

Prehistoric Native American Lesson Plan: Make a Mississippian-style Gorget

Illinois State Museum Web site used:

http://www.museum.state.il.us/muslink/nat_amer/pre/index.html

Objective: After familiarizing themselves with the Prehistoric Native American Web module, focusing on the form and use of the gorget, students will create a Mississippian-style gorget using clay and a stylus to etch a design of a stylized animal such as a spider.

Time Required: time to look at Web site sections on gorgets (15 minutes); one 50-minute period to form and engrave the gorget; overnight drying time; 15 minutes to string.

Grade Levels: 3-6

Materials:

- self-hardening clay (2" ball per student)
- pointed stick or pencil point
- 30-inch cord

Procedure: see instruction sheet

Assessment: After reading the introduction, discussing the section on gorgets and trade in the Web module, and making the gorget, the students should be able to tell or write about the symbolism, trading for shell, the use of the object, and how archaeologists learn about such objects as this.

Resources

Childress, Diana. *Prehistoric Peoples of North America*. Chelsea House, 1995. Covers the Paleo-Indians' migration across Beringia to Alaska.

Nichols, Peter. *Mastodont Hunters to Mound Builders: North American Archaeology*. Sunbelt Media. 1993. Ages 11-12.

Pickering, Robert B. *The People*. Millbrook Press. 1996. Ages 7-9.

Wheat, Patricia. *Clues to the Past: A Resource Book on Archaeology*. Hendrick-L, 1995. A site in Texas that teaches archaeological methods.

Illinois Goals and Standards addressed:

Visual Arts: Goal 27: Understand the role of the arts in civilizations, past and present.

Standard B: Understand how the arts shape and reflect history, society, and everyday life.

Social Studies: Goal 18: Understand social systems (U.S.)

Standard A: Compare characteristics of culture as reflected in the arts and traditions.

Make a Mississippian-style Spider Gorget

Gorgets are pendants that are worn on the chest, hung from a string or a necklace. Ancient Native Americans made gorgets of rare materials such as copper or marine shell, which had to be obtained through trade.

A number of similar gorgets have been found throughout the Mississippi River Valley and in the southeastern part of the United States. These gorgets were found near Dickson Mounds Museum. The gorget on the left is from the Crable site; the gorget on the right is from the Norris farms site. both date to about A.D. 1300. The material is marine shell from the South Atlantic Coast or the Gulf of Mexico. The makers engraved a spider with a cross on its back on each.



The spider was an important symbol to the people of the Mississippian culture. Archaeologists think that the cross is a symbol of fire, the sun, the center of the earth, or the four directions (north, south, east, west). The body of the spider also forms a cross, with four groups of two legs each coming out of the body. The spider symbol was especially associated with women. It is thought that the spider symbolizes weaving, fertility, the center of the earth, balance, and harmony.

Materials:

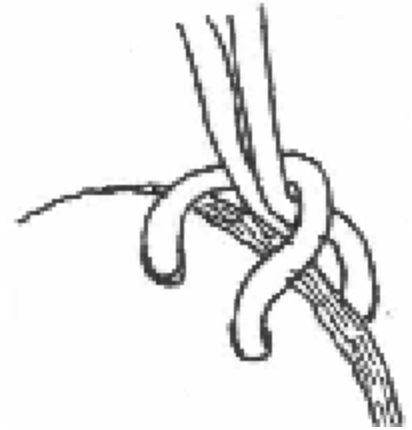
- self-hardening clay
- pointed stick or pencil point
- 30-inch cord

Steps:

1. Use a ball of clay about two inches in diameter. Flatten it out into a disk about 1/4-inch thick.
2. Use a pencil point to lightly trace the Mississippian design of the spider or other animal associated with Illinois Native Americans onto the clay. Press lightly into the clay so the design is engraved below the surface. The design will show up when light shines across the gorget.
3. Use the pencil point to poke two holes through the gorget at the top of the design about 1/2 inch from the edge. This is where you will thread your cord.
4. Leave the gorget in a safe spot to dry (at least overnight)

5. Thread one end of the cord through one hole from the front, and the other end of the cord through the other hole from the front. Gently pull the ends until there is only a loop at the front. Hold the ends together and push them through the loop from back to front. Tighten the cord.

6. Tie the two ends of the cord together at the tips.
You now have a necklace.



Design:

