

Unit 2

Native Americans: Poverty Point Artifacts

Outcomes:

I can identify community and regional historical artifacts.

***Poverty Point**

I can engage effectively in collaborative discussions.

***taking turns**

LET'S REVIEW!

Artifacts

Archaeologists have an interesting way of looking at the world. When they see a bowl, bead or stone spear point they do not just see an object, they see a piece of a story and the choices people made. The things archaeologists find are the data they work with to learn about people in the past. Take a look at some of the things found at Poverty Point — things made with purpose, skill, and maybe even affection.

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What were some artifacts that you use daily or that are important to you?



Pendant, button and cube; galena



Projectile point; gray northern flint



Tablet preform; Pickwick chert



Projectile point; Mill Creek chert



Microlith; Citronelle gravel



Atlatl weight; Catahoula sandstone



Atlatl weight; soapstone



Projectile point; Tallahata quartzite



Plummet; magnetite

What objects do you see?



Pendant, button and cube; galena



Projectile point; gray northern flint



Tablet preform; Pickwick chert



Projectile point; Mill Creek chert



Microlith; Citronelle gravel



Atlatl weight; Catahoula sandstone



Atlatl weight; soapstone



Projectile point; Tallahata quartzite



Plummet; magnetite

What do you think the objects are made out of?



Pendant, button and cube; galena



Projectile point; gray northern flint



Tablet preform; Pickwick chert



Projectile point; Mill Creek chert



Microlith; Citronelle gravel



Atlatl weight; Catahoula sandstone



Atlatl weight; soapstone

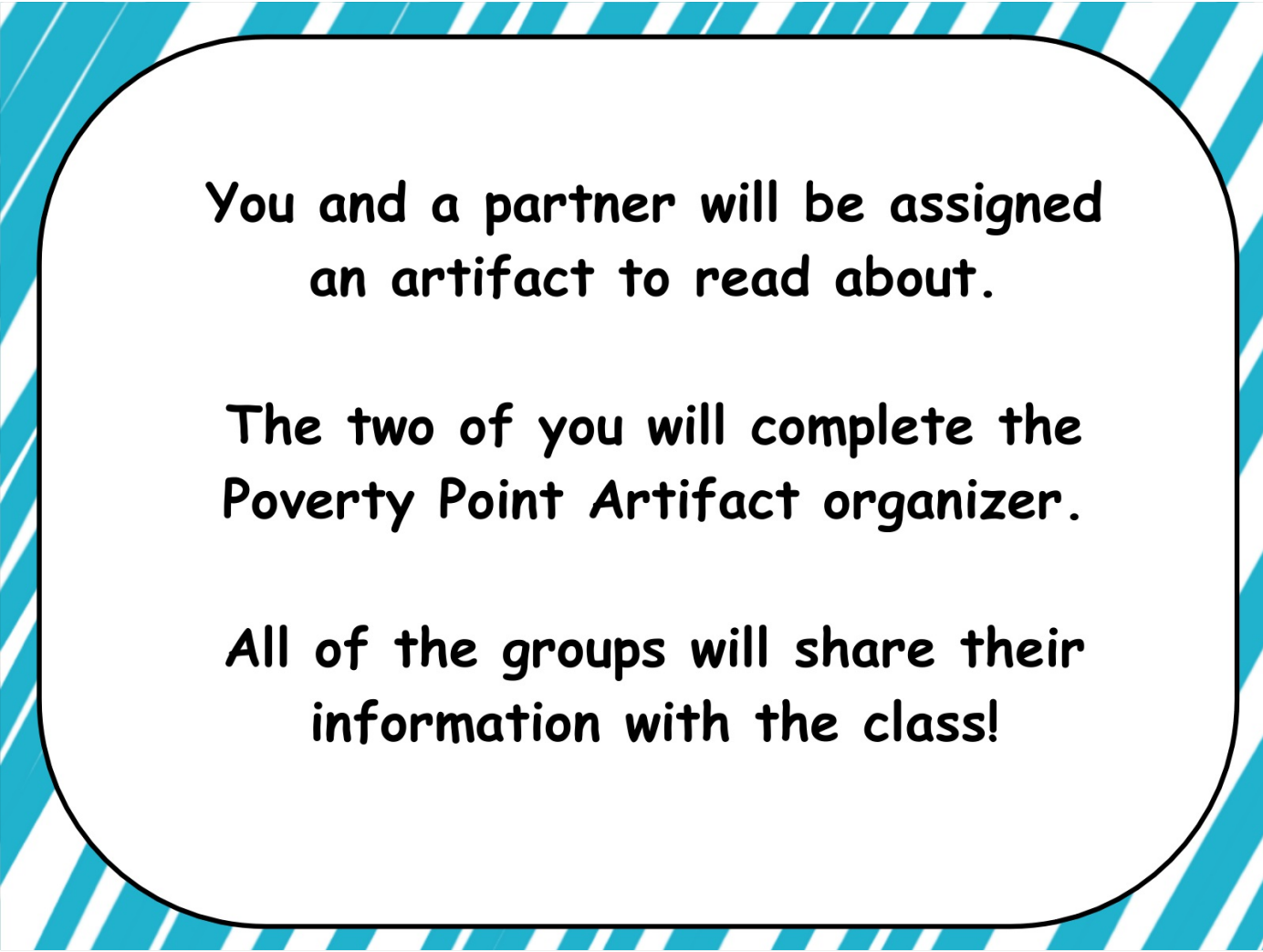


Projectile point; Tallahata quartzite



Plummet; magnetite

What might these have been used for?



**You and a partner will be assigned
an artifact to read about.**

**The two of you will complete the
Poverty Point Artifact organizer.**

**All of the groups will share their
information with the class!**

Partner Activity

Poverty Point Artifacts

[illegible]

PLUMMET

Plummets

These teardrop-shaped weights (right) varied in size with some over 4 inches long. People often made them out of iron-rich stones found in the Ouachita Mountains of Arkansas. There is a good chance that people used plummets as fishing net weights. Net fishing would have provided them with a lot of food in exchange for very little time and effort.

People may have also used plummets as loom weights for making textiles. These textiles would have been woven from wild plant fibers. Archaeologists have found rare [Late Archaic period](#) textiles at Avery Island in southern Louisiana. However, they have not yet found any at Poverty Point. This may be due to the fact that textiles simply do not preserve well.



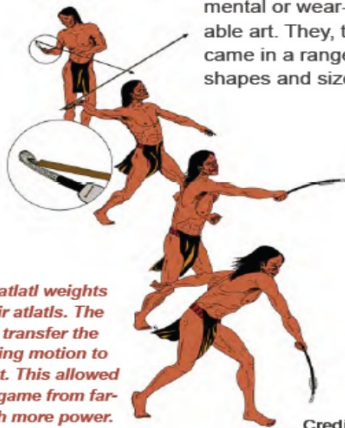
Poverty Point Artifacts (Completed)

<u>Artifact</u>	<u>Purpose</u>
plummet	used to weigh down fishing nets



Artifacts

Archaeologists have an interesting way of looking at the world. When they see a bowl, bead or stone spear point they do not just see an object, they see a piece of a story and the choices people made. The things archaeologists find are the data they work with to learn about people in the past. Take a look at some of the things found at Poverty Point — things made with purpose, skill, and maybe even affection.



Hunters attached atlatl weights to the shaft of their atlatls. The weights helped to transfer the force of the throwing motion to the spears in flight. This allowed hunters to attack game from farther away and with more power.

Atlatl Weights and Gorgets

The atlatl, or spearthrower, is an ancient tool that gave thrown spears extra power and speed. A hunter held an atlatl shaped like an oversized crochet needle in his throwing hand. He inserted the hooked end into a shallow socket in the end of the spear. He cast the spear at the target with a smooth, gliding motion, while the atlatl remained in his hand. Attaching weight to the atlatl helped make it an effective tool. American Indians made atlatl weights in many shapes and sizes.

Archaeologists have also found many flat, oblong stone artifacts at Poverty Point that they call gorgets. Gorgets are ornamental or wearable art. They, too, came in a range of shapes and sizes.



© Jenny Ellerbe

Sometimes it is hard to tell whether an object is an atlatl weight or a gorget. Both may be plain or decorated and nicely finished. They both may have holes drilled into them for attachment or repair, to bind damaged ones together and keep them intact.

Credit: Jon Gibson

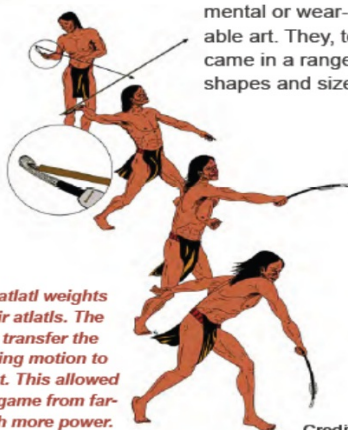
Poverty Point Artifacts (Completed)

<u>Artifact</u>	<u>Purpose</u>
plummet	used to weigh down fishing nets
atlatl	used to throw spears harder and farther



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Credit: Jon Gibson

Poverty Point Artifacts (Completed)

<u>Artifact</u>	<u>Purpose</u>
plummet	used to weigh down fishing nets
atlatl	used to throw spears harder and farther
gorgets	worn as decorative piece



Poverty Point Objects (PPOs)

Poverty Point Objects (or PPOs) are fired ceramics that were used in place of cooking stones. People made them from the fine soil found at the site and most were small enough to fit in the palm of your hand. There is evidence suggesting that the number, size and shape of PPOs determined how hot an earth oven (seen below) would get and how long it could stay hot.

More PPOs have been found at the site than any other kind of cultural artifact. The large number of PPOs suggests that people did a lot of cooking. If people did a lot of cooking, it was probably because they had access to a lot of food. The resource-rich environments nearby would have made it easy for them to find food. People probably did not go hungry. Then again, maybe they were also being good hosts. After all, the site probably had a lot of visitors over the centuries.



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PPOs:
Poverty
Point
Objects

People molded PPOs by hand and heated them until they became ceramic. The hardened PPOs worked a little like charcoal briquettes. Someone dug a fire pit, placed the PPOs in the bottom, and built a fire on top of them. After the fire died down, the food could be wrapped in leaves, put on the heated PPOs, covered with dirt, and left to roast or steam. That is called an earth oven, and the heat of the oven could be controlled by varying the number and placement of PPOs. Hot PPOs also could have been used as "boiling stones" to heat food in containers.



The image to the right shows the four main varieties of PPOs archaeologists have found at Poverty Point. Clockwise from the top: biconical, cylindrical grooved, cross grooved, and melon shaped.



Poverty Point Artifacts (Completed)

<u>Artifact</u>	<u>Purpose</u>
plummet	used to weigh down fishing nets
atlatl	used to throw spears harder and farther
gorgets	worn as decorative piece
PPOs (Poverty Point Objects)	used in cooking pits

Beads and Pendants

Archaeologists have found many different kinds of beads and pendants at the site. Some are made of clay and some are of rock or copper that came from far away. Similar kinds of beads have been found at other sites in Louisiana, suggesting, if not contact with the people at Poverty Point, at least a strong cultural influence from the site.



The beads found at Poverty Point may have been decorative, but few have actual decorations on them. The bead seen here has a small bird etched onto it. Bird forms appear on several artifacts from Poverty Point. Given the great number of different kinds of birds that call Louisiana home, seasonally and year-round, this is perhaps not surprising. Even today, people from around the world visit the state for its unparalleled bird watching!

Beads and clay objects are not to scale.

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BEADS/
PENDANTS

Poverty Point Artifacts (Completed)

<u>Artifact</u>	<u>Purpose</u>
plummet	used to weigh down fishing nets
atlatl	used to throw spears harder and farther
gorgets	worn as decorative piece
PPOs (Poverty Point Objects)	used in cooking pits
beads/pendants	used as jewelry or to decorate clothing

Projectile Points

Projectile points are the chipped stone spear, dart or arrow tips that ancient peoples made. Researchers have found over 8,000 intact projectile points at Poverty Point. Most of these were made from rock brought from afar. The imported rock came in many colors and textures (see the *Trade and Travel* section).



These are the sorts of stone points hunters used with light-weight spears and atlatls (spearthrowers). Arrow points are much smaller and lighter.

When archaeologists study stone tools, they often look for wear patterns. These are small scratches, tiny chips, or smooth spots on the tools that form from repeated use. If stone points were used only for hunting, they should show the same kinds of wear patterns, mainly broken tips from when they struck bone. Yet, points from the site have different kinds of wear patterns. This is probably because people used these points as multi-purpose tools, rather than just for hunting.

Researchers have found only a few points at Poverty Point that predate the **Late Archaic period**. Likewise, they have found far fewer arrowheads than spear points. This is because American Indians did not adopt the bow and arrow in this area until around A.D. 700.

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SPEAR HEADS

Poverty Point Artifacts (Completed)

<u>Artifact</u>	<u>Purpose</u>
plummet	used to weigh down fishing nets
atlatl	used to throw spears harder and farther
gorgets	worn as decorative piece
PPOs (Poverty Point Objects)	used in cooking pits
beads/pendants	used as jewelry or to decorate clothing
spear heads	used for hunting and fishing

SOAPSTONE BOWLS



© Jenny Ellerbe
Credit: Louisiana State Exhibit Museum

Soapstone Bowls

The people who lived at Poverty Point cooked and stored food and other things in soapstone vessels like the one seen to the left. The stone for these bowls came from quarries in what is today Georgia and Alabama. Craftspeople sculpted the bowls at these quarries and sent them out for trade only after they had been carved. It is much more efficient to transport a hollowed-out bowl than a block of stone.

People tried to get as much use out of their bowls as they could. Many of the bowls found by archaeologists at Poverty Point have repair holes for lacing cracked bowls together.

Poverty Point Artifacts (Completed)

<u>Artifact</u>	<u>Purpose</u>
plummet	used to weigh down fishing nets
atlatl	used to throw spears harder and farther
gorgets	worn as decorative piece
PPOs (Poverty Point Objects)	used in cooking pits
beads/pendants	used as jewelry or to decorate clothing
spear heads	used for hunting and fishing
soapstone bowls	used for cooking and storing food

Outcomes:

I can identify community and regional historical artifacts.

***Poverty Point**

I can engage effectively in collaborative discussions.

***taking turns**