Beyond the Mounds

Evidence of organized life in pre-contact Oklahoma

OKH.C.1.3 "Describe the region as home to well-developed and complex pre-contact societies, such as the Spiro Mound Builders."

NAME _____ DATE _____

1 READ AND MARK

Read it twice

YOUR JOB Underline three details that show how people organized work or community life at Spiro. Circle two details that show connections to distant places.

A Center on the Arkansas River

1 Long before sustained European contact in what is now Oklahoma, Native communities built towns along rivers and farmed nearby land. One center, Spiro, stood near the Arkansas River in eastern Oklahoma and flourished roughly from 900 to 1450 CE. Families grew maize, beans, and squash; they also gathered wild foods, fished, and hunted. These food sources helped support a settled community in which people did different kinds of work. Spiro was not an isolated camp or a single mound. It was part of a larger world of towns and ceremonial places across the region.

2 At Spiro, people constructed earthen mounds by moving and piling soil over many years. Some mounds held buildings used for public gatherings and ceremonies; others contained burials and objects placed with the dead. Building and maintaining these spaces required planning and shared labor, not just individual effort. Archaeologists have found finely made pottery, carved shell, and engraved copper at the site. Such objects point to skilled makers and to ceremonies that mattered to the community. The mounds and objects together show how people shaped a place for both daily life and important events.

3 Materials found at Spiro also reveal ties far beyond the Arkansas River valley. Some shells came from the Gulf Coast, while some copper originated near the Great Lakes. People and goods moved through networks linking distant communities, although an object at Spiro does not prove its maker traveled there. These connections gave local artists materials to transform into objects with distinctive designs. Spiro's residents belonged to the broader Mississippian world and are connected to the ancestors of the Caddo people. Their farms, public spaces, specialized crafts, and exchange networks challenge the idea that this region lacked complex societies before sustained European contact.

2 ANSWER WITH EVIDENCE

Use the passage

1. How did Spiro's food sources help support a settled community with different kinds of work?

2. What does the construction of Spiro's mounds show about how people worked together?

3. How do the shell and copper finds show that Spiro was connected to distant communities? What can those objects not prove?

4. Use one detail about public spaces and one about skilled crafts to describe two ways Spiro's society was complex.

3 YOUR TURN

Your own words

Write a 70 to 90 word museum label titled “More Than a Mound” for visitors who think pre-contact Oklahoma had no complex societies. Use three kinds of evidence from the passage, explain how at least two show organized community life, and state one limit on what an object alone can prove.

ANSWER KEY

Beyond the Mounds

HIGH SCHOOL · OKH.C.1.3

PART 1 · READ AND MARK

Underline three details that show how people organized work or community life at Spiro. Circle two details that show connections to distant places. Accept any marking that follows this job and points at the right text.

PART 2 · ANSWERS

#	QUESTION	ANSWER
1	How did Spiro's food sources help support a settled community with different kinds of work?	**Farming, gathering, fishing, and hunting supplied food for a settled community in which people could do different kinds of work.**
2	What does the construction of Spiro's mounds show about how people worked together?	**Moving and piling soil over many years, then maintaining the mounds, required planning and shared labor.**
3	How do the shell and copper finds show that Spiro was connected to distant communities? What can those objects not prove?	**Some shells came from the Gulf Coast and some copper from near the Great Lakes, showing that materials moved through distant networks. The objects do not prove that their makers traveled to Spiro.**
4	Use one detail about public spaces and one about skilled crafts to describe two ways Spiro's society was complex.	**Buildings on mounds served public gatherings and ceremonies, showing organized community activities. Finely made pottery, carved shell, and engraved copper show skilled craftwork.**

PART 3 · YOUR TURN (SAMPLE ANSWER)

More Than a Mound: Spiro was a center of community life in what is now eastern Oklahoma long before sustained European contact. Farming supported people who could take on different kinds of work. Building mounds took shared labor and planning, and carefully made shell and copper objects show skilled craftwork. Materials from the Gulf Coast and Great Lakes region link Spiro to distant communities. A distant material does not prove that its original maker visited Spiro, but it does reveal a wide network of exchange.

Accept other passage-based evidence of organized work, community life, or distant connections. For the label, check the word count, three kinds of evidence, explanations of two, and an accurate limit on what an object alone proves.