Before European explorers discovered North America, many groups of Native Americans lived here. The earliest were the Paleo-Indians who came across a land bridge from Asia about 13,000 years ago! They were nomadic people and hunted large animals like the mammoth. The next group, the Archaic Indians, existed in the area around 8,000 years ago. More advanced than the Paleo-Indians, the Archaic Indians lived in more settled communities, building tools, and forming social structures. The Woodland Indians came after the Archaic Indians and are known for their specialized tools and complex social structures. We know about these different Native American groups by conducting archaeological digs and examining the items they left behind in the ground and by early explorers' accounts.

The town plaza and mound were the focus of the community. In some cases, the mound was a large burial site for the chieftain, differing from the Native American groups by constructing mound buildings and improving agricultural skills. The chieftain structure, mound-building, and improved agricultural skills are known as the Mississippian Indians. They are known for their ceremonial centers and large mounds. Like the other Native American groups, the Mississippian Indians were nomadic, and different chieftains would have had varying levels of power and influence.

The Mammoth is a relative of the elephant and some mammoths had long, woolly hair that covered their body. Mammoths probably weighed about 8.8 tons and had tusks that would have been up to 16 feet long! Both the Paleo-Indians and the Archaic Indians would have hunted the mammoth for food.

Create a Culture

This activity will help you learn about different cultures! Is the culture you created important? How do people get food or earn a living? What kind of clothing do they have? What kind of shelter do they have? A group of people who share similar ideas and beliefs form a culture. Answer the following questions to create your culture.

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What does an Archaeologist Do?
An archaeologist seeks to understand previous cultures by studying the artifacts that people left behind. Archaeologists uncover artifacts when excavating (digging up) sites inhabited by early peoples.

DID YOU KNOW?
The prehistoric city of Cahokia, which is near St. Louis, contains the largest prehistoric earthen mound in North America. Known as Monks Mound, it contains 22 million cubic feet of earth, is about 100 feet tall, and covers 14 acres! It was built in stages over 300 years. The mound once contained a temple and a ruler’s house.

An atlatl is used to give a person more control when throwing a spear. It was invented before the bow and arrow. Native Americans could use the atlatl when hunting deer and other game.

A SIMPLE ATLTL
PIN OR "KNOCKING POINT"

The word maize means “source of life” and was found when Columbus arrived in the New World in 1492. Maize, or corn, was extremely important to the early Native Americans. It is thought that as early as 1500BC, the cultivation of maize became widespread and was a staple of their diet. Today, the United States produces about half of the corn in the entire world.

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http://www5.eemo.edu/museum/
Learn more about the Southeast Explorer and the Southeast Missouri Regional Museum’s exhibits and collections.

http://www.cahokiamounds.com/cahokia.html Learn about Cahokia Mounds and the Mississippian society that once flourished there! Take a virtual tour of the site of the largest prehistoric Indian city north of Mexico!