

Illinois State Museum -- Mississippian Diet Activity

Grade Level: 6-8

Time Required: one period reading the web module and other sources; one period writing up their meal plans.

Objective: Students will plan a week's meals based on wild and cultivated resources available to a Mississippian farmstead in the early summer based on information provided in *The Mississippian Saga* of ISM's River Web module. **Extension activity** would be for students to cook a recipe using these ingredients.

Procedure: Upper level students will read pertinent sections of the Museum's Web module <http://www.museum.state.il.us/RiverWeb/landings/Ambot/> (Teacher will need to preview relevant pages on plants and animals in the environment section.)

All students should also read the food (economy) section in MuseumLink's Prehistoric Native American module on Mississippians at http://www.museum.state.il.us/muslink/nat_amer/pre/htmls/miss.html

Students will take notes on what foods were available and search the web for Native American recipes that use these foods. http://www.museum.state.il.us/muslink/nat_amer/post/htmls/activities/re_recipes.html is a recipe lesson plan in the Historic Native American module.

Find recipes at <http://www.kstrom.net/isk/food/recipes.html> and at <http://www.nativetech.org/food/> and keyword Native American recipes into Google.com browser.

List of possible foods:

starchy seed complex

- maygrass (ripens late spring - important when winter stores are depleted)
- knotweed
- little barley
- goosefoot (very hearty - important for years that corn crop fails)
- corn (mid-summer green corn harvest)

oily seed complex

- cultivated plants that produce nutritious seeds
- squash
- marshelder
- sunflower
- all oily seeds are abundant in the Mississippian diet

wild plants

- wild plants with oily seeds
- wild bean
- American lotus
- arrowhead
- grapes
- persimmon
- sumac
- hickory
- acorn
- other nuts
- berries
- greens



Maygrass

aquatic herbaceous plants

- American lotus (listed above because it is wild)
- arrowhead
- cattail
- wild sweet potato

meat

- fish
- aquatic turtles
- freshwater mussels
- beaver
- muskrat
- waterfowl



Artist's rendering of corn cultivation

At this point, students can consider how balanced a diet was available to Mississippians. Did available foods provide a healthy diet? What major food types are missing that we have today? Why?

Sample Recipes

Pumpkin and Corn Dessert

1 small pumpkin

2 ears corn, cut from cob

1/2 cup whole wheat flour

Sugar or honey

Peel, seed and slice pumpkin. Cover with water and simmer until tender.

Place corn kernels in pie tin in 350-degree oven; bake for 15 minutes.

Add corn to pumpkin. Add flour, stirring constantly over low heat until mixture thickens. Add sugar or honey to taste. Serve hot.

Pick cattails early in the spring also and peel first layer to get to the tender shoots.

Gather cattail shoots in the early spring when cattails are about 3 feet tall. Pull the outer two leaves of the cattail away from the stalk. Pull straight up on the cattail plant so the base pops out. This should not pull up the roots of the cattail and will not harm its growth next season. Cattail roots are edible too.

<http://www.nativetech.org/food/cattail.html> is a recipe for steamed cattails.

Assessment: Student findings of food types should be consistent with the list provided above, reflecting plants and animals found in the wild or cultivated. Recipes will be modern adaptations of traditional recipes of Woodlands Indians. (Be aware that there will be different ingredients in Southwest Indian recipes.)

Illinois State Board of Education Goals

18.C.1 Describe how individuals interacted within groups to make choices regarding food, clothing and shelter.

18.C.2 Describe how changes in production (e.g., hunting and gathering, agricultural, industrial) and population caused changes in social systems.

