

The First Mobilians

1. Grade Level

3rd and 5th

Time Needed

2 hours

3. Objectives

After completing this lesson, students will be able to:

- Describe characteristics of Native American pottery.
- Create pottery using a Native American pottery technique.
- Compare and contrast aspects of Native American life (prior to the arrival of the Europeans) to the way we live today.

This activity supports the following Alabama Course of Study content standards for Social Studies.

3rd Grade (2010)

13. Describe prehistoric and historic American Indian cultures, governments, and economics in Alabama.

5th Grade (2010)

3. Distinguish differences among major American Indian cultures in North America according to geographic region, natural resources, community organization, economy and belief systems.

4. Materials required

- *Mobile's First People Power Point**
- *The First People Handouts**
- *How to make Clay Pottery Handouts**
- Clay in a plastic bag for each student (modeling clay or play dough could also work for younger students)
- Plastic table covers
- Popsicle sticks
- String or wire
- Sponges
- Plastic cups of water to dip sponges in
- Paper towels or rags to clean up with
- Plastic or disposable aprons
- Smart board and computer to show artifact images on

*Materials can be found on the History Museum of Mobile Primary Sources Lesson Plan disk

5. Background Information

Native Americans lived around Mobile Bay thousands of years before the first European settlers

arrived. Artifacts that show the richness of their culture are highlighted in the History Museum of Mobile's permanent exhibit, *Old Ways, New Days: The Story of Mobile*. The main goal of this lesson is to help to familiarize your students with Native American culture in Mobile, to familiarize them with primary sources (in this instance, Native American pottery artifacts) and to have them make their own piece of pottery using the same methods as Native Americans.

6. Lesson Outline

Before the lesson begins, cover desks with plastic covers if necessary and place materials that the students will need in order to make a small clay pot on their tables or desks (bag of clay, cup of water, sponge, popsicle stick).

A. Introduction (1 min.)

Tell Students:

We are going to learn a little about the Native Americans who lived around Mobile Bay and look at some Native American artifacts that you can see at the History Museum of Mobile.

B. PowerPoint Presentation (40 min.)

Go over *The First Mobilians* PowerPoint presentation to students. Also give them the *First Mobilians* hand out. Then ask some discussion questions.

Sample Discussion Questions

- What is an artifact?
- What is a primary source?
- Give me an example of a type of primary source.
- How can an artifact be a primary source?
- How long ago did Native Americans start living in the lands around Mobile Bay?
- Name and describe a major invention that the Native Americans made during the
- Archaic (Gulf Formational, Woodland, or Mississippian) period.
- During what time period did Native Americans in this area start making pottery?

Tell students:

These are real examples of Native American pottery at the History Museum of Mobile. Some of these examples are thousands of years old. Native Americans made pottery to store food in, to cook in, and to hold water. Today, we are going to learn how the Native Americans made their pottery and use their way to make our own piece of pottery.

Show students the pottery examples from the History Museum on the last two slides of the PowerPoint.

Sample Discussion Questions

- Why do you think the Native Americans made designs on their pottery?
- Why do we have designs on our plates and dishes?
- What kind of tools do you think the Native Americans might have used to make the designs with?

Tell Students:

Native Americans would make designs in the pottery after they had made it but while it was still

wet. Then they would put the pottery in a hot fire to make it waterproof. These designs were probably made with a wooden stick. One piece of pottery looks like the pattern was made with fingernails. The Native Americans also used the edge of seashells or even woven fabric similar to burlap to make a design in the wet clay. Now we are going to make pottery the same way that the Native Americans did.

C. Transition (4 min.)

Hand out the How to Make Clay Pottery instruction handout.

D. Procedure (70 min.)

Go over the instructions step by step with the students. You should demonstrate each step of the instructions. You can have the students complete each step as you demonstrate it, or show them all the steps and then let them complete the project on their own.

Clean up for this activity will take a while if you do not use plastic table covers. Have paper towels or rags handy for wiping hands and tables. If using real clay, do not let large amounts of clay go down the sink drain. Rinse the sink thoroughly with hot water after activity.

The First Mobilians

Native Americans have been living in North America for over 10,000 years. They came to the lands around Mobile Bay over 8,000 years ago. Most of what we know about the earliest Native Americans comes from the science of archaeology. Archaeologists are scientists who learn about people by looking at the things they leave behind. They have divided the prehistory of Native Americans into time periods grouped by culture. Culture is the way of life of a group of people. Here is a short summary of how Native American culture progressed in our area.

The Paleo-Indian Period (10,500– 8,200 B.C.) Archaeologists are not sure if Native Americans lived along the Gulf Coast during this time period. The people who lived in other parts of North America during this time, were great hunters who followed large herds of mastadons, mammoth, and bison. They moved when the animals moved.

The Archaic Period (8,200 B.C. to 1,600 B.C.) We know that people lived in this area during this time period. The people that lived around Mobile Bay hunted deer and small animals, and added clams, plants, and fish to their diet. The Archaic Indians even invented a new weapon called the atlatl. This was a spear thrower that helped them hunt better. The atlatl was more accurate than the crude spears used by earlier Indians. Archaic Indians also used bones, shells, stones, and animal teeth and claws to make necklaces, bracelets, beads, and other tools.

The Gulf Formational Period (1600 B.C. to 400 B.C.) The first pottery in the area around what is now Mobile, was developed during the Gulf Formational Period. People mixed clay with plant fiber, shaped it into pots, and then heated it until it dried and held its shape. Eventually, they learned to mix sand instead plant fiber with the clay to make a stronger, more durable pot.

The Woodland Period (400 B.C. to 1,200 A.D.) Instead of moving from place to place in search of food, the Woodland Indians lived most of year in permanent settlements. They still hunted and gathered much of their food but they also planted and harvested crops. They also started to hunt with the bow and arrow. As getting food became easier, they had more time to do other things. They began to make clay pottery and started to bury the dead in mounds.

Mississippian Period (1,200 A.D. to 1550 A.D.) This was the most advanced stage of Native American culture in the Southeast. Mississippian Indians lived in villages and towns. They hunted, fished, and grew their own food. They traded with other tribes and villages. During this period that the Indians also began to build large mounds. The remains of large Native American mounds are located in the river delta north of Mobile at a site called Bottle Creek.

Some of the most beautiful Native American pottery found in this area was made during the Mississippian Period. The people in this area used seashells, sticks, reeds, and fingernails to make different designs. Native Americans threw away pieces of broken pottery at places where they lived. They also buried the dead with pottery. Today, archaeologists can tell how old a piece of pottery is by looking at its design and how it was made.

How to Make Clay Pottery

You are going to make pottery in the same way that the Native Americans did. There are two different methods that you can use to make your vessel. You can use either the pinch method or the coil method.

The Pinch Method

1. Knead the clay until the air bubbles have been removed.
2. Roll a ball of clay about the size of a baseball between the palms of the hands to form a sphere.
3. Push your thumb into the center of the clay ball, then pinch to form the walls.
4. Press the thumbs gently into the center of the sphere and at the same time press with the figures on the outside while rotating the ball of clay. Turning the piece as you pinch will help you keep an even thickness in the walls.
5. Continue pressing with both the figures and thumbs until the ball is hollowed out into the shape you want and the walls are the same thickness (approximately ½ inch).
6. Cracks may appear if the clay is too dry or if it is pressed too quickly or forcefully. Repair any cracks by rubbing with dampened fingers until the crack disappears.
7. Gently tap the bottom of the pot on a flat surface, such as the tabletop, to create a flat spot on the bottom.
8. Press the end of a Popsicle stick, a stick, seashell or your fingernails, into the top edge of the pot, creating a simple yet interesting decoration. If you do not like the pattern you have made, smooth the clay with your finger and thumb and start over again.
9. If the pot is made with real clay or self hardening clay, allow it to dry slowly at room temperature until bone dry. You may then paint it with acrylic or water color paint.

Pinch method Instructions courtesy of York County Culture and Heritage Commission, York County, South Carolina

The Coil Method

1. Knead or wedge the clay until the air bubbles have been removed.
2. Pat a piece of clay into a round flat slab about a little thicker than a pencil. This will be the bottom of the pot.
3. Squeeze or roll the rest of the clay between your hands into coils about ½ inch in diameter.
4. Using the bottom of the pot as the foundation, place a coil on the edge of the round base of the pot.
5. Stack the coils one on top of another or attach the end of one coil to another as you build up the walls. Repeat until your pot is as tall as you want it to be.
6. Smooth the sides with your fingers. By using your finger to push and scrape the clay coils together on the inside and outside of the pot.

7. When smoothing the outside of the pot, hold your other hand on the inside so you do not damage what you have done already.
8. If you want the top to be level, gently turn your pot upside down and lightly tap it on a smooth surface, like the tabletop.
9. Add any decorations you want. If it is real clay, allow it to dry slowly at room temperature. The grooves in the pot are weak spots and if it dries too quickly it will crack.
10. If the pot is made with real clay or self hardening clay, allow it to dry slowly at room temperature until bone dry. You may then paint it with acrylic or water color paint.

Coil method Instructions courtesy of York County Culture and Heritage Commission, York County, South Carolina