
Lesson 4.1

SHADOWS OF NORTH CAROLINA'S PAST



Small stone head from
Montgomery County, North
Carolina, ca. AD 1200–1400.

Subjects: science, language arts, social studies.

Skills: knowledge, comprehension, application, analysis, evaluation.

Strategies: observation, classification, compare and contrast, scientific inquiry, sequence.

Duration: 45 to 60 minutes.

Class Size: any; groups of 3 to 4.

Objectives

In their study of archaeological evidence cards, students will:

- infer past Native American lifeways based on observation.
- construct a timeline of four major culture periods in Native American history.
- compare these lifeways and discuss how they are different and alike.

Materials

For the teacher, “Evidence Cards.” For each student, an “Inquiries into the Past” activity sheet.

Vocabulary

Agriculture: the cultivation of domesticated plants, such as corn, beans, and squash, as primary sources of food.

Anthropology: the comparative study of human culture, behavior, and biology, and of how these change through time. Archaeology is often considered a specialty within anthropology.

Archaeology: a method for studying past human cultures based on material evidence (artifacts and sites). Archaeology is often practiced as a subfield of anthropology.

Artifact: any object made, modified, or used by humans; usually this term refers to a portable item.

Base camp. A relatively larger, more stable camp site that serves as a base for a wide range of activities within a group’s territory. It may serve as a staging area for far-flung food-collecting, hunting, or quarrying expeditions.

Chronology: an arrangement of events or periods in the order in which they occurred.

Culture: the set of learned beliefs, values, styles, and behaviors generally shared by members of a society or group.

History: the study of past events and cultures using written records, oral traditions, and archaeological evidence as sources of information.

Horticulture: the cultivation of gardens whose foods supplement those obtained from some other primary source, such as hunting, gathering, fishing, or shell fishing.

Permanent village. A settlement that is continuously occupied by people throughout the year.

Semi-permanent village: a settlement occupied by people for several months each year, but not year round.

Short-term camp. A camp occupied for a relatively brief period of time.

Site: a place where human activities occurred and material evidence of these activities was left.

Subsistence: the means of supporting life, usually referring to food and other basic commodities.

Background

Change through time, according to archaeologist Joffre Coe, is one of the few constants in life. Everywhere and anytime, people change aspects of how they live—their tools, their foods, their houses, their art, their social structure, their world view and religion. Sometimes change is abrupt. Other times, it happens so slowly it seems imperceptible, visible only through the wide window of time.

Various factors affect change and the rate it occurs in people's lives. The environment, for example, can have tremendous effects. The slow climatic shift from Ice Age to modern weather that happened between 14,000 and 10,000 years ago overturned local ecology. In North Carolina, cold-loving boreal forests of jack pine and spruce became groves of deciduous nut trees and long-needle pine. Large Ice-Age mammals, such as the mastodon, died out. In their place, deer, bear, and other modern animals thrived.

People adjusted by changing not just what they hunted and gathered for food, but the tools they used. For example, as people came to use more and different plants for food, they created additional tools, like grinding slabs to process nuts and seeds.

Based on change over time, archaeologists identify four broad cultural periods in North Carolina before Europeans arrived. These periods are called Paleoindian, Archaic, Woodland, and Mississippian. Archaeologists constructed the story of each period by observing datable *artifacts* and other traces people left and then making inferences about how they lived. Generally, the transition from one period to another is marked by fundamental changes in things like technology (tools, containers, etc.), economy (*subsistence* patterns, etc.), or settlements.

The *Paleoindian period* is the oldest known cultural period in North Carolina. In fact, it is the oldest tradition for all of North and South America. The first Paleoindians crossed a now-submerged land bridge between Alaska and Siberia during the last Ice Age. Archaeologists find evidence Paleoindians were living in North Carolina between 10,000 and 8000 BC. They were nomadic hunters and gatherers who, in the last centuries of the Ice Age, presumably used thrusting spears tipped with chipped stone points to kill prey. Other tools included portable, but useful items like stone hide scrapers, drills, and knives. Paleoindians in the eastern U.S. occasionally hunted big game, such as now-extinct mastodons and bison. But increasingly evidence suggests most Paleoindians, including those in North Carolina, ate a wide variety of smaller animals and used many plants for food and medicines.

The *Archaic period* is the second oldest known lifeway across the continent. In North Carolina this tradition dates from 8000 to 1000 BC. Archaic Indians were direct descendants of Paleoindians. They, too, were wandering hunters and gatherers who had no year-round villages. Instead, they lived in camps; some of these settlements, called base camps, were relatively large and served as a "home base" for food-getting activities over a large area. Their shelters were probably tents made of wooden poles covered with hides that could be quickly built and dismantled. Possessions were few and portable.

Archaic Indians lived in a climate much like that of today, and were surrounded by the same species of plants and animals that exist today (in other words, the Ice-Age flora and fauna were

gone). To hunt, Archaic people used a spear-throwing device called an atlatl, which enabled them to propel spears farther and with more force. (Most archaeologists believe Paleoindians used the atlatl as well, but they have not found evidence yet to support this idea.) The white-tailed deer was the main source of meat for Archaic people. They also ate a variety of wild vegetables and fruits, and harvested wild seeds from a variety of plants that grew near riverside camps they regularly visited as they moved from place to place.

Over time, Archaic people adopted or developed new tools. They shaped grinding implements to process nuts from the spreading forests of deciduous trees and developed a technique to smooth and polish stone tools like axes. They carved bowls from steatite, a soft, soapy-feeling stone (also called soapstone). By the end of their 7,000-year-period in North Carolina, some Archaic Indians were making crude, fire-hardened clay vessels. A few were also digging small gardens, throwing in saved seeds from local seed-plants that grew around their camps.

The *Woodland period* follows the Archaic in North Carolina, beginning about 1000 BC and ending by AD 1000. The Woodland was a time of pottery-making, *semi-permanent villages*, and *horticulture*. These practices first showed up in the late Archaic among some people, but by the Woodland, they were widespread and common.

As horticulturalists, Woodland people gardened. They cultivated a variety of foods to supplement what they obtained from hunting and gathering. In their gardens, they grew many of the native seed plants their Archaic ancestors ate. Evidence suggests several of the local seed plants had been domesticated by Woodland times; specifically, some seeds' shapes had become larger and uniformly sized, indicating the plants required human help to reproduce and grow.

The Eastern Agricultural Complex is what archaeologists call the group of native plants that people cultivated in gardens. These include marsh elder, knotweed, sunflower, maygrass, and goosefoot. Many archaeologists think these crops give strong evidence that the practice of *agriculture* evolved independently in the Southeast.

Pottery-making became widespread and common at the start of the Woodland period. Some archaeologists think it may have gone hand in hand with gardening and a more settled life. The thinking goes that people needed clay vessels to cook and store food. The more they gardened and the more bulky items they possessed, the more they stayed put. As time went by, Woodland groups developed pottery with distinctive decorative and manufacturing styles.

Yet while gardens were important, Woodland people apparently did not rely solely on cultivated plants for food, and they did not stay in one place all year. Hunting and gathering still provided most of what people ate. Fishing and shellfishing were becoming important for some, especially coastal people. Even though Woodland Indians established small villages of round houses on or near fertile floodplains ideal for gardens, they periodically abandoned them. They spent weeks or months each year in seasonal camps, strategically situated within their territories to harvest or collect the wild foods key to survival. People timed the return to their semi-permanent village to the harvest of gardens.

As it did for people in earlier times, Woodland Indians' technology reflected their lifeway. Chipped stone or conch shell hoes for gardening appear in the *sites* archaeologists study. So do net sinkers and the first evidence of the bow and arrow. Archaeologists find triangular shaped points suited to tip arrows (not spears), literally pointing to a shift in hunting technology. Other evidence hints at how people organized themselves socially and politically. Some groups buried a few of their dead in earthen mounds and placed beautiful, elaborate items like pipes shaped as animals with them. Archaeologists think this special treatment hints at privileged people. Most other Woodland groups across North Carolina, however, buried their dead with few or no grave offerings, and may have been more egalitarian.

The Mississippian period covers the span from AD 1000 until Europeans arrived and colonized about AD 1650. Great cultural diversity existed among North Carolina's Indian people at this time. And this can be documented not just from archaeological evidence. Direct contacts, along with written accounts by early European explorers, chart three major linguistic and ethnic Native American groups. Algonkian speakers lived in the Coastal Plain's tidewater region. Tribes speaking Iroquoian languages lived on the inner Coastal Plain and in the Mountains. Siouan-speaking tribes occupied the Piedmont. Today, many of their tribal names are familiar. The Tuscarora, Nottoway, Meherrin, and Cherokee are Iroquoian; the Occaneechi and the Saponi are Siouan; the Lumbee emerged from various tribes finding strength when they banded together.

Despite the diversity, North Carolina's Native peoples between AD 1000 and 1650 shared several characteristics. Chief among them was corn agriculture. As early as AD 200, a variety of corn had made its way across trade routes from the Southwest to the Southeast. At first, Indian people grew it in their small gardens, along with squash and gourd, using it as they did the other crops to supplement diets. But by AD 1000, full-blown corn agriculture had taken hold. Small Woodland gardens gave way to larger fields and more intensive food production. By AD 1200, people were also planting beans, which came along trade routes to North Carolina about then. When added to hills of squash and corn, beans formed the final member of what is sometimes called The Three Sisters. Together, these crops provided a stable food base.

As farmers, tribes of this era flipped the subsistence equation. That is, where Woodland people used gardens to supplement what they hunted, gathered, or fished, Mississippian people used wild foods to supplement what they grew. Agriculture, thus, was dominant.

Not surprisingly, Mississippian populations increased, and people settled into permanent villages. Typically larger than Woodland villages, most had either above or below ground food storage facilities. House shapes varied according to region. Coastal Plain and Mountain people built square or rectangular homes, while those in the Piedmont constructed round houses. Some villages were strung-out hamlets while others had houses clustered together. Some of these clustered villages had protective stockades surrounding them. Constructed by putting posts side by side in a trench, the stockades may have been for protection. Evidence of conflict exists, perhaps caused by pressures for good agricultural soils.

Social structure was more varied and complex during the Mississippian period than it presumably was in earlier times. Chiefdoms, hereditary rule, priesthoods, and rule by consensus all existed in different places across North Carolina after AD 1000. Ritual (or ceremony) also varied; its hints are left in traces of art and architecture. People made jewelry carved and etched from imported marine shell or bone, soft capes of turkey feathers, clay pottery decorated with geometric swirls of lines. These were just a few of the distinctive things people made besides their everyday tools like bone fish hooks and sewing awls, stone arrow points, hoes, wood gravers, and hide scrapers.

In the Mountains and southern Piedmont, people built ceremonial centers whose monuments were large earthen mounds topped with wooden buildings. In some, a few people were buried. In other places, the ceremony associated with death was very different. Ossuaries, or mass graves, were common along the coast. Some Algonkian groups periodically buried community members in one grave, tending the bodies in charnel houses supervised by priests until mass burial occurred. Other groups, like some Iroquoian tribes living on the inner Coastal Plain, also had ossuaries at the edges of their villages. But they only placed family members in the grave. Piedmont tribes, on the other hand, preferred burying their dead singly in graves and often placed offerings with them.

While the Mississippian period ends at AD 1650, Native American society certainly didn't. It

went through upheaval in tragic proportions as disease, warfare, and removal challenged Indian life. Many tribes died out, their names left only in the names of modern towns or rivers. Many other small ones lost their particular languages and habits as they joined together in federations like the Catawba or Lumbee to preserve what was left of their culture. But Native society is hardy. Today, more than 80,000 Indian people live in North Carolina. They share this state and enrich its society by the contributions their ancestral and current cultures make in terms as varied as the foods we eat, the medicines we take, and the placement of towns.

Setting the Stage

Talk about or read a short story about life in Colonial times. Ask students to talk about how life then was different. Focus on aspects like technology: the tools and raw materials people used, houses, furnishings, foods, etc. Have students imagine what their life would be like now if nothing had changed. Ask, too, what kinds of things may have stayed the same.

Point out that culture is always changing, yet grounded in past ways. Like the general American culture has changed over time, so did that for Native Americans. Archaeologists chart their lifeway shifts by studying the artifacts and other evidence they left behind.

Share background information with students. Introduce the four periods (Paleoindian, Archaic, Woodland, and Mississippian) and discuss how Indian life changed over thousands of years.

Procedure

1. Review key vocabulary to be sure all students start the exercise with the same grounding. Key words include: *archaeology*, *anthropology*, *artifact*, *chronology*, *subsistence*.

2. Place the “Evidence Cards” on tables in different piles, grouped by letter (or distribute them as handouts). Tell students each group represents clues about Indian life during one of four periods identified by archaeologists. Tell them that the oldest tradition, the Paleoindian, was in place in North Carolina by 10,000 BC. The most recent period, called the Mississippian, began about AD 1000 and lasted until Europeans arrived and settled. Two others, called the Archaic and the Woodland, are tucked in between. Based on observation and inference, students must decide which materials go with which lifeway.

3. Give each student an “Inquiries into the Past” activity sheet. Divide students into groups and have them rotate through each card stack. Each student should fill in the activity sheet blanks, although encourage students to discuss with their teammates what they observe about the clues. For example, what materials are the tools made from? What are the shapes of the tools? How might they have been used? What did people eat? Where did they live?

4. When student groups have finished analyzing the artifact cards, have them arrange a chronology and present their findings to the class. Students should explain the reasons for the chronological order they choose. Ask what changes they observed from one period to another; ask, too, what things stayed the same.

5. When everyone has settled on an order for the periods, see if their observations match what archaeologists have observed.

Note: Remind students that Native American *history* in North Carolina did not stop after AD 1650; Native cultures in the state are strong and vibrant today. The objective of this exercise is to focus only on what archaeologists have interpreted about Indian history before European colonization.

Closure

Summarize the major points of each of North Carolina's four cultural periods. Particularly, discuss changes that occurred in terms of settlements, the tools used, the foods eaten, and how these foods were obtained. If this activity follows work in Parts 1 and 2, ask students to review and link concepts (such as stratigraphy, classification, observation and inference, hypothesis testing) that archaeologists rely on to interpret the past.

Evaluation

Students turn in their "Inquiries into the Past" activity sheet for evaluation.

Extensions

Visit an archaeological site (see Appendix 3 for suggestions and contact information).

Links

Lesson 1.3: "Observation and Inference."

Sources

Ward, H. Trawick, and R. P. Stephen Davis, Jr. 1999. *Time Before History: The Archaeology of North Carolina*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press. [The image in this lesson's main heading is taken from Figure 4.22.]

"Inquiries into the Past" Activity Sheet Answers:

Although the main point of this exercise is to get students thinking comparatively about how cultures change through time, the "correct" order of the card sets in terms of North Carolina's cultural history is, from earliest to latest, as follows: C, A, D, B.

Card set C represents the Paleoindian period (10,000 to 8000 BC). People were nomadic hunters and gatherers who lived in an Ice-Age environment and occasionally may have hunted large animals (megafauna) like the mastodon, which is now extinct. Because they were nomadic, people lived mostly in short-term camps and did not use heavy containers such as pottery vessels. Instead, they probably used baskets and containers made of wood and hide, but these materials do not survive in the soil and therefore are not found at archaeological sites.

- *Foods*: white-tailed deer bones (hunted); mastodon bones (Ice-Age species, possibly hunted); wild fruit seeds (gathered).
- *Tools and containers*: chipped-stone drill (for drilling holes in wood and bone); chipped-stone scraper (for scraping hides and other materials); chipped-stone spear point (for hunting, evidence for the use of a spear thrower or atlatl); chipped-stone adze (for woodworking).
- *Settlements*: short-term camps (where people camped for shorter periods of time); stone quarry (where people went to obtain stone used to make tools).

Card set A represents the Archaic period (8000 to 1000 BC). People were nomadic hunters and gatherers who lived in a modern environment, with a climate like today's. The animals they hunted and plants they gathered are all species that exist today. People were nomadic, but they did not move as frequently as in the preceding Paleoindian period. Although short-term camps continued to be used, for parts of the year people lived in more stable settlements called base camps. Although pottery was not in general use, people occasionally made stone vessels, carved from a rock called steatite (or soapstone). Baskets would also have been used, but because of poor preservation evidence for their use is generally absent.

- *Foods*: wild small-grains (grown as crops); nuts (gathered); wild fruits (gathered); white-tailed deer (hunted).

LESSON 4.1: SHADOWS OF NORTH CAROLINA'S PAST

- *Tools and containers*: stone vessel (for cooking); chipped-stone scraper (for scraping hides and other materials); chipped-stone spear point (for hunting, evidence for the use of a spear thrower or atlatl); grinding stone (for grinding seeds, and for pounding nuts); bone fish hook (evidence of fishing); polished-stone axe (for woodworking).
- *Settlements*: base camps (where people camped for longer periods of time); short-term camps (where people camped for shorter periods of time).


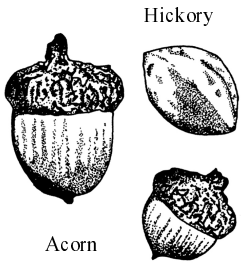

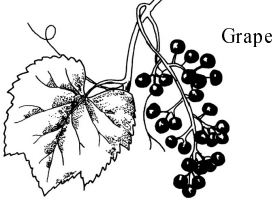
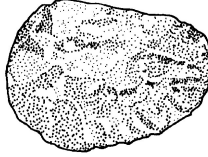
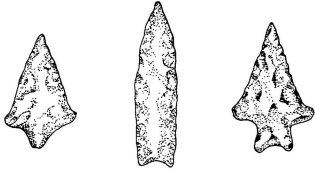


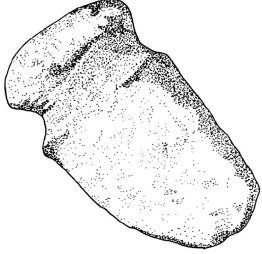
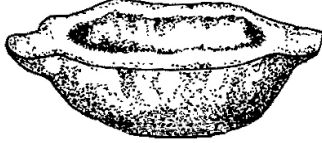

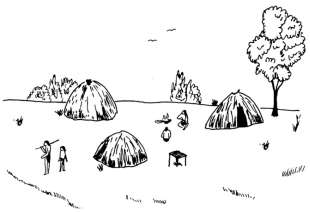
Card set D represents the Woodland period (1000 BC to AD 1000). People continued to hunt, fish, and gather wild foods. But these food sources were now supplemented by horticulture—small grains (such as goosefoot) raised in gardens. People became more settled (i.e., they were less nomadic) and lived in semi-permanent villages. Occasionally people built dome-shaped earthen mounds as ceremonial places for burial of the dead. Technological innovations included pottery vessels (which replaced stone vessels) and the bow and arrow (which replaced the spear thrower or atlatl).

- *Foods*: cultivated small-grains (grown as crops); nuts (gathered); white-tailed deer (hunted); wild fruit seeds (gathered).
- *Tools and containers*: pottery vessel (for cooking); stone pipe (for smoking tobacco); chipped-stone arrow point (used for hunting, also evidence for use of the bow); grinding stone (for grinding seeds and corn, and for pounding nuts); bone fish hook (evidence of fishing); polished-stone axe (for woodworking);
- *Settlements*: semi-permanent village (where people lived for part of the year); burial mound (ceremonial place where honored dead were buried).


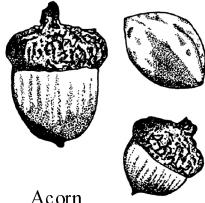

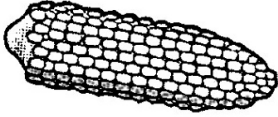




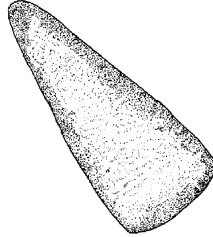

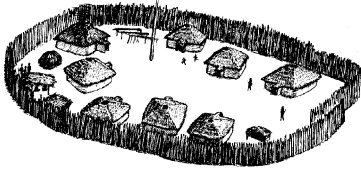
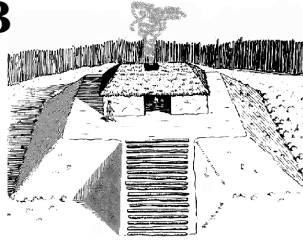
Card Set B represents the Mississippian period (AD 1000 to 1650). This was a time of full-blown agriculture, with the principal crop being corn. This staple was supplemented by the cultivation of small grains as well as hunting, fishing, and gathering of wild foods. People lived year-round in permanent villages, which were sometimes fortified with a stockade. Some villages had earthen structures called platform mounds, which supported important community buildings such as council houses, temples, or the residences of chiefs. Pottery and the bow continue to be used.

- *Foods*: cultivated corn (grown as a crop); cultivated small-grains (grown as crops); nuts (gathered); white-tailed deer (hunted).
- *Tools and containers*: pottery vessel (for cooking); stone pipe (for smoking tobacco); chipped-stone arrow point (used for hunting, also evidence for use of the bow); grinding stone (for grinding seeds and corn, and for pounding nuts); bone fish hook (evidence of fishing); polished-stone axe (for woodworking).
- *Settlements*: permanent village (where people lived year-round); platform mound with building on top (ceremonial structure which served as a council house, a temple, or the residence of a chief).


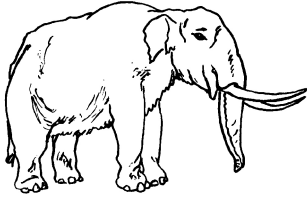
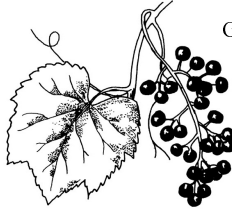
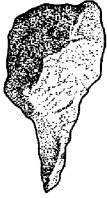

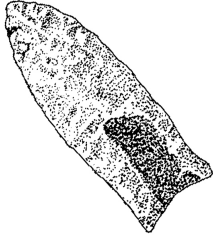



Evidence Cards (Card Set A)

<p>A</p>  <p>Goosefoot</p> <p>Wild small-grain seeds (food remains)</p>	<p>A</p>  <p>Hickory</p> <p>Acorn</p> <p>Nut shells (food remains)</p>	<p>A</p>  <p>White-tailed deer bones (food remains)</p>
<p>A</p>  <p>Grape</p> <p>Wild fruit seeds (food remains)</p>	<p>A</p>  <p>Chipped-stone scraper</p>	<p>A</p>  <p>Chipped-stone spear points</p>
<p>A</p>  <p>Grinding stone</p>	<p>A</p>  <p>Bone fish hook</p>	<p>A</p>  <p>Polished-stone axe</p>
<p>A</p>  <p>Stone vessel</p>	<p>A</p>  <p>Base camp</p>	<p>A</p>  <p>Short-term camp</p>


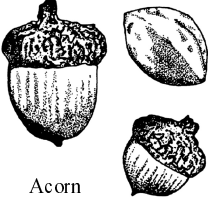

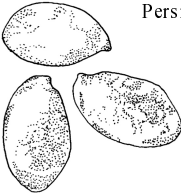

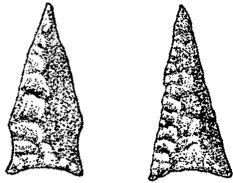


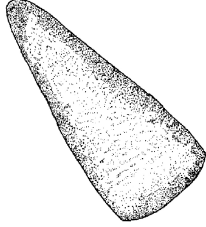
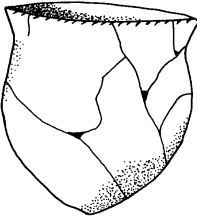
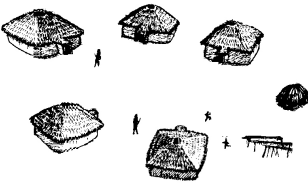
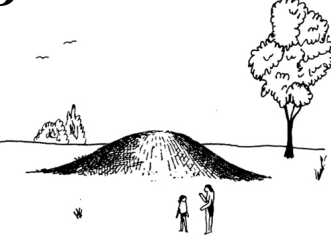
Evidence Cards (Card Set B)

<p>B</p>  <p>Marsh elder</p> <p>Cultivated small grain seeds (food remains)</p>	<p>B</p> <p>Hickory</p>  <p>Acorn</p> <p>Nut shells (food remains).</p>	<p>B</p>  <p>White-tailed deer bones (food remains).</p>
<p>B</p>  <p>Cultivated corn kernels and cobs (food remains)</p>	<p>B</p>  <p>Stone pipe</p>	<p>B</p>  <p>Chipped-stone arrow point</p>
<p>B</p>  <p>Grinding stone</p>	<p>B</p>  <p>Bone fish hook</p>	<p>B</p>  <p>Polished-stone axe</p>
<p>B</p>  <p>Pottery vessel</p>	<p>B</p>  <p>Permanent village</p>	<p>B</p>  <p>Platform mound with building on top</p>

Evidence Cards (Card Set C)

<p>C</p>  <p>White-tailed deer bones (food remains)</p>	<p>C</p>  <p>Mastodon bones (food remains?)</p>	<p>C</p>  <p>Grape</p> <p>Wild-fruit seeds (food remains)</p>
<p>C</p>  <p>Chipped-stone drill</p>	<p>C</p>  <p>Chipped-stone scraper</p>	<p>C</p>  <p>Chipped-stone spear point</p>
<p>C</p>  <p>Chipped-stone adze</p>	<p>C</p>  <p>Short-term camp</p>	<p>C</p>  <p>Stone quarry</p>

Evidence Cards (Card Set D)

<p>D</p>  <p>Goosefoot</p> <p>Cultivated small-grain seeds (food remains)</p>	<p>D</p> <p>Hickory</p>  <p>Acorn</p> <p>Nut shells (food remains)</p>	<p>D</p>  <p>White-tailed deer bones (food remains)</p>
<p>D</p>  <p>Persimmon</p> <p>Wild fruit seeds (food remains)</p>	<p>D</p>  <p>Stone pipe</p>	<p>D</p>  <p>Chipped-stone arrow points</p>
<p>D</p>  <p>Grinding stone</p>	<p>D</p>  <p>Bone fish hook</p>	<p>D</p>  <p>Polished-stone ax</p>
<p>D</p>  <p>Pottery vessel</p>	<p>D</p>  <p>Semi-permanent village</p>	<p>D</p>  <p>Burial mound</p>

Inquiries into the Past

Name:

	Food Remains	Tools and Containers	Settlements
Set A			
Set B			
Set C			
Set D			