**The Mississippians: People of the River  
Native Americans in Olden Times for Kids**

The Mississippians are a vanished culture. Once, they lived along the banks of the Mississippi River. They built huge ceremonial sites and trading centers that serviced the tens of thousands of people - hunters, farmers, and merchants - the native people who lived in the outlaying villages.

They were great traders. They traded with people from the Gulf of Mexico to Great Lakes region. They traded a stone that was native to their area. Natives in other parts of the country used this stone to make weapons. In exchange they received a variety of goods including copper, food, clothing, pipes, headdresses, and masks.

They also grew food. They raised corn, beans, and other food. Mississippians were skilled farmers. They created new cultivating tools that allowed them to farm foods such as corn, squash, and many others that prior Indians had not yet before. What they did not eat, they stored and saved for winter. This process allowed their villages to grow, survive, and prosper even in the coldest of months.

There was a social hierarchy within the Mississippian society. Each tribe member had a role, but the chief acted and served as their “king”. The leaders of these people lived in luxury, with many servants. Scholars have also found pictographs of winged warriors, feathered snakes, and spiders. It has never been proven, but some scholars believe these ancient people visited [the Aztecs](http://aztecs.mrdonn.org/index.html) in olden times.

The Mississippians were innovators. Not only did they improve their lifestyle by establishing a solid farming system, but created new weapons and tools, such as the canoe and bow and arrow to aid in their survival. Additionally, they were the first to create and utilize canoes, rafts, and log bridges to connect villages to one another.

The Mississippians are often referred to as the mound builders. They spent hundreds of years building huge, steep platforms made of hard packed dirt - mounds. Many of the mounds were built in geometric patterns. Some were very long and wide - 1,000 feet long and over 700 feet wide. If you think of it as a football field - these huge mounds would cover over 3 football fields long and over 2 football fields wide! We're talking huge!

Most of the mounds were not very tall, perhaps only 3 feet or so. But some were over 70 feet tall! Scholars estimate it took over 200 years to build one of the super huge mounds. What does it take to get people working on one project for 200 years? For one thing, it takes strong rulers.

Why all the mounds? Scholars believe that mounds were used as a burial grounds. As archaeologists explore the mounds, they have found the ancient remains of toys and clothes and bones. But some mounds have nothing hidden in the dirt. No one knows what they were built to accomplish. It is a history mystery.