

## The Mystery Artifact

Archaeologists and others, such as farmers, first found this type of bone artifact in the 1930s. They could not figure out what it was used for. A Kansas archaeologist solved the mystery 50 years later.



Archaeologist John Reynolds wondered how the Wichita built their houses. In 1982 he decided to find out by building a grass house. It was a challenging task.

First, Reynolds read what he could find on Wichita houses, including Chief Jim's oral history. Then he and his helpers cut tree limbs and took off the bark. They soaked the limbs in water. This made the wood soft so it would bend when building the frame.

Next, they gathered plant material for the outside. They could not use 8-foot-tall grasses like the Wichita because only a small part of the tall grass prairie still exists. They used cattails instead. They bundled the cattails.

Finally, it was time to fasten the bundles of cattails to the house frame. Chief Jim's oral history did not provide this information. Reynolds realized that he needed a tool to sew on the bundles. He experimented by making and using a long bone needle. The bone needle was threaded with cordage made from thin strips of bark from inside the elm tree. It worked.

At the same time, archaeologists were excavating at the Kermit Hayes Site in Rice County. They found a mysterious bone tool. They showed it to Reynolds. The mystery was solved! The design of the mystery tool and the tool Reynolds made were very similar.

Reynolds concluded that the mystery bone tool was a needle used for sewing bundles to the house frame.

How was the mystery of the artifact solved? One way archaeologists learn how people lived in the past is by building the shelters they lived in or by making the tools they used. This is called experimental archaeology.



### Student Journal

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Complete Column D.

You may want to build a small model of the grass house. You can use clay for the earth, twigs for the frame, string to tie the frame together, and long grass, weeds, or grain stalks for the covering. Use a large needle and thread to tie on the bundles.

