RUINSCAPE LESSON SHEET

Serpent Mound

On land | USA (Ohio) | about 300 BCE or 1070 CE (debated) | Grades 3-5

Name _____ **Date** _____

Serpent Mound is the largest snake-shaped earthwork in the world, and its builders are still debated.

Read the story

Serpent Mound is an effigy mound, which means it was built in the shape of an animal. It is about 411 meters long, about 1 meter high, and curves seven times before ending in a coiled tail. At the head is an oval shape, which some see as an egg or an eye.

Who built it? Early archaeologists thought it was made by the Adena culture around 300 BCE because of nearby burial mounds. Later radiocarbon dating suggested it was built by the Fort Ancient culture around 1070 CE. More recent tests point back toward the earlier date. Experts still discuss it.

Serpent Mound sits on the edge of an ancient crater, possibly made by a meteorite impact millions of years ago. The snake's head seems to line up with the sunset on the summer solstice.

How it ended

The builders' cultures changed over time, and the meaning of the serpent was lost. Farming threatened the mound in the 1800s, but it was protected after Putnam's efforts and is now a state memorial.

Key words

- effigy mound: a mound of earth built in the shape of an animal or figure
- radiocarbon dating: a way scientists find the age of things that were once alive
- crater: a bowl-shaped hole, sometimes made by a meteorite

Wow facts

- The head may line up with the sunset on the longest day of the year.
- The mound sits on an ancient crater that may have come from a meteorite.
- Frederic Putnam raised money in the 1880s to buy the land and save the mound from farming.

Talk about it

1. Why might people build a giant shape that is best seen from above?

2. Why do scientists sometimes get different dates for the same place?

Try this

Draw a map of Serpent Mound as it looked at its busiest. Label three things people did there.

Quick quiz

Circle the best answer.

1. **What shape is Serpent Mound?**
   - **A.** A snake
   - **B.** A bird
   - **C.** A bear
   - **D.** A turtle
2. **In which state is Serpent Mound?**
   - **A.** Ohio
   - **B.** California
   - **C.** Texas
   - **D.** Florida
3. **Why are its builders debated?**
   - **A.** Dating tests gave different results
   - **B.** No one has seen it
   - **C.** It moves
   - **D.** It is underwater

Go further

Open ruinscape.live/serpent-mound/ for photos, the Then and Now picture where there is one, and links to museum collections and research. On the globe, Lyra Kael can fly the class there and answer questions.

Answer key (for teachers)

1. A. It is shaped like a coiling serpent.
2. A. It is in southern Ohio.
3. A. Radiocarbon tests pointed to different cultures and dates.