Lives Along Alabama Rivers

Trace changes in food, community life, and leadership

SS24.AS.5 "Describe the cultures, economies, and governments of the first Indigenous peoples to inhabit Alabama."

NAME _____ DATE _____

1 READ AND MARK

Read it twice

YOUR JOB As you read, underline ways people obtained food, circle evidence of shared customs, and number each detail about leadership or decision-making. Use your marks to compare communities across time.

Communities Across Time

1. Imagine finding a stone point beside an Alabama creek. It might belong to the Paleoindian period, when people lived in the region by about 13,000 years ago. Small groups traveled to hunt animals and gather wild plants. They made tools from stone and shared knowledge needed for travel and survival. Much later, during the Archaic period, communities used rivers more intensively for fishing and collecting shellfish, while also hunting and gathering. Archaeologists find tools and food remains that reveal these activities. These traces do not tell us exactly how either period's groups chose leaders or made decisions.

2. During the Woodland period, many Alabama communities still hunted, fished, and gathered plants, and some grew crops such as squash and sunflowers. Pottery helped people cook and store food. Communities also built earthen mounds and exchanged goods over long distances. In some burials, objects made from materials obtained far away show connections among communities. Mounds and burial customs suggest organized communal work and shared beliefs, but they do not tell archaeologists exactly how a community made decisions. Different communities could have organized themselves in different ways.

3. By about 1000 CE, Mississippian communities in Alabama relied heavily on farming corn and squash, and later beans. They continued to hunt and fish. At Moundville, people built large platform mounds around a plaza, an open space for public gatherings. Some people crafted pottery and other goods, while farmers produced food. Leaders in these chiefdoms directed work and ceremonies and could call on surrounding communities for goods and labor. The size of the mounds and the town's arrangement point to concentrated authority. Moundville's political system differed from the less clearly documented leadership of earlier periods, though people in every period depended on cooperation.

2 ANSWER WITH EVIDENCE

Use the passage

1. How did ways of obtaining food change from the Paleoindian period to the Archaic period?

2. Describe two Woodland practices and explain what the passage does, or does not, reveal about how those communities governed themselves.

3. How were food production, public spaces, and leadership connected at Mississippian Moundville?

4. Why can the passage describe Moundville's government more clearly than the governments of earlier groups? Use evidence from both periods.

3 YOUR TURN

Your own words

Write an 80 to 100 word museum label tracing changes in food sources, shared practices, and leadership from the earliest groups through Woodland communities to Moundville. Include one limit of what the evidence can tell us.

ANSWER KEY

Lives Along Alabama Rivers

HIGH SCHOOL · SS24.AS.5

PART 1 · READ AND MARK

As you read, underline ways people obtained food, circle evidence of shared customs, and number each detail about leadership or decision-making. Use your marks to compare communities across time. Accept any marking that follows this job and points at the right text.

PART 2 · ANSWERS

#	QUESTION	ANSWER
1	How did ways of obtaining food change from the Paleoindian period to the Archaic period?	**Paleoindian groups hunted and gathered wild plants. Archaic communities also hunted and gathered, but used rivers more intensively for fishing and collecting shellfish.**
2	Describe two Woodland practices and explain what the passage does, or does not, reveal about how those communities governed themselves.	**Woodland communities made pottery and built earthen mounds. Mounds suggest organized communal work, but the evidence does not show exactly how communities made decisions.**
3	How were food production, public spaces, and leadership connected at Mississippian Moundville?	**Farmers produced food, and people built platform mounds around a plaza for gatherings. Leaders directed work and ceremonies and could call on surrounding communities for goods and labor.**
4	Why can the passage describe Moundville's government more clearly than the governments of earlier groups? Use evidence from both periods.	**Moundville's large mounds, planned plaza, and evidence of coordinated labor point to concentrated authority. Earlier tools and food remains reveal how people lived but not exactly how they chose leaders or made decisions.**

PART 3 · YOUR TURN (SAMPLE ANSWER)

Alabama's earliest groups moved to find game and wild plants, making stone tools as they traveled. Archaic communities also fished and collected shellfish along rivers. Later, Woodland communities made pottery, raised some crops, and built mounds for shared activities. Their burial goods suggest long-distance connections, but they do not reveal exactly how leaders were chosen. By the Mississippian period, people at Moundville farmed corn and built platform mounds around a plaza. Chiefs directed ceremonies and work. These changes show different ways communities met their needs and organized life over time.

Accept accurate comparisons that distinguish evidence from inference. Students should not claim that archaeologists know exactly how Paleoindian, Archaic, or Woodland groups selected leaders.