down over a period of thousands of years. The objects in each layer are called artifacts. (Artifacts are handmade objects representing a certain stage of a culture.) An archaeologist's job is to dig through each layer of dirt and tell the story of the people who lived there by the artifacts they left behind.

- 1. Who left the objects pictured in the top layer?

- 2. Who do you think left the wagon wheel pictured in the next layer?

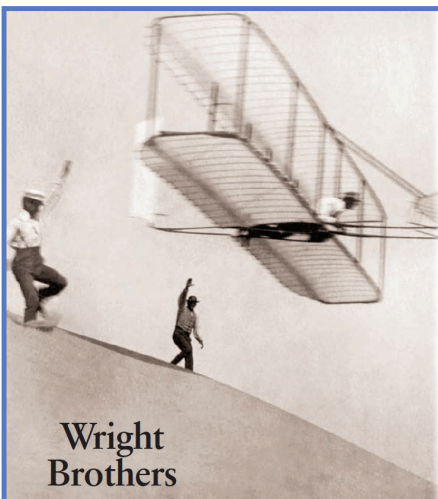
- 3. Which came first, the top layer or the next layer down?



What is the approximate age of each of the following artifacts? Where do you look on the picture to find out?

Write the age in the blank by the artifact.

- 1. _____
- 2. _____
- 3. _____
- 4. _____



Wright Brothers

The right idea will fly.

INNOVATION

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Let's Write

Pretend that you live during the Woodland period. Your tribe needs meat, and they've asked you to come to their rescue. Write a 200-word story about your hunting adventure. What do you take? Who do you take with you? What kind of game (animals used for food) do you kill? Is the game hard to find? How do you do it? How many days does the hunt take? Are you ever in danger?