Name: _____ Date: _____

Cahokia: A City of Earth Beside the River

Circle group

A thousand years ago, a big city stood by the Mississippi River. It was near where St. Louis is now. The people were called the Mississippians. We call the city Cahokia. Thousands of people lived there.

The city had huge hills of earth, called mounds. The workers had no wagons or work animals. They carried soil in baskets. They packed it into hills with flat tops. The biggest one is Monks Mound. It is the largest earthen mound in North America. Leaders probably held ceremonies on top of the mounds.

In the middle of the city was a wide open plaza. People came there for games, markets, and festivals. Nearby were circles of tall wooden posts. The posts may have helped people watch the sunrise and see the seasons change. That helped them know when to plant corn.

Many years later, the city was almost empty. Nobody is sure why people left. The mounds are still there today.

Questions

1. Where did Cahokia stand?

_____

_____

2. How did the workers move soil to build the mounds?

_____

_____

3. What is Monks Mound?

_____

_____

4. What did people do in the plaza?

_____

_____

5. How might the wooden posts have helped farmers?

_____

_____

6. Why can nobody say for sure why Cahokia was emptied?

_____

_____

Words to know

mounds: large hills of earth built by people
earthen: made out of soil or dirt
ceremonies: special events held for an important purpose
plaza: a wide open space in a town where people meet

Talk together (every group has these)

1. Find one fact that every group read. How did your sheet say it?
2. What did your sheet tell you that you think another group's did not? Ask them.
3. What is one question about this topic that none of the sheets answered?

Name: _____ Date: _____

Cahokia: A City of Earth Beside the River

Triangle group

About a thousand years ago, one of the largest cities in North America stood beside the Mississippi River. It was near where St. Louis is today. Its people are known as the Mississippians, and the city is now called Cahokia. At its busiest, thousands of people lived there.

The most striking feature of Cahokia is its mounds. The workers had no wheelbarrows, wagons, or work animals. They carried soil in baskets, load after load, and packed it into huge hills with flat tops. The biggest, called Monks Mound, is still the largest earthen mound in North America. Important buildings once stood on top of the mounds, and leaders probably held ceremonies there.

Near the center of the city lay a wide open plaza where people gathered for games, markets, and festivals. Not far away, circles of tall wooden posts stood in the ground. Researchers think the posts may have helped people watch the sunrise and mark the seasons. That would have helped them know when to plant corn.

Several hundred years later, Cahokia was nearly empty. Scientists are still studying why people left. No single answer is certain. What remains are the great mounds, quiet reminders of a busy city built with baskets.

Questions

1. Where did Cahokia stand?

_____

_____

2. How did the workers move soil to build the mounds?

_____

_____

3. What is Monks Mound?

_____

_____

4. What did people do in the central plaza?

_____

_____

5. Why might the circles of wooden posts have been useful to farmers?

_____

_____

6. Why can nobody say for certain why Cahokia was emptied?

_____

_____

Words to know

mounds: large hills of earth built by people
earthen: made out of soil or dirt
ceremonies: special events held for an important purpose
plaza: a wide open space in a town where people meet
researchers: people who study a subject to learn new facts

Talk together (every group has these)

1. Find one fact that every group read. How did your sheet say it?
2. What did your sheet tell you that you think another group's did not? Ask them.
3. What is one question about this topic that none of the sheets answered?

Name: _____ Date: _____

Cahokia: A City of Earth Beside the River

Square group

Roughly a thousand years ago, one of the most populous cities in North America flourished beside the Mississippi River, close to the site of present-day St. Louis. Its inhabitants are known as the Mississippians, and the settlement is now called Cahokia. At the height of its activity, thousands of people lived within the city and in the farming villages that surrounded it.

The most remarkable feature of Cahokia is its collection of mounds. Because the workers had no wheelbarrows, wagons, or work animals, they carried soil in baskets, load after patient load, and packed it into enormous flat-topped hills. The largest of these, called Monks Mound, remains the biggest earthen mound anywhere in North America. Important buildings once stood on the summits of the mounds, and leaders probably conducted ceremonies there.

Near the heart of the city lay a broad, open plaza where residents assembled for games, markets, and festivals. Not far away, circles of tall wooden posts rose from the ground. Researchers believe that these posts may have helped people observe the sunrise and keep track of the seasons, knowledge that would have been valuable when deciding the right time to plant corn.

Several centuries later, Cahokia stood almost deserted. Scientists continue to investigate why its people departed, and no single explanation is certain. What survives are the great mounds, quiet reminders of a bustling city constructed with baskets, patience, and determination.

Questions

1. Where was Cahokia located?

_____

_____

2. How did the workers transport soil for the mounds without wheelbarrows or wagons?

_____

_____

3. Which mound is the largest in North America?

_____

_____

4. What did residents do in the broad central plaza?

_____

_____

5. Why might knowing the seasons have mattered so much to the people of Cahokia?

_____

_____

6. Why is it difficult for scientists to explain why Cahokia was abandoned?

_____

_____

Words to know

mounds: large hills of earth built by people
earthen: made out of soil or dirt
ceremonies: special events held for an important purpose
plaza: a wide open space in a town where people meet
researchers: people who study a subject to learn new facts

Talk together (every group has these)

1. Find one fact that every group read. How did your sheet say it?
2. What did your sheet tell you that you think another group's did not? Ask them.
3. What is one question about this topic that none of the sheets answered?

For the teacher: Cahokia: A City of Earth Beside the River

Each student sheet carries a shape, not a level. The same topic and facts, written three ways.

Circle: Cahokia: A City of Earth Beside the River

Easier · 158 words · Flesch-Kincaid grade 4.2

1. By the Mississippi River, near where St. Louis is now.
2. They carried it in baskets.
3. The largest earthen mound in North America.
4. They came for games, markets, and festivals.
5. They may have helped people see the seasons change and know when to plant corn.
6. Nobody has found an answer that is certain.

Triangle: Cahokia: A City of Earth Beside the River

This passage · 203 words · Flesch-Kincaid grade 6.6

1. Beside the Mississippi River, near where St. Louis is today.
2. They carried it in baskets.
3. The largest earthen mound in North America.
4. They gathered for games, markets, and festivals.
5. They may have helped people mark the seasons and know when to plant corn.
6. Scientists have not found a single answer that is certain.

Square: Cahokia: A City of Earth Beside the River

Harder · 235 words · Flesch-Kincaid grade 10.8

1. Beside the Mississippi River, close to present-day St. Louis.
2. They carried it in baskets.
3. Monks Mound.
4. They assembled for games, markets, and festivals.
5. It would have helped them decide when to plant corn.
6. They have not found a single explanation that is certain.