

Teacher's Guide: Blood Run National Historic Landmark

Goal

The student will understand the significance of the Blood Run Site and the Oneota culture, as well as the importance of archaeology for learning about the history of Iowa.

Objectives

- Demonstrate an understanding of the Oneota culture
- Understand the sacred nature of burial mounds
- Learn how different groups of people used the same land over time
- Recognize the role of archaeology as a tool of research and learning as well as destruction
- Learn that the history of Iowa goes back more than 2000 years

Site Summary

The Oneota (oh-nee-OH-ta) culture dates from approximately A.O. 1000 to the time of European contact (the end of the 17th century) (Anderson 1975). The culture was named after a small river of the same name in northeastern Iowa that flows into the Mississippi River. Translated into English, the name means "Place of a Rock." The river was renamed by early European explorers, and is now known as the Upper Iowa River. (Anderson 1975; Keyes 1951) Oneota sites occur throughout Iowa and the surrounding states (Alex 1980; Anderson 1975).

Iowa has several unique Oneota sites, including sites with burial mounds and the largest known Oneota site, Blood Run.

Like other Native American cultures and early European settlers, the Oneota built their villages along large rivers (Alex 1980). The rivers were used as sources of food and provided transportation routes for trade (Henning and Sass 1992). Built on the flat tops of terraces and bluffs along the rivers, these villages provided easy access to all the resources used by the Oneota. They were hunters and gatherers, hunting bison and elk, and gathering acorns, walnuts, raspberries, and plums (Keyes 1934). They supplemented these wild resources with corn, beans, and squash grown in small gardens (Alex 1980; Anderson 1981; Keyes 1934). The Oneota stored the vegetables for use in the winter or any time during the year when food supplies got low. If these resources did not provide enough food, the Oneota would move to a new area or raid the supplies of a neighboring village (Anderson 1975).

The Oneota dug holes into the ground up to seven feet deep and used them to store their vegetables. These holes, called "cache pits" (pronounced like "cash") or storage pits, served the same purpose as root cellars—a cool storage place for food supplies, such as corn and squash. (Alex 1980) After a few seasons as a storage pit, the pit was then used as a place to throw away trash. Excavation of these pits provides archaeologists with a wealth of information about the daily life of the Oneota since the pits contain broken or partially constructed tools and animal bones from meals (Henning and Sass 1992).

Archaeologists have been able to reconstruct some of the details of Oneota social life from the artifacts left behind. The decoration patterns on broken pieces of pottery (called "sherds"), for example, indicate that the Oneota were patrilocal (pat-ra-lo-cul) (Anderson 1975). This means that after a man and woman get married, they live with or near the man's family instead of the woman's. Large stone disks called "chunkey stones" have been found as well. These stones were used to play a type of game. (Anderson 1981)

Oneota village sites were large and often accompanied by large earthworks (Henning and Sass 1992). Typically, these earthworks were enclosures, believed to be a type of fortification or defensive structure. Some of the enclosures built by the Oneota are thought to have served ritual purposes since they are too small and/or poorly shaped to provide adequate protection. Only three sites, all occurring in Iowa, have earthen mounds that the Oneota used for burials (Henning and Sass 1992). Usually, the dead were buried in cemeteries near the villages, in trash pits, or in mounds built by earlier groups of people.

Excavations of village sites and mounds have revealed several defining characteristics of the Oneota culture. The Oneota made a unique type of pottery, using a combination of clay and shell. Tools called "manos" (mah-nos) and "metates" (ma-tah-tees), used to grind foods such as corn into a powder, are typical artifacts as well. Small stone triangular projectile points or "arrowheads" have been found indicating the use of bows and arrows in hunting. Artifacts made of a red stone called pipestone are common finds. These artifacts are pipes and tablets or plaques. The tablets are small stones with pictures and designs on them. The designs apparently represent stories or legends about mythical creatures. The later Oneota sites, those dating from just before 1700, contain brass bracelets, glass beads, and iron knives, all acquired through trade with Europeans. (Alex 1980; Anderson 1975, 1981; Henning and Sass 1992; Ohrn 1992).

The origins of the Oneota are difficult to pinpoint (Anderson 1981), however because of historical documentation such as maps, it is clear which tribes descend from the Oneota culture. The early European explorers and traders had maps indicating Native American tribes living in areas that later turned out to contain Oneota sites. The Winnebago, Ioway-Oto, and Missouri are known as "traditional" Oneota. The Kansa, Osage, and Omaha are the "acquired" Oneota. They are called "acquired" because these groups began in another place and when they moved into the Oneota area, they picked up (acquired) Oneota cultural traits. The Yankton-Sioux are believed to have shared Oneota traits as well. (Henning and Sass 1992)

The Blood Run Site is located in the northwestern corner of Iowa along the Big Sioux River and Blood Run Creek. It is the largest known Oneota site, covering at least 650 acres in Iowa and South Dakota. The exact boundaries are difficult to determine, so the total site may cover hundreds of acres more. Within the site there are features and artifacts from the prehistoric (before written records) through the historic (after European contact) periods. Due to its location, Blood Run has been referred to as a "gateway" to the cultures of the Great Plains. Blood Run shows the definite Oneota characteristics mentioned above, however, some artifacts indicate the influence of the Plains tribes living near the site. (Henning and Sass 1992)

The site has evidence of a long history of occupation and use. The earliest date of human presence is 6500 B.C., dated from a few stone tools found on the grounds of the quarry (Henning and Sass 1992). The occupation of the site peaked during the Oneota use, from approximately A.D. 1300 to 1700. The Oneota presence was the highest during the last quarter of the 17th century, roughly 1675-1700. During this time, up to 10,000 people may have lived there, gathering throughout the year for trade and ceremonial purposes. Regular use of the site ceased after 1720, however tribes continued to visit the site on and off through 1750.

Historical maps and documents place several tribes in the Blood Run area around 1700. Specifically, the Ioway, Oto, and Omaha had villages located along the Big Sioux. The Omaha tribe was the last tribe to use the site. (Henning and Sass 1992)

During the Oneota occupation, many of the features of Blood Run were constructed. The Oneota built mounds, stone circles, and earthen enclosures (Ohrn 1992). The mounds were both round and made in the shape of animals. The circles of stones were the only remains of their elm bark lodges. The Oneota used the stones to hold down the roof of their lodges (Henning and Sass 1992). A study in the 1880s documented as many as 176 mounds, but now only about 80 remain (Henning and Sass 1992).

According to this study, the earthen enclosure at Blood Run was only about two feet high, meaning that it was probably not built for defensive purposes. Originally, the mounds were two to eight feet in height and 30 to 60 feet in diameter. Today, some mounds are still this size, however most are much smaller due to continued cultivation of the land. (Ohrn 1992)

Few details are known about the way the Oneota constructed their mounds. At Blood Run, only a few mounds have been carefully excavated by professional archaeologists. To build these mounds, the Oneota began by clearing away the sod in the intended shape of the mound, usually a circle. Within this clearing, they placed the body or bodies of the dead. On top of this they heaped basketfuls of dirt from around the village, building a mound up to eight feet in height. Many of the artifacts found within the dirt of the mounds are basically trash from the village—broken pieces of pottery and tools that were mixed in the dirt. (Harvey 1979)

After the Oneota

The use of the land by the European-American settlers began after 1860. Cultivation of the land has greatly decreased the number of mounds, obliterated any animal shaped mounds and the enclosures, and removed the stone circles. The settlers built farms and quarries on the site. Most of the destroyed mounds were located on farmland and have been plowed over repeatedly. The railroad right-of-way cut through the area where an enclosure or possibly an animal shaped mound was located (Henning and Sass 1992). In the process of clearing the fields, the early farmers dismantled the stone circles and built a wall from the stones (Henning and Sass 1992).

Within the boundaries of the Blood Run site, there is a lot of evidence of European-American settlers and their farms from the nineteenth century. On the state-owned portion of the site, there are remains of one such farmstead. Known locally as the "Decker Farm" (also known as the Johnson farm), these remains consist of two small barns, the remnants of a small house, and the foundation of a larger house. Other parts of the site containing mounds are still owned and cultivated by local farmers. In addition to the farms, there are gravel quarries and a railroad right-of-way on the site. (Henning and Sass 1992; Ohrn 1992)

The character of land usage at Blood Run has changed significantly since the Oneota occupation. When Blood Run was an Oneota village, up to 10,000 people lived there (Henning and Sass 1992). Now, the same land is used to support four or five small families, no more than 20 people. The nature of agriculture is different as well. The Oneota kept gardens to supplement their diet of wild foods. Today the land is used for cropping, with the bison and elk long gone from the area.

In addition to the farm-related destruction of the mounds and other features, Blood Run has been the site of both amateur and professional excavators, along with "pothunters" (people who ruin archaeological sites by carelessly and illegally digging into mounds to find fancy artifacts to sell). To avoid additional damage to the mounds, no further excavations are planned. This is also

because the mounds are considered sacred, like modern cemeteries, and it is disrespectful, not to mention illegal, to excavate Native American burial mounds.

Instead of excavating, since excavation limits future study of the site, archaeologists prefer to use nonintrusive techniques to learn about a site. Non-intrusive methods include: aerial photography, surface surveys, and remote sensing of the ground, which works like a big x-ray. At Blood Run, finding artifacts on the surface is common, however artifacts must not be removed. Removing an artifact without thorough documentation ruins the site for further study. Remember to leave the archaeology to the archaeologists.

Vocabulary

Students should become familiar with these vocabulary words before visiting the Blood Run site.

Archaeology: The recovery and study of material evidence remaining from past human life and culture, such as mounds, buildings, tools, and pottery.

Burial Mounds: A burial place for Native Americans, particularly those of high status individuals, such as leaders and their families.

Culture: Behavior, belief, thought, and products characteristic of a community; a way of life.

Earthwork: A large construction of earth made by Native Americans. Many earthworks take the form of mounds; others were built as walls or enclosures for protection and rituals.

Excavation: The careful, scientific digging and recording of a site done by archaeologists to gather material evidence of past human life and culture.

Feature: Non-portable remains made or built by people, such as buildings and mounds.

Hunting and Gathering: A method of obtaining food; typically the men hunted animals, such as deer, bison, and elk, and the women gathered plant foods, such as nuts, seeds, and fruit.

Oneota: A Native American culture that existed in Iowa after A.D. 1000, and the predecessor of the Winnebago, Ioway, and Missouri tribes.

Pre-Visit Activities

Before your visit, plan some classroom time to try one or more of the following activities.

- Talk about artifacts and how they are used to interpret history. An artifact can tell us much about the people, the time, and the region from which it came. An artifact reveals what materials it is made from, when and where it was made, and how it was used. Sometimes its color and style tell us about popular trends. All of this helps us determine its relative value within the "material culture."

- Discuss what artifacts can tell us about individuals. Have each student bring in an "artifact" that reveals something about him or her (a belief, a tradition, a hobby, a personality trait). Gather the "artifacts" and have students identify who brought in which one, how they know, and what they can say about that student from the "artifact."
- Discuss the fact that Native American burial mounds are like our cemeteries-sacred. It is as disrespectful to walk on the mounds as it is to step on the graves in modern cemeteries. Do the Mound Maze activity-and make sure you don't trespass on any mounds!

On-Site Activities

Include these activities in your visit to Blood Run:

- As you walk around the site, look at the mounds. Pretend you have x-ray vision and can see inside the mounds. What do you see in there? Draw a picture of what you see.
- Take the tour around the grounds. Look at the remains of the farmstead. What might be preserved 100 years from now? Look at the mounds. Do you think they will still be visible in 100 years? What might still be there?
- Compare and contrast the remains of the farmstead and the mounds. Which group, Oneota or European-American farmers, had a larger impact on the land? Who altered the appearance of it more? (Remember: a large part of the land used to be tall grass prairie.)
- As you take the tour, play detective and note the features (buildings, mounds, paths) and artifacts that you see. Can you figure out who made them and why or why not? For example, which group of people, Oneota or European-American farmers, might have built a fence? Why might the farmers need a fence and not the Oneota?
- Look at the remains of the farmstead. Imagine living there over one hundred years ago when it was new. As a member of a farming family from the late nineteenth century, what might your life be like? For example, what chores would need to be done and who would do them? What would you eat for dinner?
- One of the reasons the Oneota built mounds was to make sure everyone knew what land belonged to whom. Play detective and find similar clues about the people who have lived on the land since the Oneota did. The farmers didn't build mounds to mark their land, what did they build instead?

Post-Visit Activities

Ask some of the following questions of your students after visiting Blood Run. After each question we give some suggested answers. Have your students expand on these answers.

- Draw a picture of what your x-ray vision revealed inside the mounds. Draw a picture of what your x-ray vision might reveal at a local cemetery. Are there any differences? What do the pictures tell you about life 300 years ago and life today? (Consider: both cultures are similar in that they both have ways to honor the dead)
- Imagine what it would have been like to live at Blood Run 300 years ago. What would you eat for dinner? Where would you sleep? What might the village have looked like? Draw a picture of what your family and house might have looked like. (Your dinner was gathered from the surroundings: bison meat, acorns, blackberries, and corn.)
- Discuss cemeteries in your community, such as Grand View Swedish Mission Cemetery just south of Blood Run. What is there? What can the cemeteries tell us about the community? (Consider: ages, relationships, religious beliefs, group associations) Compare and contrast the mounds at Blood Run to a local cemetery. Name some similarities, some differences.
- Imagine you are an archaeologist 2000 years from now trying to solve the mystery of life in Iowa. What clues about it might you find? What wouldn't you find? (Consider: plastic bottles versus books and newspapers) What artifacts might be difficult to interpret? (Consider: records and CDs, a shoehorn, fingernail clippers, a zipper, toy figurines)
- Archaeology is based on the study of material objects. From these objects, archaeologists must piece together the puzzle of the past, often without the help of written records or living people. This is like putting together a large jigsaw puzzle without a complete image and not all the correct pieces. What do the archaeologists miss about culture? (Consider: individuals, language, stories, voices, songs, music, ideas, dance, manners, games, and beliefs)

Here are some suggested themes for student research. Their results might be presented in both written and oral reports.

- What did the Oneota and their descendants look like? Investigate books and magazine articles (*The Goldfinch* is a good starting place) about Native Americans and look for clues. Draw what their clothing looked like (for winter and summer), how they did their hair, and who wore the ornamentation (necklaces, bracelets, earrings).
- Investigate other mound sites in Iowa, such as the Marching Bear Effigy Mounds and Toolesboro Indian Mounds. The Native Americans who built these mounds did not have tools like bulldozers and tractors to use for construction. Instead, they used their hands, baskets, hoes made of shell and bone. One basketful of dirt weighed approximately 25 pounds. Can you figure out a system to build a mound using only the Oneota tools? Draw what it would look like.
- The Oneota didn't raise corn like farmers do today. How did they do it? Investigate the methods used by Native American groups (the Oneota weren't the only people who grew crops) and compare these methods to the ones used by farmers today. List some of the similarities and differences. Did one system work better than the other? Why?
- "Blood Run" is an interesting name for a site and a creek. Historians aren't quite sure where the name came from (Henning and Sass 1992). Place names often reveal some of the history of the town or region. Investigate the name of your town (county, street, school). Where did the name come from? Was your town named after a person,

another place, or a prominent feature? Why? That is, if it was named after a person, what did that person do for the town?

- The book *Motel of the Mysteries* by David Macaulay (Houghton Mifflin Company, 1979) is about future archaeologists misinterpreting late-twentieth century American culture. Read the book and examine the "Treasures." (Some examples of the "Treasures": toilet paper is interpreted as "Sacred Parchment," a faucet as a trumpet, a toilet plunger as a percussion instrument, a toilet seat as "the Sacred Collar") Why were these items misinterpreted? Are there other items, places, or activities that might be misunderstood by future archaeologists?
- Create a list of 20 items that could be placed in a time capsule as "artifacts" that represent current American culture. Alternatively, create this list to explain American culture to people unfamiliar with it (aliens from another galaxy, someone from the future). Each item should have a reason why it should be included.
- Visit a local cemetery and do "above-ground" or "graveyard" archaeology. What characteristics (shape, size, design) of grave markers change over time? What types of symbols are used? What do these symbols say about the person buried there? (Consider: soldier, religious beliefs, groups associations, age) Look for markers with lambs on them. What do the lambs mean? Do rubbings of the markers using a pencil or a crayon and a large sheet of paper. Compare rubbings from different sections of the cemetery. (See "Doing Local History." [The Goldfinch, Vol. 14, No. 2, Winter 1992](#) for description, complete instructions, and suggested activities.)

Doing History

These activities may be used to further explore ideas presented at Blood Run. You may want to adjust the activities to the students' interests and abilities.

- The year is A.D. 1678, and the leader of the local Oneota village has just traded with the European fur traders passing through the area. Write a short story (or a play) from the point of view of a person your age in the village about what new and interesting items are being traded (new trade items included horses, glass beads, copper and brass pots and bracelets, and iron knives). What are your reactions to these new items? Do you like them better than what you had before? Then write a story (or play) about a similar situation today. Draw pictures to go along with the story.
- The red stone tablets or plaques had designs scratched on them that probably represented mythical creatures. These tablets were placed in medicine bundles. (Anderson 1975, 1981) Native American medicine bundles included tablets, animal teeth and bones, herbs, and other special items. Create your own medicine bundle that contains items unique to you. Include your own red stone tablet with a design and other items you consider special or unique to you.
- The Blood Run site does not have a museum or an Educational Center connected with it. After touring Blood Run and learning about the site, design an exhibit for the site. What types of artifacts would you include (arrowheads, pottery, beads, tools)? Would you include artifacts from the farmstead? Or, design a visitors' brochure for school children

about Blood Run. What aspects of the site would you focus on? What is the most interesting to you about the site and the Oneota?

- Bring in a strange collection of "artifacts" (such as random items from a junk drawer, board game pieces, etc.). Have students create an imaginary culture based on these artifacts. The students should define what each artifact was used for and why. Alternatively, students can create their own artifacts for a make-believe culture.
- Archaeologists study what people leave behind: that which was forgotten about, lost, or discarded as trash. In fact, a number of present day studies have focused on landfills. Try "Garbage-Can Archaeology." Gather two trash cans from different rooms in the school, such as the library and another classroom (but do not tell students their points of origin). Have the students go through the trash cans noting the placement of the items (the stratigraphy). Then have them classify the contents by type of artifact. Can they determine the activities that occurred where the trash can came from? (See *Discovering Archaeology: An Activity Guide for Educators* by Shirley Schermer, 1992, for description and more detailed instructions.)
- Alternatively, walk around a schoolyard or a park looking at the ground. Make a list of the "artifacts" on the ground. Look also at the "features" (paths, structures, land shapes). What types of items are they? What do they tell you about the site? Use descriptive language and not the common names of the site, such as baseball diamond or sandbox. See if other students can figure out the name of the site by description alone.

Resources

These materials will help you learn more about Blood Run, the Oneota culture, and archaeology. It may be necessary to order books or journals through interlibrary loan, so allow plenty of time to obtain the resource.

Books, Articles, and Videos: 4th-8th Grade

"Ancient Site at Cherokee." Video from Iowa's P.A.S.T. series. (State Historical Society of Iowa).

"Archaeology: Digging up History." *Cobblestone*. Vol. 4, No. 6, June 1983. (School Library, Public Library)

["Digging into Prehistoric Iowa."](#) *The Goldfinch*. Vol. 7, No. 1, September 1985. (State Historical Society of Iowa, School Library)

["Indians of Iowa."](#) *The Goldfinch*. Vol. 13, No. 3, February 1992. (State Historical Society of Iowa, School Library)

Porrell, Bruce. *Digging the Past: Archaeology in Your Own Backyard*. Reading, MA: Addison-Wesley Publishing Company, Inc., 1979. (Public Library)

Books, Articles, and Videos: 9th Grade-Adult

Alex, Lynn A. *Exploring Iowa's Past: A Guide to Prehistoric Archaeology*. Iowa City, IA: University of Iowa Press, 1980. (Public Library)

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Anderson, Duane C. *Eastern Iowa Prehistory*. Ames, IA: Iowa State University Press, 1981. (Public Library)

Deetz, James. *In Small Things Forgotten*. Garden City, NY: Anchor Press, Doubleday, 1977. A nontechnical discussion of historic archaeology. Includes a chapter on "Graveyard Archaeology." (Public Library)

Harvey, Amy E. *Oneota Culture: In Northwestern Iowa*. Report 12, Office of the State Archaeologist. Iowa City, IA: University of Iowa, 1979. A thorough, but very technical, description of an excavation at Blood Run. Good summary showing differences in the various Oneota sites in Iowa. (Public Library)

Macaulay, David. *Motel of the Mysteries*. Boston, MA: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1979. A spoof about future archaeologists misinterpreting late-twentieth century American culture. (Public Library)

"Myths and Moundbuilders." PBS Odyssey series video. Shows the early misconceptions about mounds (not Oneota mounds), archaeological excavations, and a mound building experiment. (Public Library)

Resources for Teachers for Teaching Archaeology to Students

Hawkins, Nancy W. *Classroom Archaeology: An Archaeology Activity Guide for Teachers*. Baton Rouge, LA: Division of Archaeology, Office of Cultural Development, P.O. Box 44247, Baton Rouge, LA 70804. 1984.

Hoyer, Julianne Loy. *Iowa's P.A.S. T.: A Classroom Manual for the Video Series*. 1993. (State Historical Society of Iowa)

McNutt, Nan. *Project Archaeology: Saving Traditions*. Longmont, CO: Sopris West, Inc., 1120 Delaware Ave. Longmont, CO, 80501. 1988. An archaeology curriculum for middle school and gifted elementary school students, with activities and project ideas.

Schermer, Shirley J. *Discovering Archaeology: An Activity Guide for Educators*. Iowa City, IA: Office of the State Archaeologist, 1992. Has activities and lists several resources for teaching children about archaeology. (State Historical Society of Iowa, Public Library, School Library)

Wheat, Pam and Brenda Whorton. *Clues from the Past: A Resource Guide for Educators*. Dallas, TX: Texas Archaeological Society and the Hendrick-Long Publishing Company, 1990.

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1951 "Prehistoric Indians of Iowa." *Palimpsest*. 32:281-344.

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