

Clues at Cahokia

Use evidence to build careful historical questions.

S.WG.c “developing questions, enhancing curiosity, and engaging in critical thinking and analysis;”

NAME _____

DATE _____

1 READ AND MARK _____ Read it twice

YOUR JOB Underline two details that could serve as evidence, circle two words or phrases that show uncertainty, and write 1 beside one detail that makes you want to ask a new research question.

Investigating an Ancient City

- ① About 1,000 years ago, Cahokia stood near the Mississippi River in what is now Illinois. It became the largest known Indigenous city north of Mexico at that time. Workers built earthen mounds, including Monks Mound, and residents lived in neighborhoods around open plazas. Archaeologists have found homes, tools, pottery, and remains of traded materials. These discoveries show that Cahokia was a busy, organized place, but they do not tell every part of its story to us.
- ② Researchers ask why Cahokia grew so quickly and how its leaders organized labor. They compare soil layers, plant remains, and the locations of buildings. For example, corn pollen can suggest that nearby people grew maize, while shells from the Gulf Coast suggest long-distance exchange. Each clue has limits. Pollen cannot identify the person who planted a field, and a traded shell cannot explain whether exchange was peaceful, forced, or both. Careful investigators separate what evidence supports from what it cannot prove.
- ③ By about 1350 CE, most people had left Cahokia, yet no single cause has been proven. Some scholars examine signs of drought or flooding. Others study evidence of conflict, disease, political change, or pressure on forests and soil. A strong historical question is narrow enough to investigate and names evidence that might help answer it. For instance, a researcher might ask how changing river conditions affected food production during Cahokia's final centuries. The question does not assume one cause before the evidence is examined.

2 ANSWER WITH EVIDENCE _____ Use the passage

1 What claim can shells from the Gulf Coast support? What important detail about the exchange can the shells not prove?

2 A student says, "Cahokia's leaders forced people to trade." Which idea from the passage shows why this claim is too certain?

3 Why would corn pollen be useful to an investigator, but not enough to identify a particular farmer? Use evidence from the passage.

4 Choose one possible reason people left Cahokia. Write a focused research question about that reason and name one kind of evidence from the passage that could help investigate it.

3 YOUR TURN _____ Your own words

Choose a past community other than Cahokia. In four sentences, write one focused historical question about a change, name two kinds of evidence you would seek, and explain how each could help without assuming your conclusion.

PART 1 • READ AND MARK

Underline two details that could serve as evidence, circle two words or phrases that show uncertainty, and write 1 beside one detail that makes you want to ask a new research question. Accept any marking that follows this job and points at the right text.

PART 2 • ANSWERS

#	QUESTION	ANSWER
1	What claim can shells from the Gulf Coast support? What important detail about the exchange can the shells not prove?	They support the claim that Cahokia had long-distance exchange. They cannot prove whether the exchange was peaceful, forced, or both.
2	A student says, "Cahokia's leaders forced people to trade." Which idea from the passage shows why this claim is too certain?	A traded shell cannot explain whether exchange was peaceful, forced, or both. The shells alone cannot prove that leaders forced trade.
3	Why would corn pollen be useful to an investigator, but not enough to identify a particular farmer? Use evidence from the passage.	Corn pollen can suggest that nearby people grew maize. It cannot identify the person who planted a field, so it cannot identify a particular farmer.
4	Choose one possible reason people left Cahokia. Write a focused research question about that reason and name one kind of evidence from the passage that could help investigate it.	Answers will vary. Example: How did drought affect Cahokia's food supply before 1350 CE? A researcher could examine signs of drought and plant remains.

PART 3 • YOUR TURN (SAMPLE ANSWER)

How did the construction of aqueducts change daily life in ancient Rome? I would examine written records about water use to learn who received water and when. I would study pipes and fountains to see where water reached people. These sources could show changes in access to water, but they would not prove that every Roman benefited equally.

Accept answers that distinguish a reasonable conclusion from a claim the evidence cannot prove. For the open response, accept a focused question, two relevant evidence types, and a statement that avoids assuming the conclusion.