

**POVERTY POINT EARTHWORKS:
LOUISIANA’S ANCIENT INHABITANTS (LESSON 1)**

GRADES 5-8
GEORGE DURRETT

TIME ALLOTMENT:

Two 45-minute class periods

OVERVIEW:

When we think of ancient cultures in the New World, the Mayans, Aztecs, and Incas come to mind. Yet here in Louisiana lies evidence of a culture that extends back as far as 1350 BC. The prehistoric people of Poverty Point created an earthen structure so immense that it was unrecognizable from the ground. In the 1950’s, an aerial photograph was discovered that pictured huge earthen ridges and mounds that were not a product of natural geological formation.

Through the video and web activities in this lesson, students will examine the structures and artifacts of Poverty Point in order to understand the cultural aspects of North American prehistoric people and the role of archeologists in preserving our past. With the use of web site, film and text, analyze and illustrate the roles of the people past and present that had an impact on this historic site.

SUBJECT MATTER: Social Studies,
History

LEARNING OBJECTIVES:

The student will:

- List the reasons the Poverty Point inhabitants chose that site.
- Illustrate in story form the roles of people past and present at Poverty Point.
- Describe the mound formations and their purpose.
- Analyze the role of an archaeologist, geoscientist, and historic site manager in the preservation of our history.

STANDARDS:

United States History Standards for grades 5-12
<http://www.sscnet.ucla.edu/nchs/standards/worldera1.html>

<http://www.sscnet.ucla.edu/nchs/standards/worldera2.html>

Standard 1A: Describe types of evidence and methods of investigation that anthropologist, archaeologists, and other scholars have used to reconstruct early human evolution and cultural development.

Standard 2B: Analyze differences between hunter-gatherer and agrarian communities in economy, social organization, and quality of living.

Louisiana Social Studies Content Standards
<http://www.doe.state.la.us/DOE/asps/home.asp>

**Geography:
Physical and Cultural Systems**

Students develop a spatial understanding of Earth’s surface and the processes that shape it, the connections between people and places, and the relationship between man and his environment.

Places and Regions

G-1B-M1: Explaining and analyzing both the physical and human phenomena associated with specific places, including precipitation and settlement patterns.

G-1B-M4: Describing and explaining how personal interests, culture, and technology affect people’s perceptions and uses of places and regions.

Environment and Safety

G-1D-M1: Analyzing and evaluating the effects of human actions upon the physical environment.

Historical Thinking Skills

H-1C-M1: Describing the earliest human communities.

Louisiana History

H-1D-M1: Describing the contributions of people, events, movements and ideas that have been significant in the history of Louisiana.



United States History Standards for Grades 5-12

<http://www.sscnet.ucla.edu/nchs/standards/era5-5-12.html>

Standard 1A: Explain the causes of the Civil War and evaluate the importance of slavery as a principle cause of the conflict.

Standard 3B: Explain the economic and social problems facing the South and appraise their impact on different social groups.

Louisiana English Language Arts Content Standards,

<http://www.doe.state.la.us/DOE/asps/home.asp>

ELA-1-M4: Interpreting texts with supportive explanations to generate connections to real-life situations and other texts.

ELA-1-M5: Using purposes for reading (e.g., enjoying, learning, researching, problem solving) to achieve a variety of objectives.

ELA-2-M4: using narration, description, exposition, and persuasion to develop various modes of writing.

ELA-4-M3: Using the features of speaking when giving rehearsed and unrehearsed presentations.

ELA-4-M5: Listening and responding to a wide variety of media.

ELA-5-M2: Locating and evaluating information sources.

ELA-6-M2: Identifying, comparing, and responding to a variety of classic and contemporary literature from many genres.

ELA-7-M3: Analyzing the effects of an author's purpose and point of view.

ELA-7-M4: Distinguishing fact from opinion and probability, skimming and scanning for facts, determining cause and effect, inductive and deductive reasoning, generating inquiry, and making connections with real-life situations across texts.

Louisiana Social Studies Content Standards

<http://www.doe.state.la.us/DOE/asps/home.asp>

Places and Regions

G-1B-M4: Describing and explaining how personal interests, culture, and technology affect people's perceptions and uses of places and regions.

G-1C-M7: Explaining how cooperation and conflict among people contribute to the political divisions on Earth's surface.

Foundations of the American Political System

C-1B-M2: Identifying and describing the historical experiences and the geographic, social, and economic factors that have helped to shape American political culture.

Historical Thinking Skills

H-1A-M2: Demonstrating historical perspective through the political, social, and economic context in which an event or idea occurred.

H-1A-M3: Analyzing the impact that specific individuals, ideas, events, and decisions had on the course of history.

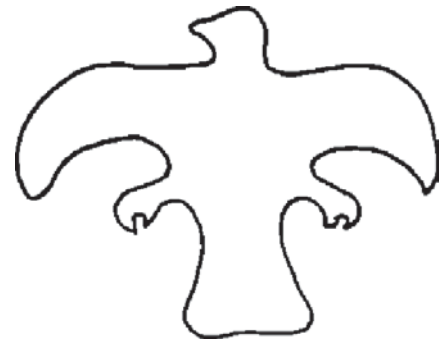
United States History

H-1B-M12: describing the causes and course of the Civil War and examining the impact of the war on the American people.

Louisiana History

H-1D-M1: describing the contributions of people, events, movements, and ideas that have been significant in the history of Louisiana.

H-1D-M3: identifying and discussing the major conflicts in Louisiana's past.



MEDIA COMPONENTS:**Video:**

Poverty Point Earthworks: Evolutionary Milestones of the Americas

Web Sites:

Poverty Point Earthworks: Evolutionary Milestones of the Americas

http://www.lpb.org/programs/povertypoint/pp_transcript.html

This Web site examines the ancient earthworks of the Poverty Point Native Americans, a development that may have begun 6,500 years ago. Archeologists discuss where and why the mounds were developed, the artifacts found, and the possible lifestyle of these people.

MATERIALS:

- Pencil and paper
- Question and answer sheets for film viewing

For each group of 4-5 students:

- Handout with suggestions for story writing
- Xeroxed picture of artifacts of ancient peoples
- Picture of Poverty Point site

PREP FOR TEACHER:

Prior to this lesson, bookmark the Web site used in the lesson on each computer. View film and set it to the spot to be viewed.

Prepare the writing element of the lesson by:

Making copies of the attachment, "A Day in the Afternoon of _____"

INTRODUCTORY ACTIVITY:

1. Pass out xeroxed pictures of artifacts of ancient peoples. Ask your students to examine the pictures and offer suggestions on the items' purpose, age, and location of the possible sites. Are these people hunters and gatherers, or have they progressed enough to establish villages? What kind of culture do you think they may have had?
2. Following this discussion, define what an archeologist, geoscientist, and historic site manager are and the purpose of their work. Introduce a picture of the Poverty Point site and the names of the archeologists and geoscientist that worked it.

Poverty Point is a very large earthwork development formed by Louisiana Native Americans as far back as 6,500 years ago. The site was abandoned 3,300 years ago. It wasn't until the 1840's, about twenty years before the civil war, an explorer by the name of Jacob Walters was looking for lead ore and found the first reported Native American artifacts at Poverty Point. In the 1950's an old aerial photograph was found that showed man-made earthen mounds. They were so big, no one standing on the ground could have seen that they formed a specific shape and purpose. Today we are going to hear from four professionals that have worked to understand the Poverty Point Site and its history. Two of the men are archeologists. These are people who scientifically study the life and culture of ancient peoples. Their names are Robert Connolly, Ph.D. and Jon Gibson, Ph.D. One professional, Robert Saucier, is a geoscientist studying the earth, how it was formed in northern Louisiana, and how that relates to the location of the Poverty Point mounds. The fourth individual in this team is Dennis LaBatt, an historic site manager. His job is to oversee the excavations and protect the site from harm.

3. The teacher will pass out the question forms that will be answered while watching the film and read over them with the students. The questions will include:
- How old are the earthforms?
 - In what shape are the earthforms?
 - If the ridges were straightened and laid end to end, how long would they be?
 - What possible purpose did the thirty-seven acre plaza serve?
 - What explanation is there for the deep pits found on the western side of the plaza?
 - Where did the Poverty Point people get copper and stones?
 - Their houses were probably constructed from what materials?
 - What did the people eat?
 - What destroyed any evidence of housing?
 - What did they hunt with?
 - How was the food cooked?
 - What animal was symbolic for the Poverty Point culture?
 - What does a certain type of jewelry indicate in this culture?
- Corresponding answers are attached.*



- 4.
- FOCUS FOR MEDIA INTERACTION.** Before starting the video ask students about their community. Have them describe the streets they live on, the style of their homes, important buildings in their city. Tell the students to compare their community to that of Poverty Point.
 - START** the video for student viewing. As the students view the film they will answer questions on the Focus Sheet Discover Poverty Point. **PAUSE** the video at 7 minutes after the statement “and we actually have accounts from the original European explorers into the region.” Screen image is drawing of a circle of hunters . Let the students report on the important points of information they have collected in the first part of the video. Check for recognition by asking about the age and shape of the earthworks. How were they found? How are people studying the earthworks and what have we learned from the research?
 - RESUME** play. **PAUSE** following the researcher’s discussion of people returning to the area and adding on to the mounds with people living in the area up until about 700 AD. Have students discuss the plaza and indicate what facility in their city serves a similar purpose as the plaza. What were two methods of insurance for the residents of Poverty Point? Why was geometry important to Native Americans? In what direction do the wings of the Bird Mound point?
 - Ask the students if they think the people of Poverty Point had all the resources they needed. Reminding them that there were no Wal-marts and so have the students predict how and where the people could get materials they needed.
 - RESUME** play with the segment that opens “In terms of artifacts.” How did the materials and people come to Poverty Point to trade? What were some of the important trade items? **PAUSE** following “such that we can not recognize that evidence today.” Have the students share the information on trade and construction from the previous segment.
 - RESUME** play and continue until the end of the video. Students should complete all the questions on the **FOCUS SHEET** Discover Poverty Point The students will discuss the data gathered from the film. The Poverty Point Earthworks: Evolutionary Milestones of the Americas website will be provided on the internet for exploration and review. The students are encouraged to check their answers and provide additional material.

CULMINATING ACTIVITY:

1. Following the discussion, the teacher will assign a character or allow groups to choose a character and use their information on Poverty Point to write a story, "An Afternoon in the Life of _____". (More information and insight will be shared if the teacher assigns the characters. The list of characters can be lengthened for smaller, more numerous groups by assigning Poverty Point girl, boy, man, and woman.) They will choose from the following list:
 - Archeologist
 - Geoscientist
 - Historic Site Manager
 - Poverty Point child
 - Poverty Point adult
 - Farmer who once plowed and planted at Poverty Point

Students, I want you to choose from these characters to write a story that summarizes what you have learned today. Put yourself in the place of one of these people and write in first person using "I" and "we" to describe the afternoon. The five senses of smell, taste, sight, hearing, and touch will be included. This can be done by describing the season, the food cooking, birds singing, children playing, structures around you, the feel of the dirt and artifacts as they are made or discovered. Use the information from at least eight questions to make your writing factually correct. This form of writing is referred to as historical fiction.

2. As the groups begin to brainstorm their stories, the teacher will allow one group at a time to go to the computer or computers in the classroom and examine the Poverty Point web site that has been bookmarked. If the class has access to a computer lab, the students could individually visit the website in order to complete the questionnaire on the film and search for additional information including views of maps and artifacts.
3. The teacher may assess on the written story alone, or include a presentation of each story to the class by the students.

CROSS-CURRICULAR EXTENSIONS:

LANGUAGE ARTS: Historical fiction paragraph including the five senses and facts on Poverty Point. Have the students include metaphors, similes, and personification to enhance the descriptive aspect.

MATHEMATICS: Seventy-one metric tons of foreign flint was found at the Poverty Point site. If a Native American raft or canoe can carry 200 pounds of flint, how many trading trips would 100 canoes have to make?

TECHNOLOGY/SOCIAL STUDIES: Research other early civilizations, basics about their culture, and how long each lasted. Make parallel time lines in order to compare and contrast civilizations and explore the meaning of B.C. and A.D. Make a trading card with a draw program by copying pictures from the Internet and writing pertinent facts.

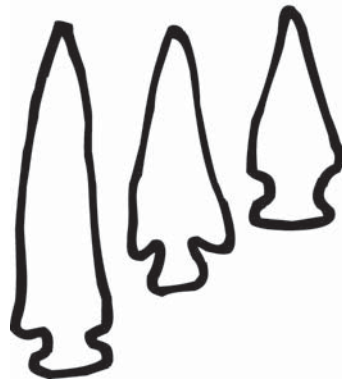
VISUAL ARTS: Make a relief map of the Poverty Point Area. Design jewelry from clay similar to the jewelry of these Native Americans. Construct a village on an earthworm where it will be safe from flooding.

COMMUNITY CONNECTIONS:

- Field trip to Poverty Point
- Visit a local museum to investigate an evidence of ancient people from the immediate area.
- Invite archaeologists, geologists, and historians to speak to the class about
- **Poverty Point Earthworks: Louisiana's Ancient Inhabitants**

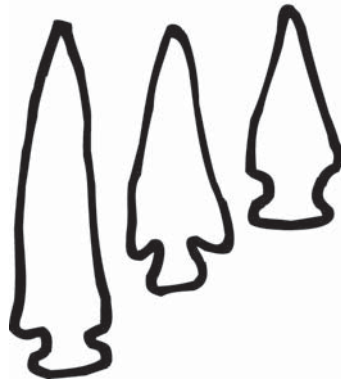
FOCUS SHEET Discover Poverty Point:

1. How old are the earthforms?
2. In what shape are the earthforms?
3. If the ridges were straightened and laid end to end, how long would they be?
4. What possible purpose did the thirty-seven acre plaza serve?
5. What explanation is there for the deep pits found on the western side of the plaza?
6. Where did the Poverty Point people get copper and stones?
7. Their houses were probably constructed from what materials?
8. What did the people eat?
9. What destroyed any evidence of housing?
10. What did they hunt with?
11. How was the food cooked?
12. What animal was symbolic for the Poverty Point culture?
13. What does a certain type of jewelry indicate in this culture?



FOCUS SHEET Discover Poverty Point(Answers):

1. How old are the earthforms? **Oldest is 6,500 years and Poverty Point is 3,800.**
2. In what shape are the earthforms? **Crescent or C-shape, 6 embankments.**
3. If the ridges were straightened and laid end to end, how long would they be? **12 Km. or 7.5 miles.**
4. What possible purpose did the thirty-seven acre plaza serve? **Ceremonies, games, dances.**
5. What explanation is there for the deep pits found on the western side of the plaza? **Wooden posts calendar markers for important days.**
6. Where did the Poverty Point people get copper and stones? **Long distanced organized trading network.**
7. Their houses were probably constructed from what materials? **Earth, dirt**
8. What did the people eat? **fish, turtles, mammals (deer, rabbit), birds grapes, beans, nuts, squash**
9. What destroyed any evidence of housing? **modern plowing and farming techniques**
10. What did they hunt with? **spears, bows & arrows, plummets, nets**
11. How was the food cooked? **open hearths and earth ovens using clay balls**
12. What animal was symbolic for the Poverty Point culture? **owls**
13. What does a certain type of jewelry indicate in this culture? **personal status, social standing in the community**



Writing Handout: “A Day in the Life of a/an _____ “

Archeologist

- What materials did he use in the film?
- What would most of his activities be during a regular afternoon?
- At the end of the day, what might he have found?
- Use the five senses to describe the setting.
- Use first person, I and we, to write the story.
- One character may be used without quotation marks or more than one character with quotation marks.

Geoscientist

- By studying maps and terrain, what made him think that the mounds were not natural?
- What aspects of the site would appeal to early people who need safety, food and shelter?
- What might he discuss with the site manager or the archaeologist?
- Use the five senses to describe the setting.
- Use first person, I and we, to write the story.
- One character may be used without quotation marks or more than one character with quotation marks.

Historic Site Manager

- What steps might he have to take to keep people from coming on the site and removing artifacts?
- How would arrangements be made for the public to view the site and learn its history?
- Would he have to coordinate activities with the archaeologist, geoscientist, and visitors?
- Use the five senses to describe the setting.
- Use first person, I and we, to write the story.
- One character may be used without quotation marks or more than one character with quotation marks.

Poverty Point child

- What kind of house might the child live in?
- What clothes would he wear?
- What might his/her chores be for the afternoon?
- Would he/she have time to play?
- Use the five senses to describe the setting.
- Use first person, I and we, to write the story.
- One character may be used without quotation marks or more than one character with quotation marks.

Poverty Point adult

- What kind of house might he/she live in with the family?
- Where would the house probably be positioned?
- What jobs would he/she be responsible for?
- What would the family do for entertainment in the evening?
- Use the five senses to describe the setting.
- Use first person, I and we, to write the story.
- One character may be used without quotation marks or more than one character with quotation marks.

Farmer who once plowed and planted at Poverty Point

- How would he feel about the land that had belonged to his family changed to an historic site?
- Would he lose a significant amount of farmland?
- How did he feel about unknowingly plowing ridges that were the remains of an ancient civilization?
- Use the five senses to describe the setting.
- Use first person, I and we, to write the story.
- One character may be used without quotation marks or more than one character with quotation marks.