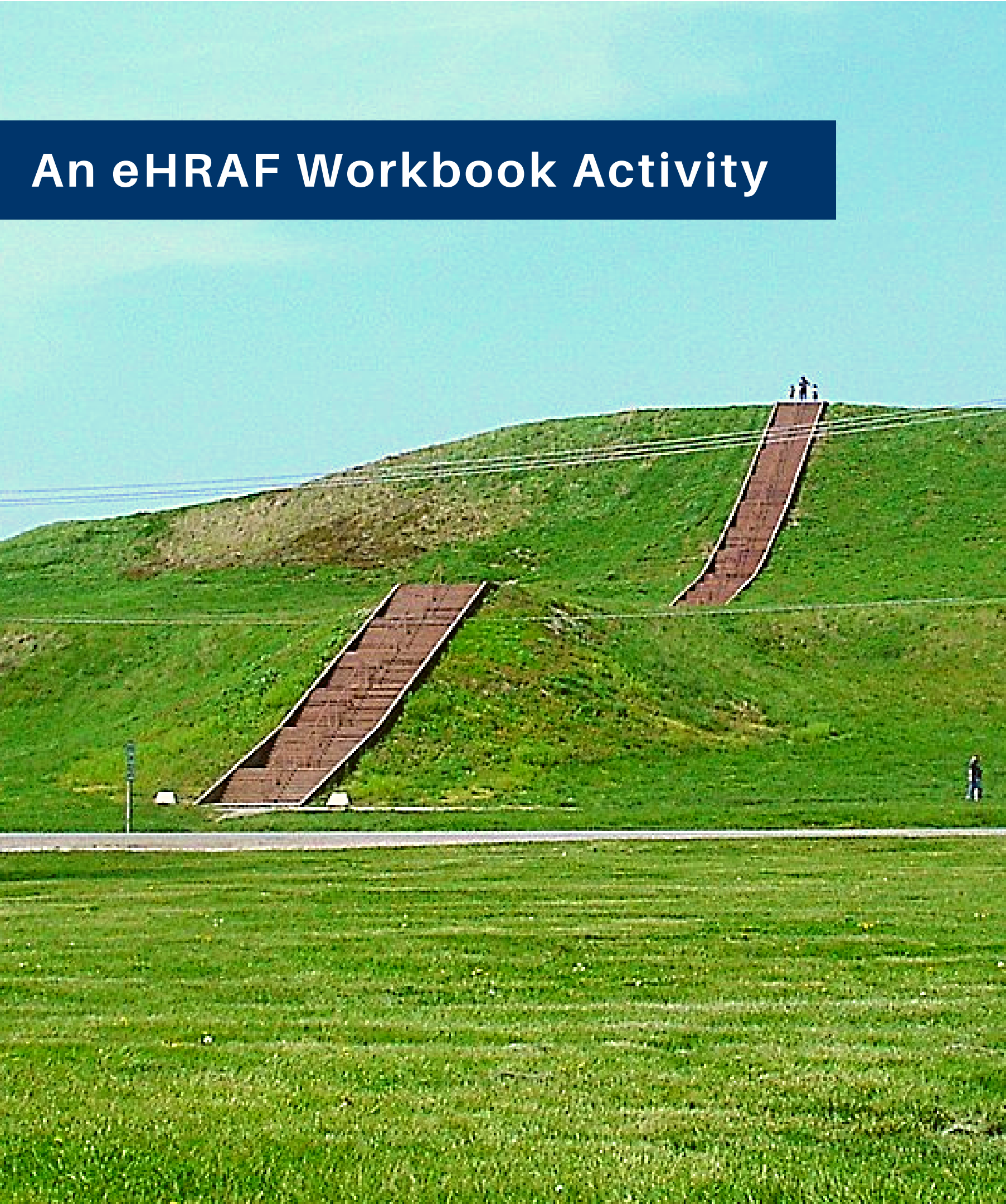


An eHRAF Workbook Activity



Great Discoveries: Cahokia



In this activity

Topics We'll Cover

- Learn about Cahokia
- Read passages in eHRAF Archaeology
- Answer questions about this archaeological discovery
- Find out what makes Cahokia a "Great Discovery"

ILLINOIS

Lac Pimitou

les Pimitou ou Peoria

CAHOKIA

Caskaquias

la Saline

Cap S. Antoine

Rivière d'Ouabache ou de S. Je
Desert de six vint
ou les Illinois font la

Cahokia Mounds State Historic Site

near Collinsville, Illinois, is home to the archaeological remnants of the most sophisticated prehistoric native civilization north of Mexico. Within a 2,200-acre tract lies the central section of the ancient Mississippian settlement that is today known as Cahokia.

In 1250 CE, the city of Cahokia was larger than London. Cahokia was constructed by accomplished builders who erected a variety of structures, from family residences to monumental public architecture, that have endured for centuries.

**Did you
know?**





Cahokia

Cahokia has 140 mounds and three chronological periods with multiple phases. Early settlement dates from 300 CE, the Late Woodland period. Cahokia has been variously called a "city", a "state", and a "complex chiefdom."

Archaeologist Warren Wittry found evidence of a solar calendar at Cahokia. He named this "Woodhenge" in deference to Stonehenge. Several "Woodhenges" were built over the centuries, which may have been used by leaders to solidify their supernatural and political authority.

To get started, review these short videos and articles about Cahokia:

- ▶ [Cahokia: City of the Sun](#)
- ▶ [Lost City of Cahokia](#)
- ▶ [In Search Of History - Cahokia: The Mound Builders](#)
- ▶ [Cahokia's Celestial Calendar \(Woodhenge\) Native America | PBS](#)





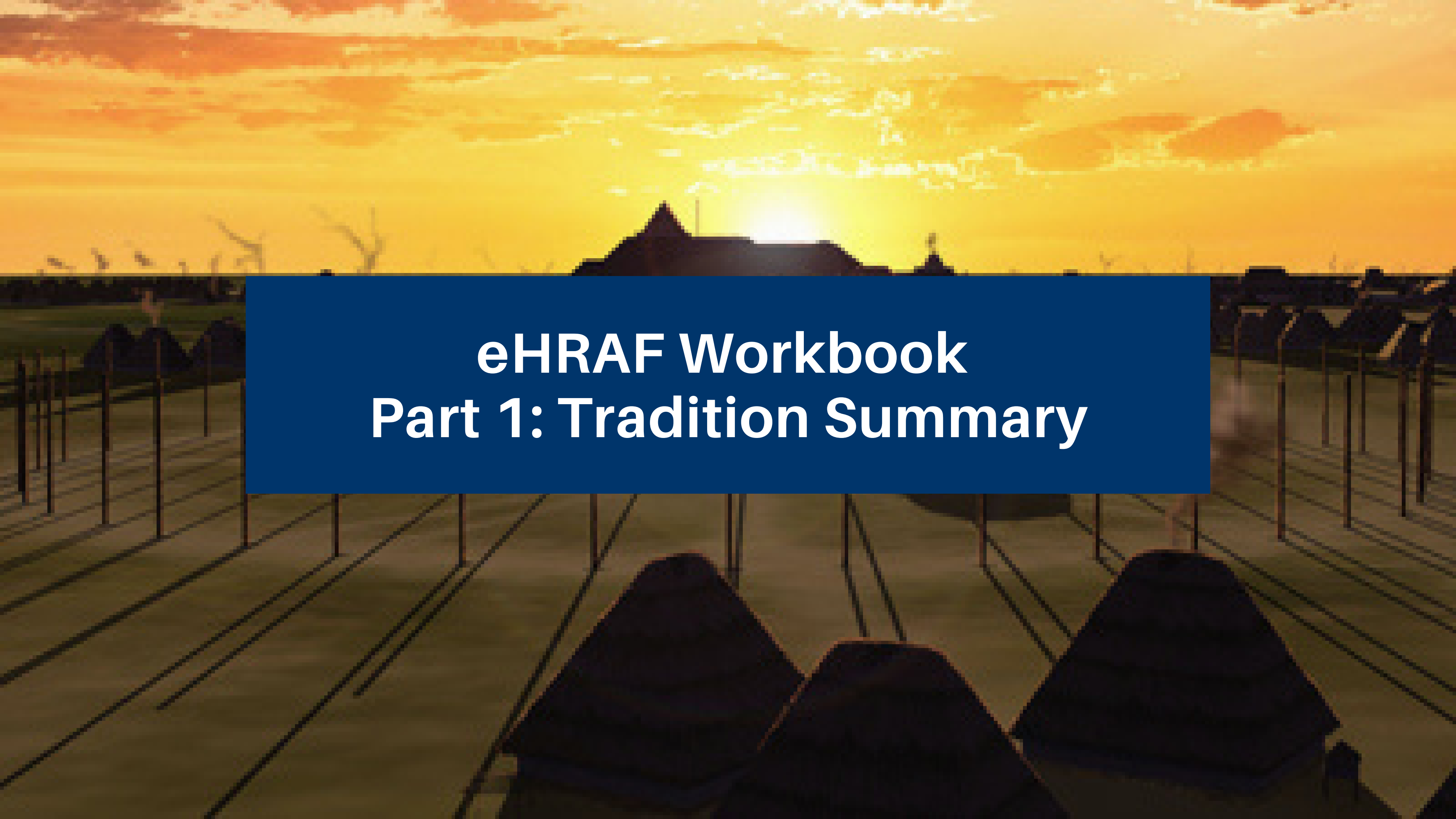
ARTICLES ABOUT CAHOKIA

[Ancient Native Americans Once Thrived in Bustling Urban Centers](#)

[Cahokia Mounds Civic and Sacred Landscape](#)

[The Solar Calendar of Woodhenge in Cahokia | Native America: Cities of the Sky](#)

[Cahokia Mounds State Historic Site](#)

The background of the slide features a warm sunset scene. The sky is filled with soft, orange and yellow clouds, with the sun positioned centrally on the horizon, creating a bright glow. Below the horizon, the silhouettes of trees and a fence line are visible against the darkening landscape. In the foreground, there are dark, rounded shapes that appear to be bushes or small trees.

eHRAF Workbook

Part 1: Tradition Summary

A background image of a park. In the foreground, there is a paved path leading towards a grassy area. To the left of the path, there is a small, low, grassy mound. In the background, there are trees and a road with a few cars. The sky is blue.

Tradition Summaries

A brief overview for traditions in eHRAF Archaeology is provided in the form of **Tradition Summaries**.

**eHRAF
Archaeology**

The format, general outline, and headings are the same for each summary. You will find a basic overview about the tradition, such as its time period, location, history, environment, and sociopolitical organization.

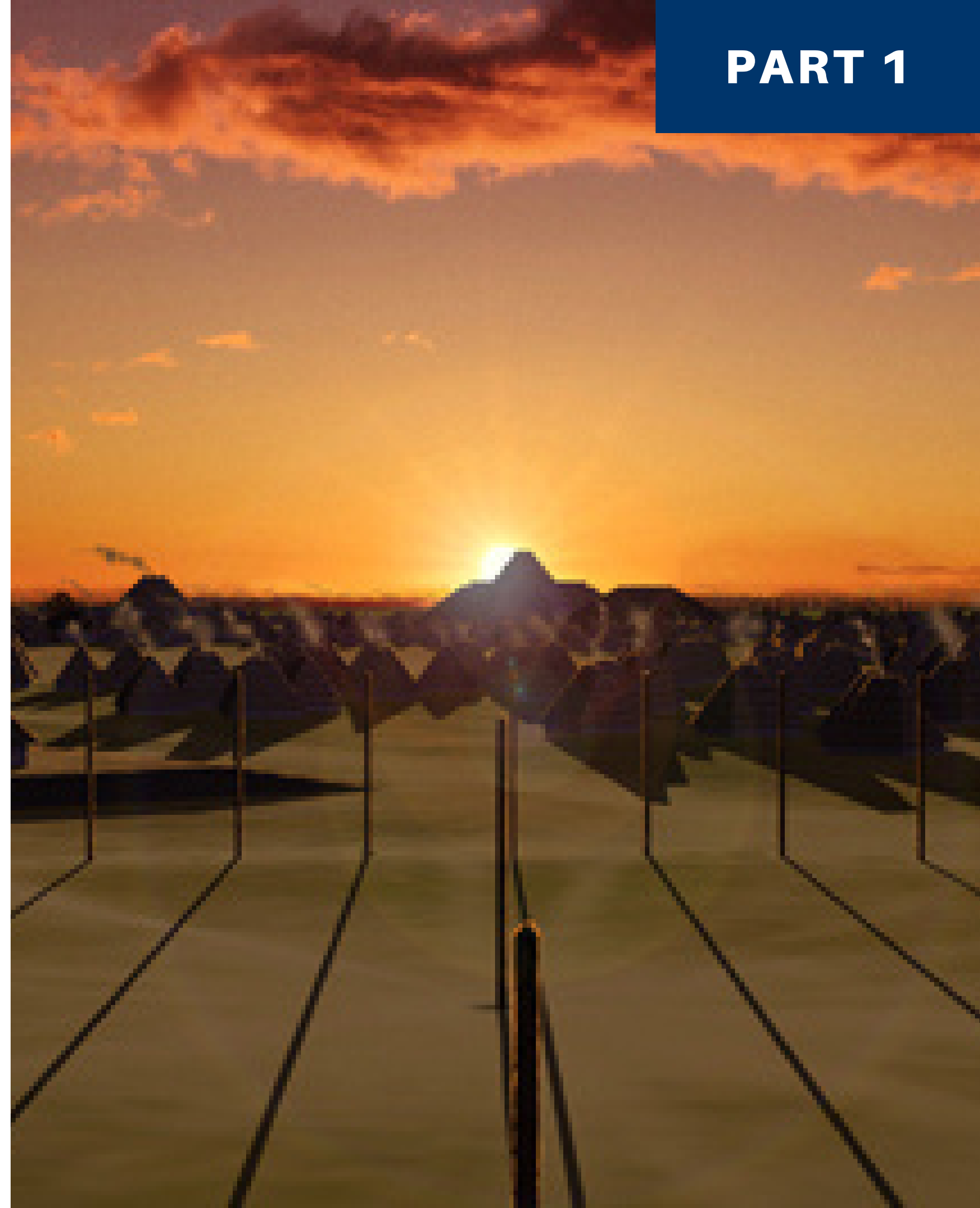
To find a tradition summary, go to the Browse Traditions tab and enter the tradition name into the box, then click on Tradition Summary below the tradition name to read it.

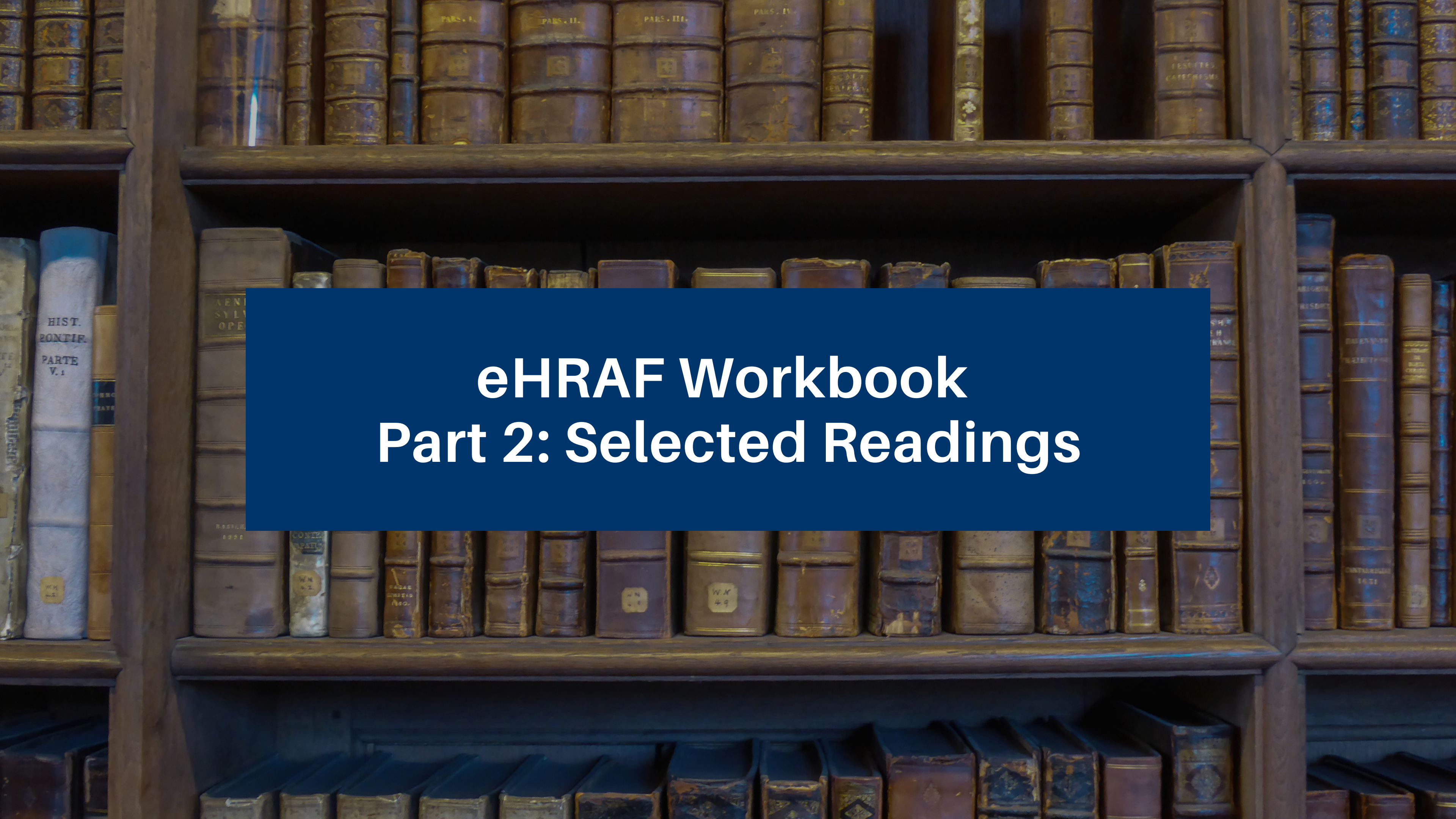
Mississippian (NP60)

Begin by learning more about the **Mississippian** tradition. First, read the eHRAF Tradition Summary:

 <https://ehrafarchaeology.yale.edu/traditions/np60/summary>

Then, write a brief description of the Mississippian tradition indicating any significant archaeological elements that stand out to you.



The background of the slide is a photograph of a wooden bookshelf filled with numerous old, leather-bound books. The books are arranged in rows, and their spines show signs of age and wear. Some spines have gold lettering, and others have simple labels. The lighting is warm, highlighting the texture of the wood and the leather.

eHRAF Workbook

Part 2: Selected Readings

To read documents or pages in eHRAF:

First, follow the permalinks provided in the activities below to get to the relevant documents.

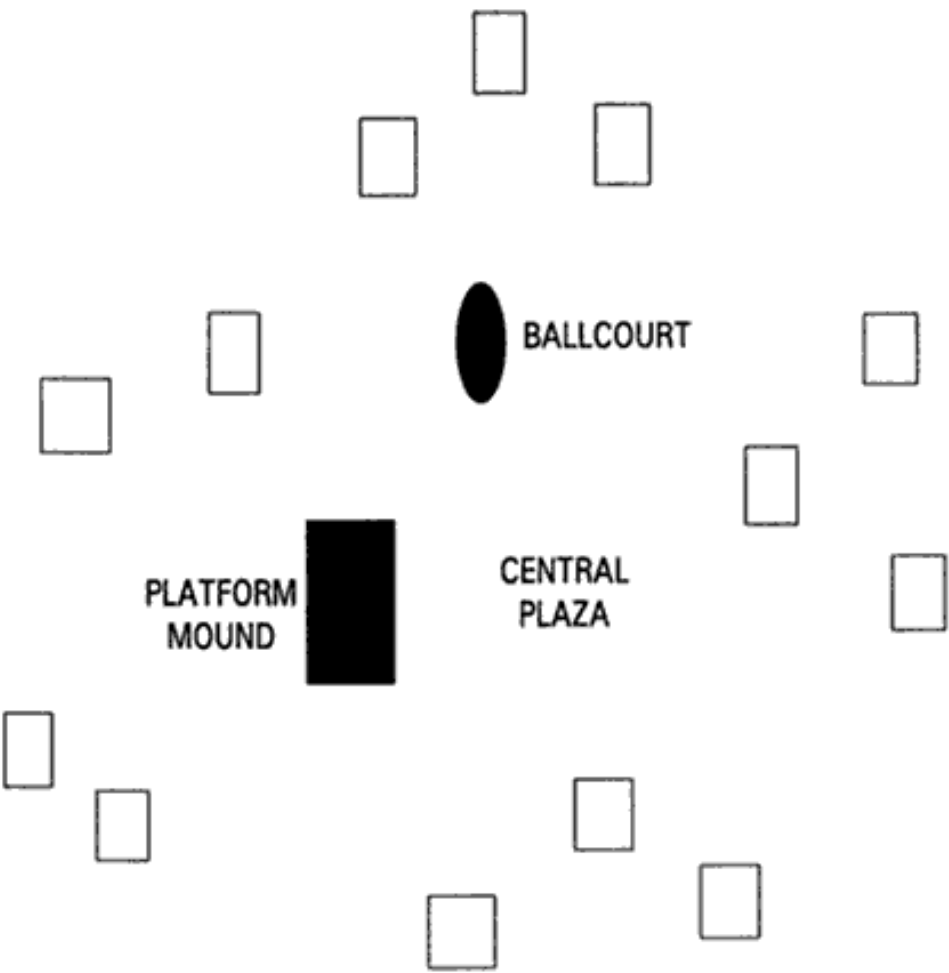
For example:

 <https://ehrafarchaeology.yale.edu/traditions/nt76/documents/001>

Then, use the Page List dropdown menu to navigate to the required page(s).



Figure 3.2. Schematic map of a village plan.



102 Maps
128 Organization And Analysis Of Results
344 Public Structures
345 Recreational Structures
361 Settlement Patterns

< PREV

NEXT >

Page List
40

Page Focus

Original Page

Tradition (OWC)

Hohokam (M

Region

North Am

Sub Region

Southwest And

Field Date

No

Coverage Date

1050-550 BP (AD 950-

Place Coverage

Phoenix Basin, Arizona, United S

Section Title(S)

Political Communities • Residential Community

Finding documents without permalinks

INSTRUCTIONS

Follow these steps if you are having trouble with permalinks from off campus while using a proxy or VPN service, or if you have been provided with a HRAF-issued username and password.

- **Sign in via your library proxy or VPN, or using the HRAF-issued credentials.**
- **Go to the Browse Documents tab.**
- **Enter the author's last name into the Filter Index box.**
- **Click on the required title to access the document, then select the page number from the Page List dropdown menu as shown above.**

Browse Traditions

Browse Subjects

Browse Documents

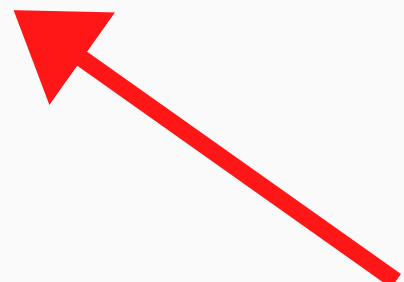


Documents

eHRAF is comprised of thousands of ethnographic sources including monographs, journal articles, dissertations and manuscripts. Use this page to find relevant documents by searching or filtering. Each document in eHRAF also contains a Publication Information page with added metadata including brief abstracts written by HRAF analysts who have subject-indexed the file.



Search Document List



The Cahokia chiefdom: the archaeology of a Mississippian society (Milner 1998)

🌐 <https://ehrafarchaeology.yale.edu/traditions/np60/documents/044>

Pages:

- 1-10, Introduction to Cahokia
- 137-138, Settlement Organization, Solstices

Cahokia identity and interaction models of Cahokia Mississippian (Hall 1991)

🌐 <https://ehrafarchaeology.yale.edu/traditions/np60/documents/004>

Pages:

- 4, The Origin of the Cahokia Mounds
- 33-34, Summary



PART 2

Some perspectives on Cahokia and the northern Mississippian expansion (Emerson 1991)

🌐 <https://ehrafarchaeology.yale.edu/traditions/np60/documents/015>

Page:

- 223, Cahokia and American Bottom Research

Mississippian political economy (Muller 1997)

🌐 <https://ehrafarchaeology.yale.edu/traditions/np60/documents/045>

Page:

- 271, Elites and Production: Mounds and Scale



Summer sunset

Md 72 Sub2

Summer sunrise

Md 72 Sub1

Equ

eHRAF Workbook Part 3: Advanced Search

Winter
sunset

Md 96

Winter
sunrise



Part 3: Advanced Search

Now that you have read selected passages from eHRAF Archaeology, dig deeper with **Advanced Search**. This will enable you to find specific passages in documents that have been indexed by HRAF anthropologists at the paragraph level.

On the following slide, you will find an example of an advanced search. Try this search and then experiment with different subjects and/or keywords.

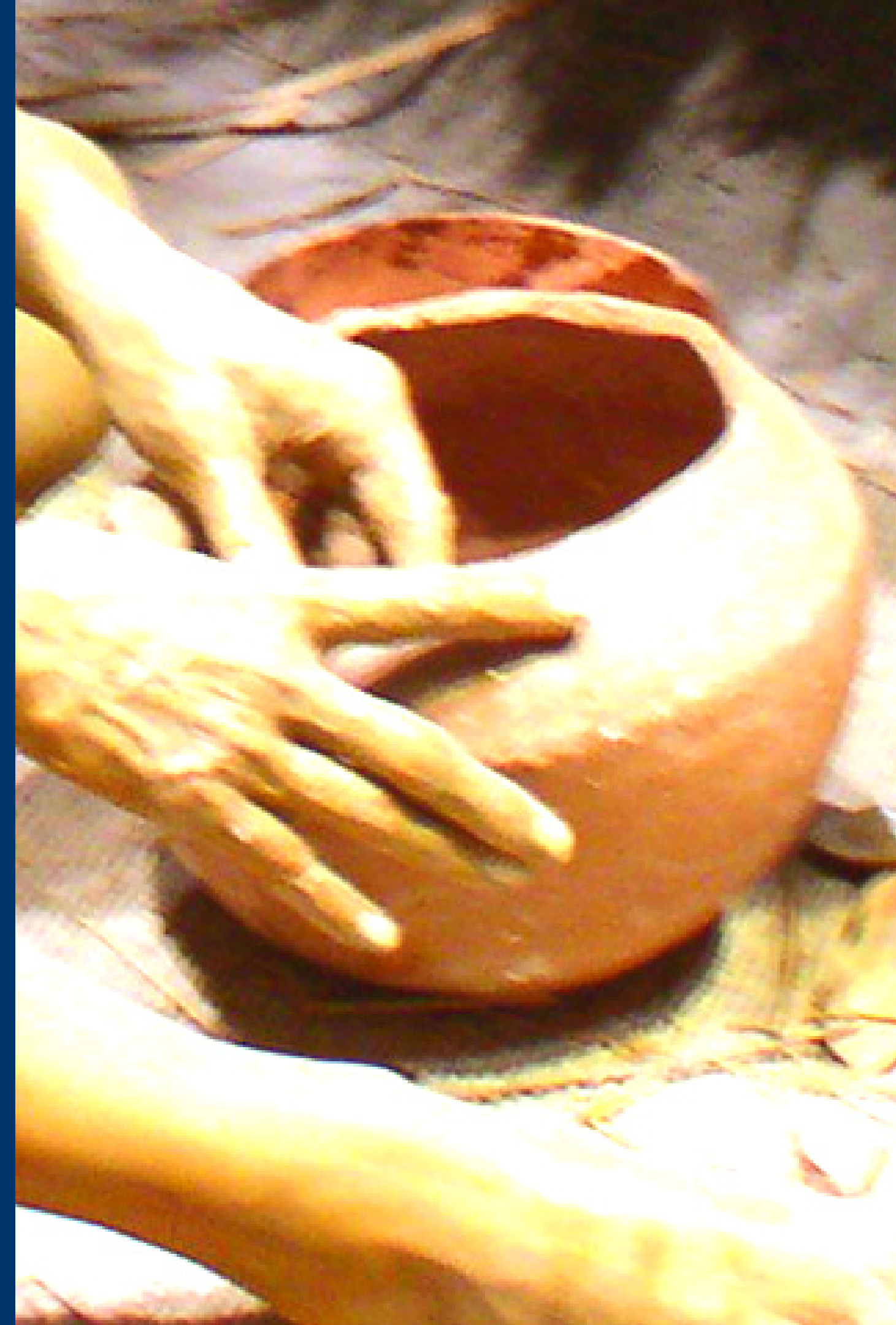
Part 3:

Advanced Search

In the Add Traditions column, select **Mississippian (NP60)**.

In the Add Subjects column, select the major subject categories **Building and Construction (330)** and **Structures (340)**.

In the Keyword section, type **Mound***.



ADVANCED SEARCH

Advanced Search

Any of these 1 Traditions ▾

Any of these 6 Subjects ▾

Any of these Keywords ▾

🌐

Mississippian

✕

#

building and construction • construction • earth r

✕

AND OR

mound*

✕

+

RESET FORM

Q SEARCH



Add tradition:
Mississippian (NP60)



Add subjects:
Building and Construction (330)
Structures (340)



Add keyword:
mound*

Results for: *traditions:"Mississippian" AND (subjects:("building and cons...*

Filtered to: Mississippian

Found 41 paragraphs in 6 documents across 1 traditions

SEARCH RESULTS



☐	Document	Results	Samples	Published Year	
☐	Milner, George R., 1953- The Cahokia chiefdom: the archaeology of a Mississippian society	27	--	1998	1100 BP -
☐	Muller, Jon Mississippian political economy	2	--	1997	1100 BP -
☐	Anderson, David G., 1949- The Savannah River chiefdoms: political change in the late prehistoric Southeast	6	--	1994	1100 B
☐	Knight, Vernon J. Moundville as a diagrammatic ceremonial center	2	--	1998	1100 BP -
☐	Emerson, Thomas E., 1945- The Apple River Mississippian culture of northwestern Illinois	2	--	1991	1000 BP - 4
☐	Knight, Vernon J. A new history of Moundville	2	--	1998	1100 BP -

The Origin of the Cahokia Mounds

The purchase of the site of Cahokia for state park use was first recommended by a commission created by the Forty-sixth Illinois General Assembly in 1909 to investigate and report on the preservation of certain lands for public parks (Anon. 1923:492–93). For various reasons little action was taken on this recommendation until June 1, 1925, when the “Great Cahokia Mound” and some surrounding mounds were purchased after condemnation proceedings for what eventually became Cahokia Mounds State Historic Site. No additions were made until 1963, but the area in state ownership has increased steadily since then. One of the reasons for the failure of the state to take action was the unwillingness of several geologists in positions of authority to support strongly the acquisition. A. H. Worthen, as director of the Illinois Geological Survey, had been a witness to one phase of the destruction of the great mound of the St. Louis group west of the Mississippi River from Cahokia. From his interpretation of the stratigraphy of this mound, Worthen went on to infer that

[the] many elevations scattered over the surface of the [American] Bottom, locally known as “mounds,” the formation of which have very generally been referred to human agencies [were not in fact] artificial elevations, raised by the aboriginal inhabitants of the country, as has been assumed by antiquaries generally, but on the contrary, they are simply outliers of loess and drift, that have remained as originally deposited, while the surrounding contemporaneous strata were swept away by denuding forces (1866:314–15).

SEARCH RESULTS

912 Cultural Stratigraphy

Filtered to: Mississippian

Found 41 paragraphs in 6 documents across 1 traditions

FULL CONTEXT

←

↕

↓

☐	Document	Results	Samples	Published Year	
☐	Anderson, David G., 1949- The Savannah River chiefdoms: political change in the late prehistoric Southeast	6	—	1994	1100 BP-500 BP
☐	Mississippian North America › Eastern Woodlands • Horticulturalists				
	(1994) The Savannah River chiefdoms: political change in the late prehistoric Southeast Section: Irene By: Anderson, David G., 1949- • Page: 180 • Published: 1994 Mound stage 8 differed appreciably from the preceding stages in a number of respects. At approximately 48.8 meters in diameter, it was much larger than the previous mounds, was circular instead of rectangular in shape, and had a rounded instead of a flat summit. Stage 8 partially covered the burial mound to the east, which appears to have been used primarily during the Savannah occupations. In the construction of stage 8, shell was first placed over stage 7, including two layers on the flanks, with sand used as fill around and over the shell. Except where it overlapped the burial mound, stage 8 was capped with clay. The construction of stage 8, which was 1.8 meters higher, on the average, than stage 7, required as much fill as in all the preceding stages combined.				OCMS 332 Earth Moving 349 Miscellaneous Structures OWC NP60 Mississippian

An aerial photograph of a suburban neighborhood. The scene shows a mix of green lawns, trees with yellow and orange autumn foliage, and several houses. A winding road or path cuts through the landscape. In the foreground, there's a large, open grassy area with some trees. The overall tone is peaceful and scenic.

eHRAF Workbook Part 4: Assignment

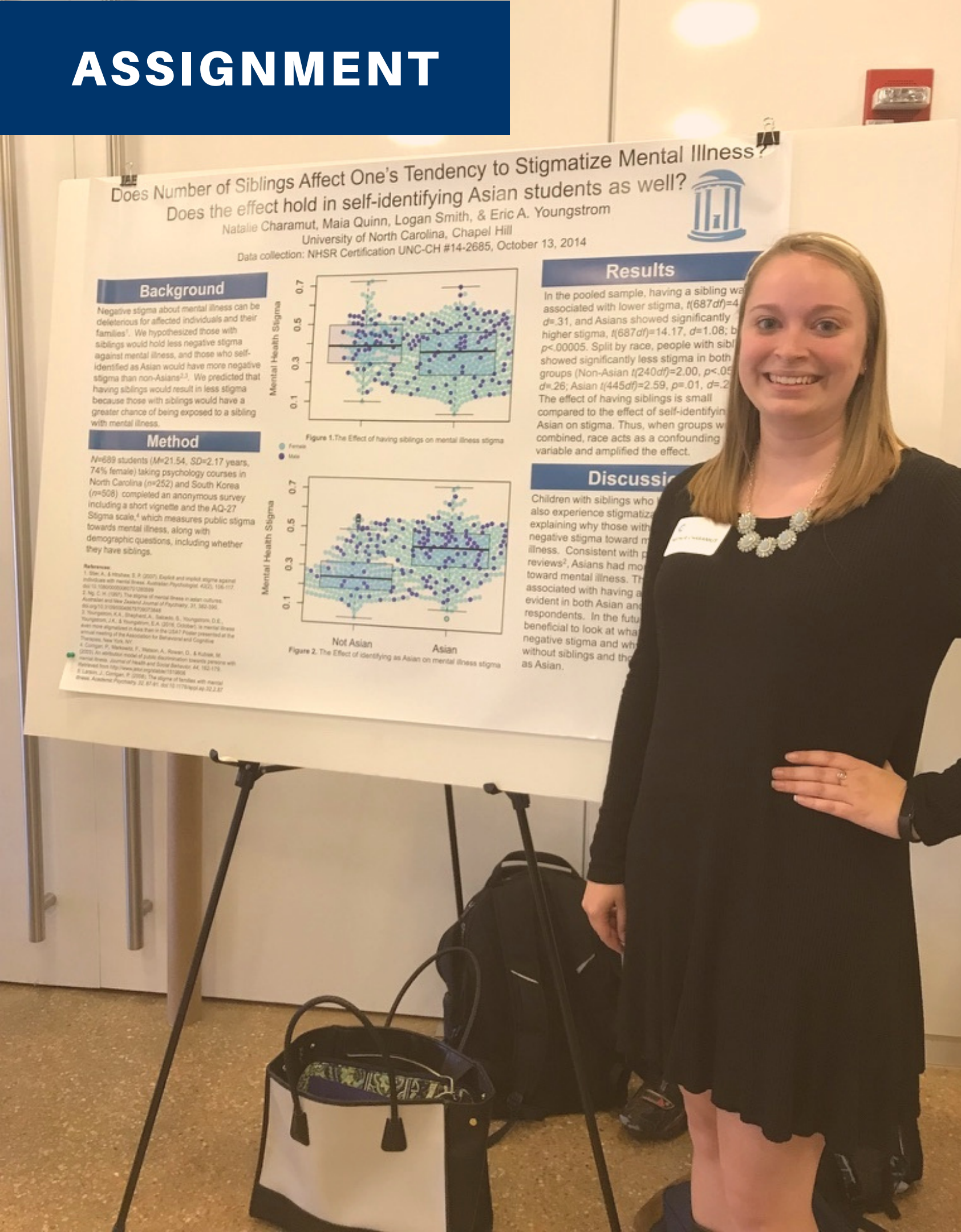
ASSIGNMENT

The purpose of this assignment is to present a report summarizing your findings about this great discovery.

This can be done in the form of a group project or an individual paper.

Groups can divide the questions that follow, with each student contributing information about a specific question.

Consider making a slideshow presentation to illustrate your findings.



Your final report describing **Cahokia** should have 6 sections which correspond to these 6 types of questions:

- **Who?**
- **What?**
- **Where?**
- **When?**
- **How?**
- **Why?**



QUESTION 1

Who?

Who are the main archaeologists associated with this discovery? Describe their biographical information, education and training, publications, etc.

Who are the people studied? Describe how people lived during this time at this place, such as: social stratification, division of labor, gender roles, economic life, food and subsistence, religious practices.



QUESTION 2



What?

What did the archaeologists discover?

Provide a general description of the archaeological site.

Describe the material culture, structures, artifacts, etc.

Include relevant photos and/or interpretive artistic renderings.

QUESTION 3

Where?

Where is the site located?

Describe the geography of this discovery, its location in the contemporary world, size, scope, etc.

Does the location have strategic importance?

How did the physical environment and natural resources shape cultural practices?



QUESTION 4

When?



When were the discoveries made?

When in human history do archaeologists believe that this site can be dated to?

Describe the relative time period, what preceded it, and what followed it. What does this represent in terms of cultural evolution and progress?

How?

How did archaeologists excavate, analyze, and interpret this site?

Tell us about the scientific methods used for excavation and analysis of the materials founds.

What technologies were utilized by the people who lived during this archaeological time period?

How did they construct buildings and make artifacts (lithics, pottery, etc.)?



QUESTION 6

Why?



Why is this archaeological site considered a “great discovery”?

Describe how this site is important in terms of its place in human history.

Why should this great discovery be preserved and who should be responsible for preservation?



References

Emerson, Thomas E. 1991. "Some Perspectives on Cahokia and the Northern Mississippian Expansion." In *Cahokia and the Hinterlands: Middle Mississippian Cultures of the Midwest*, 221–36. Urbana: Published in cooperation with the Illinois Historic Preservation Agency by the University of Illinois Press.
<https://ehrafarchaeology.yale.edu/traditions/np60/documents/015>.

Hall, Robert L. 1991. "Cahokia Identity and Interaction Models of Cahokia Mississippian." In *Cahokia and the Hinterlands: Middle Mississippian Cultures of the Midwest*, 3–34. Urbana: Published in cooperation with the Illinois Historic Preservation Agency by the University of Illinois Press.
<https://ehrafarchaeology.yale.edu/traditions/np60/documents/004>.

Milner, George R. 1998. "The Cahokia Chiefdom: The Archaeology of a Mississippian Society." In *Smithsonian Series in Archaeological Inquiry*, xvi, 216. Washington: Smithsonian Institution Press.
<https://ehrafarchaeology.yale.edu/traditions/np60/documents/044>.

Muller, Jon. 1997. "Mississippian Political Economy." In *Interdisciplinary Contributions to Archaeology*, xiii, 455. New York: Plenum Press.
<https://ehrafarchaeology.yale.edu/traditions/np60/documents/045>.

Image Credits

Slide 1

Monks Mound in July by [Skubasteve834](#), [CC BY-SA 3.0](#), via Wikimedia Commons

Slide 2

Woodhenge motif black drink beaker by [Herb Roe](#), [CC BY-SA 3.0](#), via Wikimedia Commons

Slide 3

Illinois in 1718, approximate modern state area highlighted, from Carte de la Louisiane et du cours du Mississippi by [Guillaume Delisle](#), [public domain](#), via Wikimedia Commons

Slide 4

Illustration of a child running at Cahokia Mounds by [Prayitno](#), [CC BY 2.0](#), via Wikimedia Commons

Slide 5

Illustration of women working at Cahokia Mounds by [Prayitno](#), [CC BY 2.0](#), via Wikimedia Commons

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Slide 6

Pre-Colombian art, from Cahokia Mounds site by [TimVickers](#), [public domain](#), via Wikimedia Commons

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A digital painting by the artist Herb Roe, of a Mississippian era priest holding a ceremonial flint mace and a severed human head by [Herb Roe](#), [CC BY-SA 3.0](#), via Wikimedia Commons

Slide 8

Cahokia Woodhenge at sunrise by [Herb Roe](#), [CC BY-SA 4.0](#), via Wikimedia Commons

Slide 9

Cahokia Mounds World Heritage Site, Illinois by [Stephanie A. Terry](#), [CC BY-SA 4.0](#), via Wikimedia Commons

Slide 10

Artist's conception of the winter solstice sunrise over Fox Mound, Cahokia circa 1000 CE by [Herb Roe](#), [CC BY-SA 4.0](#), via Wikimedia Commons

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Christ Church Library, Oxford by [-JvL-](#), [CC BY 2.0](#), via Wikimedia Commons

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Mississippian culture avian themed repoussé copper plate by [Herb Roe](#), [CC BY-SA 3.0](#), via Wikimedia Commons

Slide 15

A diorama of the Bird Man found in Mound 72 at Cahokia, a ridge-top burial mound south of Monk's Mound by [jefgodesky](#), [CC BY-SA 3.0](#), via Wikimedia Commons

Slide 16

A diagram of solstice and equinox sunset and sunrise positions at the Mound 72 Woodhenge at the Cahokia Mounds site near Collinsville, Illinois, USA by [Herb Roe](#), [CC BY-SA 3.0](#), via Wikimedia Commons

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Stairway to Heaven at Cahokia Mounds by [Aemurray_wustl](#), [CC BY-SA 4.0](#), via Wikimedia Commons

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Slide 18

A diorama showing a Mississippian potter and her tools, as she shapes a pottery vessel by [Herb Roe](#), [CC BY-SA 3.0](#), via Wikimedia Commons

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Artist's conception of the Mississippian culture Cahokia Mounds Site in Illinois by [Herb Roe](#), [CC BY-SA 4.0](#), via Wikimedia Commons

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UNC QEP Expo Presentation by [Ncharamut](#), [CC BY-SA 4.0](#), via Wikimedia Commons

Slide 25

Aerial shot of Monks Mound by [Terry Robinson](#), [CC BY-SA 2.0](#), via Wikimedia Commons

Image Credits

Slide 26

A diorama showing a Mississippian culture elite person from the Cahokia site in Collinsville, Illinois. The figure wears a cloth skirt and sash, an engraved shell gorget, ear spools, and a falcon eye design painted on his face by [Herb Roe](#), [CC BY-SA 3.0](#), via Wikimedia Commons

Slide 27

Birdman Tablet found at Monks Mound by [Paul Sableman](#), [CC BY 2.0](#), via Wikimedia Commons

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A map of the Southeastern Ceremonial Complex and some of its associated sites by [Herb Roe](#), [CC BY-SA 3.0](#), via Wikimedia Commons

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Monks Mound, Cahokia site, 1882 illustration from History of Madison County, Illinois published by [W. R. Brink & Co.](#), [public domain](#), via Wikimedia Commons

Image Credits

Slide 30

A diorama showing a Mississippian culture flintknapper from the Cahokia site in Collinsville, Illinois by [Herb Roe](#), [CC BY-SA 3.0](#), via Wikimedia Commons

Slide 31

Cahokia Mounds State Historic Site by [Michael Hampshire](#), [CC BY-SA 4.0](#), via Wikimedia Commons

Slide 32

Cahokia Mounds, UNESCO reconstruction by [Prayitno](#), [CC BY 2.0](#), via Wikimedia Commons

NOTE: Images have been slightly cropped to fit the Canva presentation template.



Great Discoveries: Cahokia

An eHRAF Workbook Activity

Produced by
Human Relations Area Files
at Yale University
hraf.yale.edu