

“Teaching With Technology”

Contact Period in the Mississippi Valley

For the Native Americans who witnessed the arrival of the first Europeans, the event was, in many ways, cataclysmic. In order to help students understand the impact of the Contact Period in America’s history, the Arkansas Archeological Survey in partnership with the Department of Foreign Languages at the University of Arkansas, is developing multimedia educational software to explore aspects of the history of Native American encounters with Europeans in the Lower Mississippi Valley. The project will incorporate images, sound clips, foreign language materials and—perhaps of greatest interest—actual texts written by early explorers describing their experiences. The project is being funded in part by a grant from the National Endowment for the Humanities under its “Teaching With Technology” program. When the three-year project is completed in 1999, the software will be made available at no cost to schools and educational institutions via CD-ROM and the Web.

Project Content

The Lower Mississippi Valley was chosen as the focus of the project because the region witnessed a greater range of cultural encounters than almost anywhere else in the New World: English, French, and Spanish colonists met dozens of distinctive Native American groups. The software is aimed at several educational levels from upper elementary to university and offers three language tracts (English, French, and Spanish) that can be used separately or in conjunction. Since many of the original documents were written by French and Spanish explorers, we hope the program will motivate students to access the foreign language tracts to learn how to read these early texts. A special program to guide students in “Reading in a Foreign Language” will be incorporated into the design of the French and Spanish tracts. Instructors

who teach across the curriculum will have an educational program that includes anthropology, history, geography, social studies, English, and foreign languages.

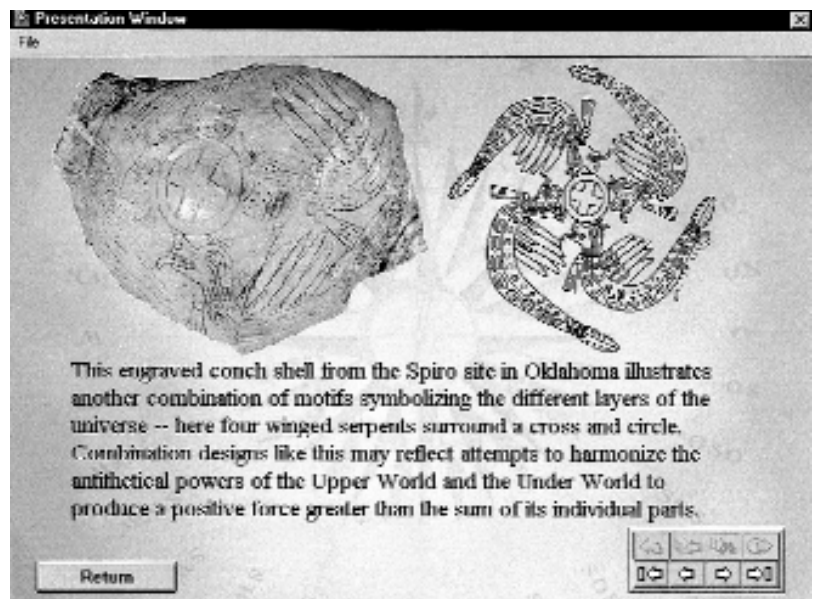
A primary goal of the project is to help students answer the question: “How does one derive from the archeological and historical record an understanding of what happened in the past?” The software will assist students in developing the skills necessary for creative inquiry and problem solving, ultimately engaging students in the process of learning. The software is not intended to be a multimedia encyclopedia, but rather an exciting exploration of the past and the means by which it is discovered.

Learning Modules

The software will provide one introductory module and five learning modules. Each module will be arranged in three levels of difficulty, beginning with an introduction to basic concepts and learning skills, advancing through knowledge building and evaluation of information, and culminating with advanced problem solving through the creation and analysis of data sets. Each module will explore various aspects of Contact Period experiences, as follows:

- **First Encounters.** In this module, students will learn that both Native Americans and Europeans possessed distinctive world views,

Designs on a conch shell from the Spiro site illustrate a Native American belief system.



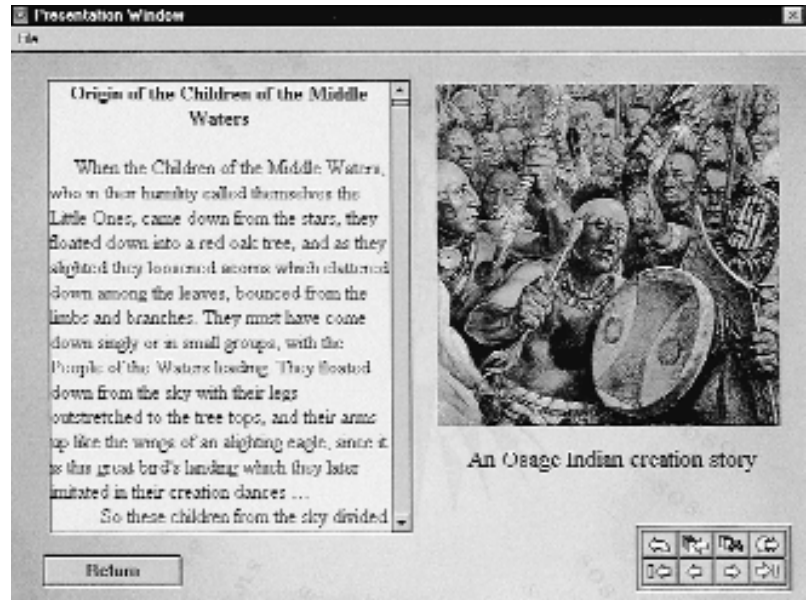
An excerpt of an Osage creation story is illustrated with original art by Charles Banks Wilson.

the similarities of which provided common ground for interaction, while the differences created misunderstandings and unfulfilled expectations.

- **Viewing the Land.** Ways of viewing the land and organizing relationships with the land, including how natural resources were used, also differed between Native Americans and Europeans. Through the use of maps and other graphics, students will explore geographic concepts, settlement patterns, and land use.
- **Interactions.** Native Americans and Europeans participated in rituals and other interactions through which they recognized each other's existence, created agreements to share the land and its resources, asserted rights of self-determination, sought means to cooperate, and made attempts at religious conversion. Sometimes these efforts were successful; sometimes they failed.
- **Exchanges.** Trade between Native Americans and Europeans was not just a matter of swapping material goods; mutual exchanges affected established economic patterns and created long-reaching consequences for Native peoples. In this module, students will use maps and other materials to examine the location of Native American settlements in relation to natural resources that provided goods for exchange between Native communities. Students also will explore the negative and deadly effect of European diseases upon Native Americans.
- **Legacies.** Native American interactions with colonial Europeans provided enduring legacies, preserved not only in historical documents, but also in the land and among its modern inhabitants. These legacies contribute to the value of historical knowledge in modern society. Students will be able to explore ways in which colonial-era relations between Native Americans and Europeans contributed to the shape of the land and society in the Lower Mississippi Valley today.

Review and Production

The project will be reviewed by an advisory board representing various specialties, including computer-assisted learning, foreign language learning, software development, secondary education,



and humanities, as well as representatives from Native American communities. The software will be developed using Macromedia Authorware® and Director®, and will be compatible with both Macintosh and Windows platforms. It will be available on CD-ROM and over the Internet; we will provide supporting material and teacher training to enhance use of the software. Interested readers can view the evolving progress of software development at the following Web site: <www.uark.edu/depts/contact>.

We envision a product that will provide instructors on several educational levels with an exciting means to use computer technology to teach across the curriculum and to engage students in the process of learning. In doing so, we hope students will discover the value of primary sources in the archeological and historical record, enjoy learning a foreign language or learning about the past, and ultimately apply these new-found skills to life-long learning.

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Screen captures by the authors.