

**Monacan Women**  
**A home-based lesson plan**

Historical Background

Before English colonists arrived, there were many different Native American tribes living in North America. The Native Americans that lived in the area that became Louisa County were Monacans, part of the larger Siouan-speaking Native American group. The Monacans are an active tribe based out of Amherst, Virginia. For more information on the tribe, visit their website ([www.monacannation.com](http://www.monacannation.com)).

The Monacans were a **patrilineal**, agricultural society. They lived in villages surrounded by **palisaded** walls. They lived in domed lodges made of bark in their villages and temporary teepees when they traveled. They slept on reed mats. The Monacan men hunted deer, elk, and smaller animals. The men would leave their villages every year to visit their hunting camps. They would also leave to sell fur and other goods after the hunting season. They mined copper, which they used to make necklaces. The Monacans traded with the Powhatans to the east who cherished these copper necklaces. They also traded many goods with the Iroquois to the north.

Native American **gender roles** were very different from European settlers. Women were essential to the tribe's survival. Their duties were to gather (seeds, roots, fruits, and other wild plants), plant, harvest, and process food. They farmed the “three sisters” of maize (corn), beans and squash. They also cared for children, cooked, preserved food, made household utensils and furnishings, built lodges, and processed hides (the skin of animals) into clothing, blankets, floor coverings, teepees, and goods for trading. Some women were midwives and medicine women who used herbal medicine to heal the sick.

Diseases, such as smallpox and influenza, arrived in North America in the 1500s due to Spanish explorers. This meant that surviving tribes were already in a weakened state when colonists arrived in Central Virginia in the 1600s and 1700s. When the English moved into their area, the Monacan people wanted little contact with them and moved further west. Unlike the Powhatans, the Monacans were not friendly to the English and because of this the colonists never learned their language, the Siouan language. This is why today the historical record of the Monacans is extremely poor. When the English landed at Jamestown in 1607, the Virginia Siouans numbered more than 10,000 people. Between 1685 to 1790, the Virginia Indian population in the area east of the mountains was reduced by over 90 percent.

Colonial records contain only one statement made from a Virginian Siouan-speaker in the 1600s. In 1608, near present-day Fredericksburg, Virginia, Captain John Smith encountered warriors that fired bows at his men and ran away when the English returned fire. The recorded statement was made by a wounded Monacan warrior named Amoroleck who was left behind. When Captain John Smith asked Amoroleck why his people tried to attack his men he replied, “We heard that your people came from the underworld, to take our world from us.”

Key Words

Patrilineal - A kinship system that determines people's family or tribe membership based on their father, not their mother. In other words, a child belongs to the family group of their father, not their mother. Typically, men hold more power and property in patrilineal societies.

Palisade - A fence of wooden stakes fixed in the ground, forming an enclosure often for defense.



Photo Credit: Wikipedia

Gender Role - A gender role includes the range of behaviors and attitudes that are generally considered acceptable, appropriate, or desirable for people based on gender. Expectations for how different genders should behave vary among different time periods and cultures.

Discussion Questions

What were Monacan women's roles in their society?

What was a popular crop to grow among the Monacan Indians?

Why did the Monacans leave Louisa?

Activity - Cord Clay Pot

This pottery sherd was found by Dovetail Cultural Resource Group in Southside, Virginia. It is called an Albemarle-type prehistoric pottery sherd dating from 600 - 1200 AD. The pattern was created with a rope that had been wrapped around a wooden paddle.



Photo Credit: Dovetail Cultural Resource Group

Supplies

- Air dry clay
- Popsicle stick or pencil
- Rope, twine, etc.

Instructions

1. Roll a palm sized piece of clay in your hands to soften it.



2. Shape it into a pinch pot.



3. Wrap some rope or twine around a popsicle stick or pencil. Press into the sides of the pot to make patterns.



4. Let the pot air dry.

Activity - Beaded Necklace

Bead jewelry is deeply rooted in Native American culture. It was often used as a means of representing social classes. It was common for Native Americans to use parts from animals to make jewelry, including bones, teeth, animal hides, and even porcupine quills. They used tendons of animals and plant fibers to string beads together. They also ground oyster and clam shells into beads. Copper was a popular metal for Native American jewelry and semi-precious and precious stones were also used including turquoise, garnets, charoite, and gaspeite stones.



The beads of this Virginian Native American necklace are made from deer bones.  
Photo Credit: Don Ham Collection

Supplies

- String, yarn, etc.
- Beads
- Scissors



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Instructions

1. Cut a piece of string long enough to wear as a necklace.



2. String beads on the necklace one at a time making sure to leave enough room to tie the two ends together.



Activity - Three Sisters Garden

In a technique known as companion planting, Native American groups in North America planted winter squash, maize (corn), and climbing beans close together on a flat-top mound of soil (12 inches high and 20 inches wide). Rotten fish or eels were sometimes buried with the seeds to act as fertilizer. The corn provided a structure for the beans to climb, the beans provide nitrogen to the soil, and the squash provided shade to help the soil retain moisture and prevent weeds and the prickly hairs prevented pests. The corn was planted first. When it was 6 inches tall, the squash and beans were planted around it. Corn, squash, and beans provide enough nutrients to support a vegetarian diet.

Three Sisters  
Garden: corn,  
beans & squash.

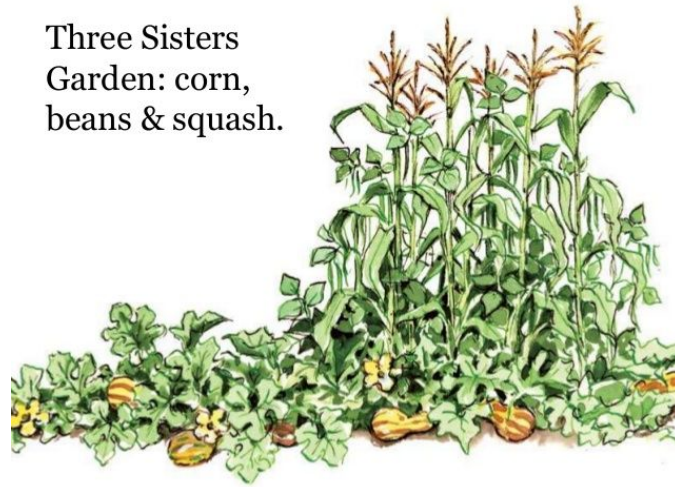


Photo Credit: Slideshare.net

Supplies

- Small pot
- Soil
- Corn, bean and/or squash seeds

Instructions

1. Fill the pot most of the way to the top with soil.
2. Plant the seeds following the instructions on the seed packet.
3. Water the soil and place the pot in a sunny, warm area.

