

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

**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 spider.

**Grade Levels:** 3-6

**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.



**Illinois State Museum Web site used:**

[http://www.museum.state.il.us/muslink/nat\\_amer/pre/index.html](http://www.museum.state.il.us/muslink/nat_amer/pre/index.html)

**Motivation:**

The gorget (pendant) 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. Note the anatomical parts of the spider in the designs.

### **Spiders in Native American Culture.**

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 (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.

### 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.

### Instruction Sheet:

#### 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.



*Pattern #2*



*Pattern #1*

#### Spiders in Native American Culture.

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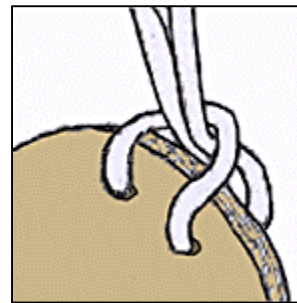
with four groups of two legs each coming out of the body. The spider symbol was especially associated with women. It is thought that the spider symbolizes weaving, fertility, the center of the earth, balance, and harmony.

**Materials:**

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

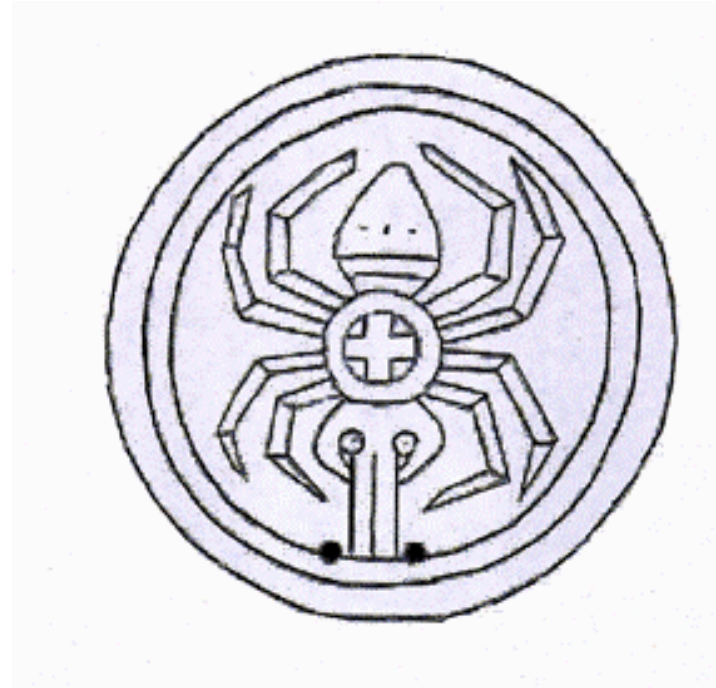
**Steps:**

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 onto the clay the Mississippian design of the spider, or adapt the design to one of a similar style associated with Illinois Native Americans. Press lightly into the clay so the design is engraved into 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). The color should be lighter with no dark areas.
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.



Step 5

Spider  
#1



Gorget Pattern

Spider Gorget Pattern #2

