



Peoples of the Mesa Verde Region Lesson Plan

A blended-learning lesson integrating online research, classroom discussion, and independent or small-group extension projects

Overview

The Crow Canyon Archaeological Center's [*Peoples of the Mesa Verde Region*](#) is an interactive, online timeline that traces the history of Pueblo and other American Indian peoples in the Mesa Verde region of the American Southwest. Covering more than 15,000 years, the timeline explores the origins of various Southwestern tribes and examines the impact of European-American settlement on indigenous cultures.

In this lesson, students will explore the timeline using a worksheet to focus their research. During classroom discussion, students will review and extend the concepts presented. Independent or small-group extension projects will enable students to work with selected concepts to create meaningful interpretations of Southwestern history.

Key Concepts

People, place, and the environment; migration; natural resource use; archaeology; colonization; cultural continuity and change; cause and effect; unity and diversity

Grade Levels

9–12

Guiding Questions

How have different cultural groups interacted with the environment in the Mesa Verde region over time? How does this history help us understand cultural and environmental change today?

Length of Time

Online research: 1–2 hours (modification for less time described below—see “Procedure”)

Classroom discussion: 30–60 minutes

Independent and small-group extension projects: 2–6 hours (or more, depending on grade level, individual classroom requirements, presentation formats, etc.)

Learning Objectives

Students will

- use the *Peoples of the Mesa Verde Region* online timeline to research the different groups of people who have inhabited this region;
- analyze relationships between humans and their environment by examining natural resource use, human migration patterns, and cultural change;
- make comparisons between their own lives and those of the people who have lived in the Mesa Verde region at different times;

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- analyze cultural change and continuity by comparing housing, food, artifacts, and migration patterns over time;
- study the impact of human migration on the environment and on people already living in the destination regions; and
- create multimedia projects that explore various dimensions of history and culture in the Mesa Verde region.

Materials

- *Peoples of the Mesa Verde Region* worksheet
- Extensions and Additional Resources handout
- Internet access for each student

Procedure

1. Provide students with the *Peoples of the Mesa Verde Region* worksheet. Help students complete the worksheet, as needed, using the online resource. Students who finish early can begin working on activities from the Extensions and Additional Resources handout.

Modification for less time or lower grade levels: Divide the worksheet into sections and have small groups of students research only one or two time periods or cultural groups. Before the large-group discussion, students present what they've learned about their time periods or cultural groups to their peers.

2. Review the completed worksheet with students. As you review, record important information about each time period on the board, and keep a running list of questions students have for further research.
3. Use the discussion questions below to further explore ideas and concepts presented in the online resource. Discuss ideas in a large group, in small groups that present back to the class, or individually as independent reflection questions.
4. Challenge students to take on one of the extension projects (or create their own) to further examine the daily life, history, culture, and modern-day presence of people from the Mesa Verde region.
5. Wrap up by having students discuss or reflect on final reflection questions (see "Reflection and Assessment").

Discussion Topics and Questions

1. What is culture?
2. What is your culture? Are you a member of more than one culture?
3. How would you describe the housing, food, and artifacts that are part of your culture (or cultures) today?
4. What evidence of your culture (or cultures) might archaeologists find a thousand years from now? How would they interpret your culture (or cultures) from that evidence?
5. Why did people in the Mesa Verde region move at different times in the past? Why do people around the world move today?
6. How did the environment affect the cultures of different groups of people in the Mesa Verde region?

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7. How does the environment affect cultures today? What happens to contemporary cultures when the environment changes?
8. Where do Pueblo, Navajo, and Ute peoples live today? Where do people of European descent live?
9. How are the Pueblo, Navajo, and Ute peoples similar to one another? How are they similar to peoples of European descent?
10. How are timelines constructed? What evidence do historians and archaeologists use to reconstruct history? How is our historical understanding of these groups limited by this evidence? What don't we know?
11. How might the different groups of people who have lived in the Mesa Verde region describe their histories differently than historians and archaeologists describe them? Why?
12. What has happened to the ancient villages, houses, kivas, and farm fields of the Mesa Verde region? Who is responsible for taking care of these historic places today?
13. Why should we learn about the history of the Mesa Verde region?

Reflection and Assessment

Have students respond to the following questions either by discussing in small groups or by writing their responses:

1. What factors drove population, cultural, and environmental change in the Mesa Verde region over the past 15,000 years?
2. How have these factors influenced the cultures and lifestyles of the different groups of people who have lived in the Mesa Verde region?
3. How do some of these same factors influence cultural and environmental change today? What different factors drive cultural and environmental change today? Cite specific examples.

Extensions and Additional Resources

Extensions

Students can work independently or in small groups on projects that explore one of the following topics related to the history of the peoples of the Mesa Verde region. Students may also come up with their own topics.

1. **Mesa Verde region timeline:** Create a comprehensive timeline of cultural change in the Mesa Verde region over the past 15,000 years. Organize information into categories (for example, cultural group, migration, housing and structures, food, artifacts) to track and describe changes through time.
2. **Migration timelines:** Construct timelines that focus on the movement of people in and around the Mesa Verde region over time. First, create 8½-x-11" transparencies of a map of the Mesa Verde region and surrounding area, all the way to the northern Rio Grande in New Mexico; set one aside as the "master." On the remaining transparencies, illustrate the territories and migration patterns of cultural groups during each time period. Next, lay the transparencies over the master map and compare migration and settlement patterns through time. Write explanations to accompany your maps. Be sure to explain the evidence for the migrations and why they might have occurred.
3. **Location studies:** Research important places in and near the Mesa Verde region, such as Mesa Verde National Park, Chaco Culture National Historical Park, the Hopi Reservation, the Navajo Nation, Hovenweep National Monument, the Ute Mountain Ute and Southern Ute reservations, and cities like Durango, Cortez, and Ignacio. Research reports can include maps of the areas and descriptions of the places. Include the history of occupation of specific places: When were they occupied? By whom? How long? Were there different kinds of occupations in different places? What was life like? Explain the importance of these places in understanding the history of the Mesa Verde region.
4. **Art and artifacts:** Research and replicate artifacts from each time period. Describe and analyze the replication process: What makes the manufacture of a particular artifact difficult? Easy? How did the way you made the artifact compare with the way people in the past made the artifact (did they use the same tools and materials)? How does the artifact work? Is the replica effective (at holding water, hitting a target, digging and planting, protecting the body, etc.)? Accompanying reports should describe the materials used to make the artifacts, as well as the uses and cultural significance of art and artifacts to various groups in the Mesa Verde region. Use the Artifacts Gallery (www.crowcanyon.org/artifactsgallery) on Crow Canyon's website to more closely study artifacts from the Mesa Verde region.
5. **Food and culture:** Compare foods throughout the human history of the Mesa Verde region. Cook specific foods, write historical "cookbooks," create illustrated histories of food preparation, or use nutritional analyses to compare ancient Pueblo diets with your own modern diet. Importantly, describe how the environment affected food diversity, availability, and preparation. Use Crow Canyon's online database *Plant Use by Native Peoples of the American Southwest* (www.crowcanyon.org/plantuses) to research the uses of common plants found in the Mesa Verde region.

6. **Around the world:** Compare the cultural practices of the Pueblo, Navajo, Ute, Spanish, and other peoples who lived in the Mesa Verde region at a given point in time with those of groups who lived elsewhere at the same time. What was life like in Egypt, Greece, China, Central America, South America, or the eastern United States? How did cultures use the environment to survive and thrive? What similarities existed between the peoples of the Mesa Verde region and other cultural groups? Explore connections between different groups of people in the past by researching trade networks—for example, what does the presence of macaw feathers and ocean shells at an ancient Pueblo site tell us about trade?
7. **Peoples of the Mesa Verde region today:** Use the Internet to research the Ute, Navajo, and Pueblo peoples living in the Southwest today. How does their history in the Mesa Verde region continue to influence their modern cultures and lifestyles? How is the Mesa Verde region’s landscape and culture still shaped by the contributions and legacies of these groups?

Additional Resources

Crow Canyon Archaeological Center and Website (www.crowcanyon.org)

Our website has a wealth of resources, including videos, photo galleries, online and classroom lessons, information about current archaeological research, information about education programs, and links to many additional resources. This is a great place to start!

Anasazi Heritage Center Museum and Website (www.blm.gov/co/st/en/fo/ahc.html)

This museum, located in Dolores, Colorado (just a short drive from the Crow Canyon Archaeological Center), offers interactive exhibits and lots of information about the history of the Mesa Verde region. It is also the starting point and information center for Canyons of the Ancients National Monument.

Mesa Verde National Park and Website (www.nps.gov/meve/index.htm)

This incredible national park (also just a short drive from the Crow Canyon Archaeological Center) is home to more than 5,000 archaeological sites, including 600 cliff dwellings once inhabited by Pueblo people.

Indian Pueblo Cultural Center Website (www.indianpueblo.org)

This website has abundant information about Pueblo Indian culture, past and present. A map of pueblos in New Mexico and links to individual pueblo websites help students access information about the lives and culture of Pueblo people today.

Time Team America Television Show Website (PBS) (www.pbs.org/time-team/home)

In 2012, the Crow Canyon Archaeological Center collaborated with *Time Team America* on a field school. Their website (go to home page, link to “Experience Archaeology”) describes the way archaeologists applied the scientific method to answer questions about “The Lost Pueblo Village.” A number of videos and links explore how archaeology is used to learn about Pueblo history.

Ute Mountain Ute (www.utemountainutetribe.com) and *Southern Ute* (www.southernute-nsn.gov)
Websites

These websites share information about the Ute Mountain Ute and Southern Ute tribes’ culture, history, and economic projects and government today.

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Navajo Nation Website (www.navajo-nsn.gov/index.htm)

The Navajo Nation website details the history of the Navajo Nation, reports on current tribal events and news, and describes governance structures and programs.

Hopi Tribe Official Website (www.hopi-nsn.gov)

This website shares links and information about current events and news from the Hopi Tribe. It also details governance structures and programs to support the needs of the Hopi people.

www.crowcanyon.org

School group programs: www.crowcanyon.org/schools

Classroom resources: www.crowcanyon.org/teachers

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