

Lesson One: An Introduction to Winterville Mounds and the Native American Mississippian World

Objective: Students will be introduced to Native American Mississippian culture as they create a timeline of events and design a mound city of their own.

Materials: *Winterville Mounds and the Native American Mississippian World*; butcher paper; art supplies (markers, crayons, colored pencils); *Timeline of Events Answer Key*; *Vocabulary List and Crossword*; poster board; *Winterville Mounds Map*; Internet access.

Activity One: Timeline of Events

1. Distribute *Winterville Mounds and the Native American Mississippian World*.
2. Lay out a long sheet of butcher paper.
3. Have students use the dates and facts in the narrative to create a timeline of the Native Americans at Winterville Mounds. A *Timeline of Events Answer Key* is provided.
4. Have students use this information to write a report about the Native Americans who lived at Winterville Mounds.

Activity Two: Learning Vocabulary

1. Distribute the *Vocabulary List and Crossword* and discuss the definitions of the words as a class.
2. Solve the crossword puzzle using words from the vocabulary list.
3. Have students create a game, puzzle, poem or creative art piece based on the vocabulary.

Activity Three: Create a Mound City

1. Break students into groups.
2. Distribute poster board and art supplies.
3. Distribute *Winterville Mounds Map*.
4. View a 3-D animation of Winterville Mounds on the Mississippi Archeology Trails website at <http://trails.mdah.ms.gov/winterville.htm>.
5. Using the map, the 3-D animation, and the information in *Winterville Mounds and the Native American Mississippian World*, have students create their own mound city. Students should include elements such as ceremonial mounds, plazas, farmsteads, rivers, and any other elements they consider important.
6. Have each group present their city to the class and explain why they placed each element where they did.

Extension Activities:

Go There! Plan and schedule a field trip to Winterville Mounds located in Greenville, Mississippi. There you can watch a film about Winterville Mounds, tour the museum and site, and interact with expert historians and on-site archeologists. Contact Winterville Mounds at 662-334-4684 to schedule your trip.

Listen Up! Hear experts talk about mounds across the state on the Mississippi Archeology Trails website at <http://trails.mdah.ms.gov/moundtour.htm>. In addition to their Mounds Tour map with audio, you can access additional information about the Winterville site and Mississippian period, explore Mississippian artifacts, and learn about the work of archaeologists today. You can also learn more about mounds on the Indian Mounds of

Mississippi, a website from the National Park Service, at <http://www.nps.gov/history/nr/travel/mounds/index.htm>.

Native Americans Traveling Trunk: Borrow the free *Native Americans Traveling Trunk* that focuses on the Mississippi's Choctaw and Chickasaw people. With this trunk students will have an opportunity to listen to the oral storytelling of Native American origins and illustrate the stories; create Native American music with turtle rattles; learn how to play common Native American games such as stickball; and handle Chickasaw artifacts including a turtleshell rattle, stickball equipment, bowls and jars, and a tanned deer hide.

See the following link for more information <http://mdah.state.ms.us/new/learn/classroom-materials/traveling-trunks/native-americans-traveling-trunk/> or contact the Outreach Programs Coordinator at 601-576-6997.

Mound Mysteries Revealed: View *Ancient Mysteries: The Secret Burial Mounds of Pre-Historic America*. Leonard Nimoy is the host of this examination of the Mississippian mounds scattered across North America. Very little is known about the makers, how the mounds were constructed, or why. Leading experts offer theories about these earthworks, which range from barely recognizable lumps to stories-high structures and earth sculptures whose shapes are hidden unless viewed from aerial heights. Produced by Greystone Communications, Inc. for A&E Network, 1995. 45 minutes, color. Sixth to twelfth grade.

This film can be borrowed free of charge from the Mississippi History on Loan Collection. Go to <http://mdah.state.ms.us/new/learn/classroom-materials/mississippi-history-on-loan-film-collection/> or contact the Outreach Programs Coordinator at 601-576-6997.

How Many School Buses Can Fit in a Mound? Find out in the *Indian Mound Construction* lesson plan, where students will gain an understanding of the Native American mound builders in Mississippi and the amount of work undertaken by the people of these early cultures. Students will calculate the amount of soil used in the construction of a mound and the modern day equivalent. This lesson is adaptable for students grades three to six and aligns with Common Core Standards and Mississippi Social Studies Frameworks. It can be accessed at <http://mdah.state.ms.us/new/learn/classroom-materials/lesson-plans-and-teaching-units/>

Winterville Mounds and the Native American Mississippian World

40,000-10,000 years ago, nomadic bands of hunter-gatherers from Siberia in Asia entered what we now call North America, through the Beringia Land Bridge at the Bering Strait. Additional migrations occurred via sea travel. These events occurred during the last great ice age, the Pleistocene Era. The oceanic waters were encased in ice. Ocean levels fell and land was exposed. These migrant hunter-gatherers from Siberia followed the animals they hunted into this new land. As they followed the animals, they eventually reached the southeast and what would become known as Mississippi. This occurred around 12,000 years ago. The prehistoric Native Americans who settled and lived at Winterville Mounds were some of the first Mississippians and Americans.

Beringia Land Bridge (right). Arlene Goldberg, Media Project, Inc. Aerial view of Winterville Mounds (below). MDAH, Winterville Mounds.



Mound Builders and Mound Meanings

In the Mississippian era, 1000-1600 AD, the first peoples of Mississippi began to construct large mounds. Native Americans built the mounds using manpower. They dug dirt with their hands and sticks, and used baskets to move the earth. They stamped the earth down with their feet until over time a mound was constructed. The

entire community participated in the construction of the mounds.

Mounds were built throughout the Southeast region of the United States. Hundreds of mounds were built in Mississippi, including dozens that can still be seen today, such as those at Owl Creek (1,100-1,200 AD, Tombigbee National Forest), Bear Creek (1,000-1,300 AD, on the Natchez Trace at the Mississippi-Alabama state line), Pocahontas (1,000-1,300 AD, north of Jackson), and Jaketown (1,500 BC, Belzoni). Mississippi's largest mound, Emerald Mound (located just north of Natchez on the Natchez Trace), is the state's largest surviving mound and covers approximately eight acres. These mounds were constructed between 1,000 and 1,600 AD, at the height of mound building in this area. At Winterville, mounds ceased being built in the late 1300s after a fire consumed the original buildings on top of the Temple Mound.



An artist's rendering of a typical Mississippian mound urban center. Ancient Civilizations, Forgotten Cultures. The Lower Mississippi Delta Initiative and Ancient Indian Architecture/Earthwork Study. Sponsored by the National Park Service in partnership with the State Historic Preservation Offices of Arkansas, Illinois, Kentucky, Louisiana, Mississippi, Missouri, and Tennessee and the Tunica-Biloxi Indian Tribe.

Mississippian mounds were flat-topped pyramids so that structures such as houses and temples could be placed on top. Notice the flat top pyramid mounds in the above picture. High ranking members of the society, the chiefs, warriors, and priests lived on top of the mounds. At Winterville Mounds the paramount chieftain probably lived on Mound A, the highest mound on the site.

In this way the mounds functioned as a political statement. They demonstrated the power of the community, chief, and the elite of the society. Generally the head chieftain would live and govern from one mound site while other members of the community would live at nearby mound sites and farmsteads in the outlying areas.

Mounds had several other functions. The mound sites were the religious centers of the Native Americans. People

traveled to Winterville Mounds, the head chieftain's residence, to attend ceremonies, religious observances, and communal gatherings. Temples were also often placed on the top of the mounds. This is where ceremonial religious leaders performed religious rites. Native Americans at Winterville Mounds apparently believed in a Great Spirit, the Creator, and the sun embodied this. They worshiped and respected the natural world. They believed all things had a place in the cosmos.

Mounds were also burial sites. A burial mound might have charnel houses on the top. Bodies deposited in the charnel house remained there until nothing was left but the bones. Then they would be buried in the mound. Mound B at Winterville Mounds is believed to have been a repository for the dead. Native Americans honored and respected their ancestors.

The mounds were surrounded by open areas of land called plazas. Most mound sites had one large plaza. Winterville Mounds is unique because it has two large plazas. The plazas were where the general populous congregated for ceremonies and festivities. People set up markets on the plaza to exchange their goods for items they needed. They did not have money so barter was their mode of economic exchange. Native American games such as chunky and stickball were played on the plazas.



Rendering of Owl Creek Mounds by Richard A. Marshall. Tombigbee National Forest (left) and the Southwest Plaza, MDAH, Winterville Mounds (right).

Using the Environment to Survive

The rich environmental resources of the Mississippi Valley attracted people to the region in pre-Columbian times. Materials for food, clothing, housing, and trade were readily available. At Winterville Mounds agriculture began to impact the culture around 1,000 AD and allowed people to settle in one place and build mounds. By 1200 AD maize, or corn, was a primary food source and agricultural crop. Beans and squash were also important.

The abundant deer were the most hunted animal at Winterville Mounds. Birds, fish, and other small animals supplemented the diet. On Mound F at Winterville, the remains of a feast were discovered, revealing that swamp rabbit was the main dish. When Hernando de Soto and the Spanish conquistadors entered Mississippi in 1540, they commented in their journals about the good soil and rich wildlife. The journals written by conquistadors during their explorations and upon returning home are still read today. People also continued to forage and gather food as well as farm to ensure an adequate food supply for the community.

Native Americans used animal hides and fur, woven mulberry bark, feathers, grasses, Spanish moss and other materials to make clothing that suited the environment and weather. In summer they wore very little, while in winter they wore warm clothing.

Houses at Winterville Mounds were wattle and daub huts. Woven cane was used to support the structures. Then clay was applied to the cane mats and allowed to harden, creating a seal and insulating the homes.

The Mississippi River, the namesake of the Mississippian people, also played an important role in the development of communities and culture along its banks and tributaries. The river was a superhighway for travel and trade with other native groups. Artifacts in the Winterville Mounds Museum show the extensive contact that people had with groups, including those in Arkansas, Alabama, the Mississippi Gulf Coast, and Cahokia –the great Mississippian center in Illinois.

Mississippian People, Interacting with Each Other and Interacting with Outsiders

Mississippian society was hierarchical and divided into social classes. The head chief was at the very top. Warriors, priests, and nobles were the elite classes. The largest group was probably the common people. Each group had responsibilities and obligations to the other groups.

Gender differences became more noticeable during the Mississippian Era. Men were the hunters, warriors, priests, and chiefs, while women farmed the land, foraged and gathered food, cooked, made clothing, and were responsible for the children. However, women were also respected members of the tribes. In the *Hernando de Soto Chronicles*, a powerful female chief is mentioned. This suggests that some Native American groups were matrilineal and led by women.



A Chickasaw Tribal Celebration in 2008. MDAH, Winterville Mounds.

By 1600 Native Americans abandoned Winterville Mounds. The reason for this remains unknown; however, the late Mississippian period (1400-1500) was characterized by political upheaval and warfare and increased migration due to war and disease. The site may also have simply been abandoned because Mississippian culture was diminishing and disappearing, being replaced by tribal entities such as the Choctaws and Chickasaws. Still, these groups had Mississippian roots and continued to maintain many of its cultural attributes. Hernando de Soto and the conquistadors brought diseases that Native Americans had no immunity against. These diseases devastated the indigenous population. It is possible Winterville Mounds was affected. Native Americans remained in the area but Winterville Mounds ceased to be used as a ceremonial center.

After the Spanish conquest, the Spanish, French, and English claimed the land and fought wars to control it. Each country in turn displaced many Native Americans. After the American Revolution the Americans declared Mississippi a territory in 1798. Almost immediately removal of the Native Americans became a priority. Treaties such as the 1805 Treaty of Mount Dexter where the Choctaw ceded 4.5 million acres to the federal government prepared the way for Mississippi statehood. The Treaty of Dancing Rabbit Creek was signed by the Choctaws and federal government on September 27, 1830. It ceded 11 million acres to the federal government. It was the

first treaty signed under the Indian Removal Act of 1830. It began the removal of most Native Americans from Mississippi to Indian Territory, now known as Oklahoma. These removals are known to history as the Trail of Tears.

With Native Americans no longer living at Winterville Mounds, the area became plantations and farms in the 1850s. Many of the twenty-plus mounds at Winterville Mounds were destroyed in the process. Plowing and grazing of cattle on the mounds caused erosion. History and culture were lost due to neglect and indifference. In 1939 the Greenville Garden Club, a local organization, purchased the land to preserve it. From 1960 to 2000 the site was run as a state park by the Winterville Mounds Association and the Mississippi Department of Wildlife, Fisheries, and Parks. In the 1960s, archaeologist Jeffrey P. Brain conducted a series of excavations at the Winterville site, uncovering artifacts and human remains from the Mississippian era that significantly furthered the understanding of the people who once lived in the area. A museum opened on the site in 1969, a “labor of love” headed by Mrs. Robroy Fisher and the Greenville Garden Club. Since 2000, Winterville Mounds has been preserved and maintained by the Mississippi Department of Archives and History.



Visitors examine interpretive signage at Mound A (above), the Winterville Museum (below left), and the museum interior (below right). MDAH, Museum Division.



Timeline of Events Answer Key

40,000-20,000 years ago: Nomadic bands of hunter-gatherers from Siberia, Asia, and perhaps parts of Europe enter North America.

12,000 years ago: People settle in Mississippi.

1000-1600 AD: The Mississippian Period. Mounds constructed include those at Owl Creek, Bear Creek, Pocahontas, and Jaketown, among others.

1000-1200: The rise of maize agriculture.

1200-1400: Mound building is at its height.

1250-1600: Emerald Mound constructed.

Late 1300s: Buildings on Winterville's main mound burn; mound building at Winterville site ceases.

1400-1500: Political upheaval and warfare, large population migrations due to war, disease, and slavery, and possible sustained periods of drought.

1539-1543: Hernando de Soto explores the Southeastern United States.

1600: Native Americans abandon Winterville Mounds for unknown reasons.

1798: Mississippi becomes a territory of the United States.

1805: Choctaws cede 4.5 million acres of land to the government with the Treaty of Mount Dexter.

1830: The Indian Removal Act places Mississippi Native Americans on reservations in Oklahoma. Throughout the 1830s, Native Americans from the Southeast United States are moved to the west in a journey that becomes known as the Trail of Tears.

1830: The Choctaws cede 11 million acres of land to the government with the Treaty of Dancing Rabbit Creek.

1939: Greenville Garden Club purchases Winterville Mounds.

1960: Winterville Mounds is operated as a state park.

1969: Winterville Mounds Museum opens.

1993: Winterville Mounds is designated a National Historic Landmark.

2000-present: Winterville Mounds is operated by the Mississippi Department of Archives and History.

NAME: _____ DATE: _____

Vocabulary List and Crossword

Review the words and definitions below. Then use your knowledge to complete the crossword puzzle on the next page.

attributes: character.

biotic: life.

chapel house: a religious place where bodies and bones of dead are deposited.

chunky: Native American game that required three or more players, one to roll or chunk the stone and others who threw spears where they thought the stone was going to stop.

communal: Used or shared by everyone; belonging to all the people of a community.

congregated: assembled.

conquistadors: Spanish soldiers who came to the New World seeking gold and riches.

cosmos: universe.

cultivated: farmed.

daub: baked clay.

diminishing: to reduce; make smaller.

displaced: removed.

elite: best, higher social class such as a head chief.

embodied: to give concrete form, personify.

environment: the world in which we live.

foraged: searched for and gathered food that occurs naturally in the environment.

functions: uses.

hierarchical: rank.

immunity: natural or acquired resistance to disease.

indigenous: native.

maize: corn.

matrilineal: inheriting or determining descent through the female line.

Mississippian Era: a term used to describe the time period at Winterville Mounds when Native Americans lived there. The period lasted from 1000-1600 AD.

nomadic: moves and wanders from place to place, not stationary.

paramount: superior.

plaza: large open space.

Pleistocene Era: the last great ice age when glaciers covered most of North America.

populous: people.

pre-Columbian: before Christopher Columbus discovered the New World; before Europeans.

prehistoric: before the written word.

preserve: maintain; to set apart for protection.

repository: a place where you store items.

rite: ceremony.

treaty: a formal agreement between two or more parties.

tributaries: a stream or river that flows to a larger stream, river, or body of water.

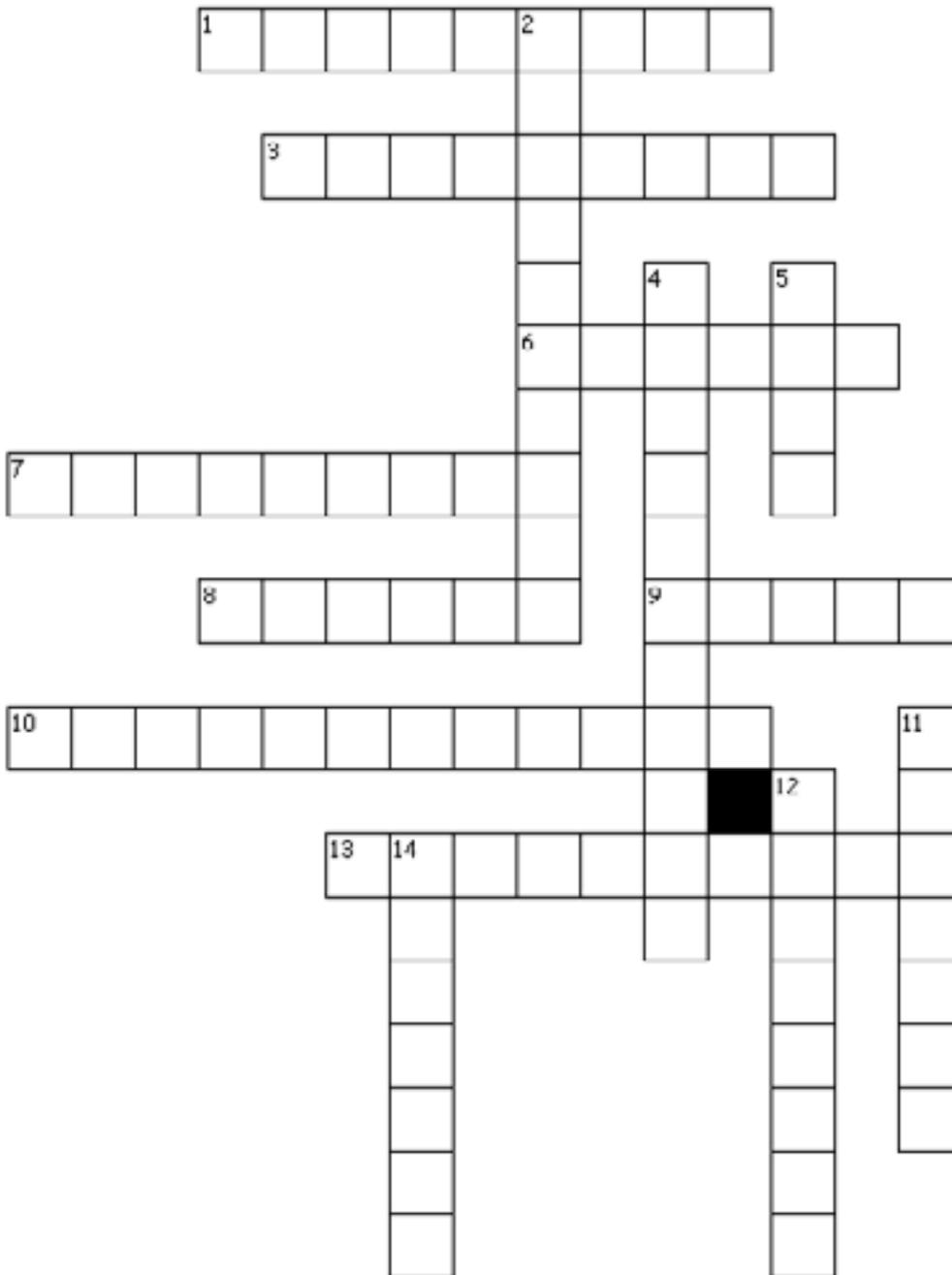
vassals: subordinates.

wattle: weave; like the Native American houses where they wove grass and other materials to form their structures.

NAME: _____ DATE: _____

Vocabulary List and Crossword

Use the vocabulary list to complete the crossword puzzle below.



Across

- 1. removed
- 3. uses
- 6. life
- 7. superior
- 8. universe
- 9. best
- 10. rank
- 13. native

Down

- 2. character
- 4. assembled
- 5. ceremony
- 11. subordinates
- 12. people
- 14. wanders

Vocabulary List and Crossword Answer Key

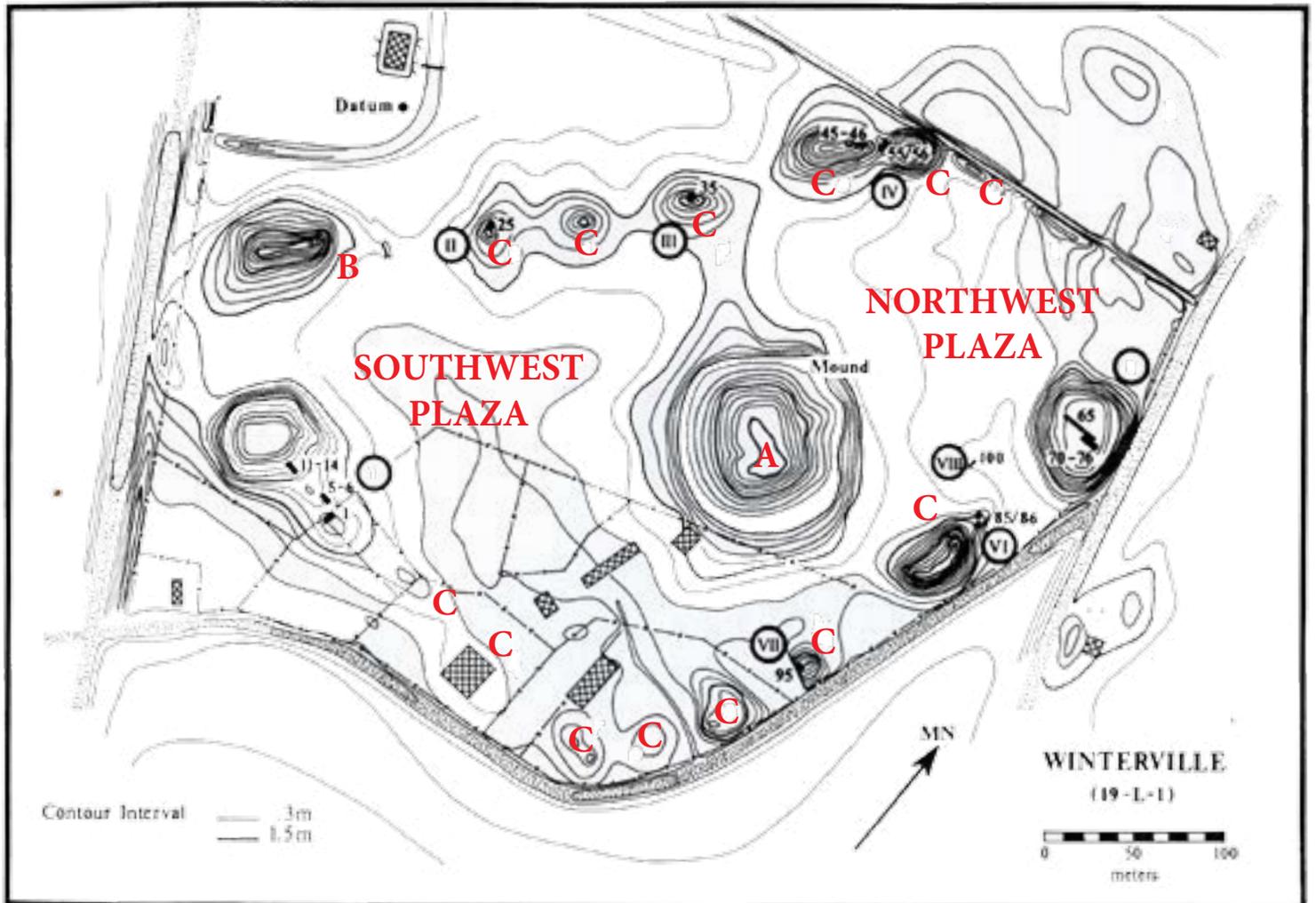
Across

1. displaced
3. functions
6. biotic
7. paramount
8. cosmos
9. elite
10. hierarchical
13. indigenous

Down

1. attributes
4. congregated
5. rite
11. vassals
12. populous
14. nomadic

Winterville Mounds Map



Topographic map of the Winterville site and locations of the excavations (adapted from the original prepared by Albert C. Spaulding in 1949 and published by Phillips in 1970. Winterville: Late Prehistoric Culture Contact in the Lower Mississippi River Valley by Jeffrey P. Brain, Mississippi Department of Archives and History, 1989.

Map Key

A Probable Main Ceremonial Mound

B Possible Workshops

C Probable House Mounds

Plazas