

# **Implementing Contextual Learning into Georgia History**

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## Exploring the Prehistoric Indian Civilizations of Georgia

### Research

Studies have proven that students are constantly searching for relevance and meaning in their educational curriculum. Today's generation of young students are driven by the need to understand how their instructional tasks are related to actual events and future life situations on the job or in society (Weinbaum and Rogers 1995). Contextual learning can be described as a process by which "knowledge is socially shared, thinking is shaped by interaction with tools, comprehension is engaged with objects and events, students learn in a situation specific environment" (pg. 5).

An essential factor in education is the creation of interest among students in a given classroom setting. If an educator can provide instruction with elements that spark interest in the students they are establishing lifelong knowledge and applicable skills.

It is vital for school systems to evaluate new techniques in education using insight related to an agenda that is consistent with the future (Darrell, 2001). The world is everchanging and educational instruction should compliment that change. Public schools must prepare to educate a vast number of diverse learning levels and styles. A single focused college preparatory curriculum will not meet the needs of the student body.

"According to the contextual learning theory, learning occurs only when students (learners) process new information or knowledge in such a way that it makes sense to them in their own frames of reference, including prior knowledge" (Inner Worlds of Memory, Experience, and Response).

Self directed learning has been shown to have positive effects on learners. One of the strongest points in favor of this method of learning is that it closely simulates the way students will be expected to perform the rest of their lives, engaged in lifelong learning (Harwell & Blank, 2001).

To become effective educators we must be open to change. In doing so we can accept adjustments in our teaching methods and curriculum in order to provide consistent, high-performance results for all students (Parnell, 1995).

### Content

This lesson is designed to actively engage students in identifying and analyzing prehistoric Indian periods. It will enable the learner to better understand the customs, culture, and beliefs that found their origins in the periods of prehistoric Indian history in Georgia. Students will learn first hand how the customs, culture, and beliefs of this early

era have been passed down through oral tradition, and artifacts that were discovered in surrounding areas. This study will further investigate these early civilizations and how they influenced history and European culture, particularly the impact on the southeastern region of the United States. The objective is for students to establish critical thinking skills, and obtain the knowledge necessary to describe and analyze Georgia's prehistoric Indian civilizations. Our lesson will be used in Georgia History classes at Cass Middle School. Students will be provided resources such as use of the Internet, encyclopedias, and Georgia History books to help them examine and understand the prehistoric Indian civilizations.

### **Objectives**

A complete list of Georgia's Quality Core Curriculum Standards can be found at <http://www.glc.k12.ga.us/>.

- Standard 8.6 - Describes and analyzes Georgia's prehistoric Indian civilizations.  
Essential Question: What were Georgia's prehistoric Indian civilizations?
- Standard 8.8 – Explain the impact of Spanish and English conquest on civilizations of North America and the impact of the Indian Civilizations of the European settlers.  
Essential Question: What was the impact of the interactions between the European's and the Indians?
- Standard 8.41 – Identifies contributions made by various ethnic groups to the development of Georgia past and present.  
Essential Question: How have various ethnic groups contributed to the development of Georgia?

### **Materials**

Personal computers equipped with Internet and Microsoft Word  
Encyclopedias  
Georgia History books  
5 gallon buckets  
Dirt  
Clay pots  
Permanent markers  
Industrial glue  
Cherokee alphabet list  
List of places with Indian names in Georgia  
Blank chart with the four prehistoric Indian periods labeled  
Graphic organizers  
Handouts

## **Procedures/Activities**

Day One – Students will be introduced to the lesson plans and given a synopsis of the assignments and activities they will be undertaking during the next ten days. Students will then be given an introduction to prehistoric Indian civilizations that were present in Georgia.

- Anticipation guide - brainstorming
- Basic terms consistent with unit

Day Two – Teacher led discussion explaining the difference between perception and reality. Teacher will compare current stereotypes and explain how stereotyping can have a negative influence and how situations involving it relate to everyday life.

Day Three – Students will be placed into groups and use graphic organizers to record their perception of the culture, customs, and beliefs of prehistoric Indians. Discuss the belief system compared to today's society. Would certain laws work in our present society?

Day Four – Teacher led discussion. Students will be divided into groups and using the resources provided, fill in the Prehistoric Indian Chart. When the students are finished, interpret completed charts; involve students in discussion – Was the student's perception right or wrong? Have they changed their mind? If so, how?

Day Five – Archaeological dig. Designed to promote student discovery and interpretation. Students will be given pots, dirt, permanent markers, the Cherokee alphabet, and each group will write a short message to bury in the dirt (the pots will be broken up). Each group will be given another group's bucket to interpret the artifact and its writings.

Day Six – Continuation of dig. Identify the written message on the pots. Using archaeological simulation to reconstruct artifacts; report steps and findings to class. Discuss relevance of historical records and problem solving skills. Students will describe the dig using previously learned vocabulary words and a systematic step by step procedure.

Day Seven – Students will identify on a grid chart, according to geographical regions, local counties with archeological sites. They will pick two counties from the sites and research their ancestry to discover what artifacts were found there and by what period of Indians.

Day Eight – Students will research and identify ten Georgia place names, such as cities, rivers, and National Parks, which come from Indian origin. The student will state what tribe the name came from, if possible, and why that name was given. The student will also research how the Indian heritage in Georgia influenced historical events. Identify historical events in and around our area such as Gordon, Bartow, Murray, Polk, and Floyd Counties.

Day Nine – There will be a guest speaker from Bartow Historical Museum to discuss Indian customs. A simulation of an Indian camp will be displayed outside of the classroom. Various artifacts will be included in the trunk of treasures. Indian tools, weapons, and pottery will be on display.

Day Ten – Students will turn in a written research paper and give an oral presentation on the prehistoric periods discussed in this unit.

Day Eleven – Students will give their responses on a written assessment covering material on this ten day lesson plan.

**Assessment:**

Results of student assessment will be recorded and posted at a later date upon completion of Lesson Unit II: Prehistoric Indians of Georgia.

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