UNIT THREE:
First Peoples, First Encounters

INTRODUCTION FOR THE TEACHER

Key Topics
First peoples, perspectives and values, early history of region

Objectives
Students will:

a. be able to recognize First Peoples in the Illinois country

b. begin to plot and understand the settlement process, foreign exploration, impact on indigenous population, and impact of outside commercial interests.

c. use and critique primary sources as historical evidence (with particular emphasis on journals and drawings).

d. be able to interpret visual evidence.

Summary
A centuries old inaccuracy which has been used to justify then colonial designs of empire has been “We brought a people with no land to a land with no people!” In this unit students are asked to imagine the first encounters between Native Peoples in Illinois and the first French Explorers in the region. We explore the perceptions of one group of another, and how those perceptions are a selective process based on cultural assumptions. We also look at how the French presence moved from its original status as powerless guests of the Native Americans to a business partnership, upon which European power grew and eventually dispossessed the Native People. Students will notice the inconsistent use of labels to describe the Native Americas. Varying the identity labels was a deliberate decision to inspire questions among students. The First Peoples had their own names for their individual nations, and while early explorers most always referred to the particular tribe, the conquering society has not made such distinctions.

State Goals and Standards Met in Unit 3

State Goal 1: A, C
State Goal 5: A, B
State Goal 14: D, F
State Goal 15: A
State Goal 16: A, C, D
State Goal 17: C, D
State Goal 18: A, B, C
PORTAGES

If you were to explore an unknown land, what kinds of information would you like to find out? What kinds of concerns would you have? In small groups, create categories and list your questions.
LESSON 1
First Encounters in Illinois Country

The European Age of Exploration demonstrated multiple themes in the history of the 15th, 16th and 17th centuries. A new and growing awareness, knowledge and curiosity of the world, as well as competition among the empires for wealth and glory were among these themes and spurred travel to lands around the globe, which were then “claimed” for one empire or another. One chapter in this story is the French and their claim to and contact with North America, especially the lands that ultimately became Illinois. Though the French followed the general patterns of their European competitors, their interaction, their connection to and their records of the encounters are unique and shed light on the perceptions and exchange of cultures that transpired in the Native American and European encounters.

The French explorers and traders in the Illinois country were among the first Europeans to recognize the expertise of these “first” people of Illinois, to appreciate the beauty of the continent, to feel the excitement of mapping and charting its resources, and to see the amazing cultural contrasts exposed by contact with the Native Americans of this area. As Father Jacques Marquette’s journals show, before embarking on their adventure they had been in plenty of contact in France with Native Americans who had previously lived or traveled to the region. Along the way, friendly tribal peoples guided them as well. Marquette, the geographer Louis Jolliet, and five voyageurs made their way from St. Ignace (Michilimackinac) west through Lake Superior, down the rivers of Wisconsin, and some distance south on the Mississippi River. As they neared the territory claimed by Spain (near present day Arkansas), Marquette and Jolliet decided to avoid potential capture by Spaniards or Native Americans allied with them, and turned around. Heading north, the French explorers left the Mississippi where the Illinois River joined. Marquette was welcomed by the Kaskaskias, one of the tribes of the Illinois confederation (also including the Peoria, Cahokia, Tamaroa, Metchigamea and Moingwena tribes). This tribe led Marquette and Jolliet to the Portage Site.
ACTIVITY 1

The Exploration Route of Marquette and Jolliet

Marquette and Jolliet both drew maps of their journey. Use Marquette’s map (on the next page) to trace their travels. Compare it to Jolliet’s map in Unit 1 and to a current map. Compare these maps to the one published by the Illinois State Museum, below.

PRIMARY SOURCE

“Marquette’s Map” Chicago Magazine, 1857. Courtesy of the Newberry Library, Chicago

3.

First Peoples, First Encounters
Like other Jesuits in North America, Marquette kept a journal of his travels that would be published for readers in New France and France. In the Jesuit Relations of 1674, Father Marquette described his encounters with the Illinois in rich detail:

“At the door of the cabin where we would be received stood an old man who awaited us in a rather surprising posture, which constitutes a part of the ceremony that they observe when they receive strangers. This man was standing stark naked, with his hands extended and lifted toward the sun as if he wished to protect himself from its rays, which nevertheless shone upon his face through his fingers. When we came near him, he paid us this compliment: ‘How beautiful the sun is, O Frenchmen, when you come to visit us! All our village awaits you, and you shall enter all our cabins in peace.’ Having said this, he brought us into his own cabin, where there was a crowd of people who devoured us with their eyes, though they observed a profound silence...

“...Seeing all assembled and silent, I spoke to them by four presents that I gave them. By the first, I told them that we were journeying peacefully to visit the nations dwelling along the river as far as the sea. By the second, I announced to them that God, who had created them, had taken pity on them, inasmuch as after they had so long been ignorant of him, he wished to make himself known to all the peoples. I was sent by Him for that purpose, and it was up to them to acknowledge and obey Him. By the third, I said that the great captain of the French wished to inform them that it was he who established peace everywhere and that it was he who had subdued the Iroquois. Finally, by the fourth, we begged them to give us all the information that they had about the sea and about the nations we must pass to reach it.

“...They are divided into many villages...their cabins are very large and are roofed and floored with mats made of rushes....they are active and skillful with bows and arrows. They also use guns, which they buy from our Indian allies who trade with our French.....they live by hunting, game being plentiful in that country, and on corn, of which they always have a good crop....they also sow excellent beans and melons...consequently they have never suffered from famine....their dishes are made of wood and their ladies from the skulls of cattle, skillfully shaped to make a spoon for eating sagamite...their garments consist only of skins....”
A few decades later, in the 1690's, Pierre de Liette (under the pseudonym, DeGannes) offered an equally detailed account of the Illinois and the Illinois country, highlighting an especially large village. He, too, fell in love with the area:

“The Illinois country is undeniably the most beautiful that is known anywhere between the mouth of the St. Lawrence River and that of the Mississippi. Which are a thousand leagues apart... You see places on the one side that are unwooded prairies requiring only to be turned up by the plow, and on the other side valleys spreading half a league before reaching the hills, which have no trees but walnuts and oaks...you find virgin forest....consisting of tender walnuts, ash and white wood, Norway maple, cottonwood, a few maples, and grass taller in places than a man....you find marshes, which in autumn and spring are full of bustards, swans, ducks, cranes and teals...and prairies of extraordinary extent.” (pp. 302-306)

He described the process by which “women...go off in canoes...to cut reeds with which they cover their cabins....” (pp. 339-347) He noted that there were 260 such cabins and 800 warriors, probably creating a Grand Village of 20,000...They [the warriors] are tattooed behind from the shoulders to the heels, and as soon as they have reached the age of twenty-five, on the front of the stomach, the sides and upper arms.” (pp. 323-327)

De Liette also witnessed the buffalo hunting techniques of the Illinois: “The Indians started out in two bands, running always at a trot. When they were about a quarter of a league from the animals, they all ran at full speed, and when within gunshot they fired several volleys and shot off an extraordinary number of arrows....As for me, I did not shoot. Their appearance filled me with terror, and I withdrew from our troop when I [saw] them approach; which set all the savages laughing, at which I was not a little mortified. It is certain that those animals are frightful looking and usually terrify people who have never seen them.” (310-311)

The funeral and burial traditions of the Illinois were recorded by DeGannes as well: “...they paint his face and hair red, put on him a white shirt if they have one, and new mittasses of cloth or of leather, and moccasins, and cover him with the best robe they have. They put in a little kettle or earthen pot, about a double handful of corn, a calumet, a pinch of tobacco, a bow and arrow...” (pp. 357-361)
QUESTIONS

1. How would you interpret the special “posture” of greeting described by Marquette?

2. How do you think the Indians would have received the news that the priests were there to “save” them?

3. What do Marquette and DeLiette/DeGannes reveal about their own values from these accounts of Native American behavior? Both men’s journals were meant for public readership. What might have been the purposes in publishing their accounts?

4. In what ways are present burial traditions like or unlike the Indian traditions described here? What do the Indian traditions imply about their beliefs in God or the afterlife?

5. Why would the Illinois seem to accept the French into their area, their way of life?

6. What do the French seem to hope for in their encounters with the Illinois?
1. Comb the two documents for details. Construct a chart that lists details on the following: a description of Illinois, the people, food sources, housing, customs, etc. List any additional questions you have and check the original sources for the answers.

2. Make a sketch based on the accounts of either Marquette or DeLiette/DeGannes.

3. Imagine that you are a shaman or leader of the Illinois. Either write or draw a description of the dream you had about the encounter with the French. Predict the future of the relationship with the white man.

4. Take a trip downtown or through your neighborhood and keep a “travel diary.” Note interesting sites and people you see along the way; also consider recording your impressions with sketches as well.
LESSON 2

Images from the Encounter

From the first encounters, the Native Americans had their own opinions of the Europeans, though these rarely find their way into our histories. If we look closely, however, we can discover those opinions. Some of their thoughts were translated and written down by Europeans. Though Native Americans had no known written language, they shared the stories and observations of their way of life and encounters with Europeans through a rich oral tradition and they also made images of the Europeans and their encounters. For example, the following image was made at a meeting to sign a treaty between Americans and the Ojibways in the 1820s. The artist highlights what distinguished white culture from their own.

In addition to the accounts they wrote, the French also made visual images of the First Peoples. In the “Codex Canadiensis,” 1675-1680 French Jesuit Jean Louis Nicolas sketched the country’s flora, fauna, and people. The drawings are rich with the details about which both Marquette and DeLiette/DeGannes had written.

1. Divide into small groups. Examine either the image of Native Americans drawn by Father Nicolas OR the image of Americans drawn by an Ojibway. Make a comprehensive list of the details in each image.

2. Given that there were probably many things to notice about each other, imagine why the details pictured would have drawn the European’s or the Ojibway’s attention. What values are reflected? Explain.
A View of Native Americans

LESSON 3

From Encounters to Exchanges: Building Commercial Relationships

In the midst of this early exploration, religious conversion, and journal recording it was established that the Illinois emptied into the Mississippi which emptied into the Gulf of Mexico, and more French came to settle. Explorer Robert de LaSalle staged an imposing ceremony to claim the entire mid-continent in the name of King of France. By 1700, a new relationship, the French/Indian fur trade, was well-established. In the initial stages of this trade the voyageurs (with a license to trade furs) and coureurs des bois (fur traders without a license) would trade manufactured goods (metal pots, cloth, knives, guns) to the Native peoples who hunted and trapped the fur bearing animals. Beaver was particularly popular because its water proof fur made excellent hats for Europeans.

The European traders treated their Native American hosts with some respect, as it was Native civilization that had the power and made the rules. Paddling between supply depots like that at Michilimackinac at the northern end of Lake Michigan and Indian villages on the rivers of the Illinois country, the European traders crossed the open stretches of water and land with their canoes, heavy with cargoes of skins and trade goods. Their physical stature was small (no taller than five feet) but their strength was renowned due to the rugged routes and portages they traveled and the fairly solitary nature of their lives.

Even though the fur trade was important to New France, the nomadic life of the fur traders would not have permitted the growth of the European settlement without the establishment of more missions, villages, forts, and the cultivation of crops and cattle and other sources of industry and economic pursuits. Through settlements, arrangements, and outright claims of land, the European “footprint” grew in the Illinois country. But the French (as well as the later English) conception of land ownership was baffling to the Illinois. Traditions of hunting grounds and loosely identified territories were respected until war between tribes, when revenge or honor saw one tribe obtain more land from another. The Illinois thought their connections with the French would protect their way of life. But the Illinois continued to move south down the Mississippi and anti-French tribes decimated the Illinois, along with diseases, intermarriage and other factors. The population dropped to about 2,000 persons by 1763. Yet no inter-tribal wars or land acquisitions of the Native American populations could have prepared them for the wars of empire and the consequences of those wars between the French and the English. This contest for empire would result in the cession of the French claims to the English in 1763, and spell the beginning of the end of collaboration between Europeans and Indians in Illinois.

The Illinois Confederation in an 1803 treaty “relinquished and ceded to the United States all the lands in the Illinois country, which the said tribe had heretofore possessed.....reserving to themselves the tract of about 350 acres near the town of Kaskaskia....” In 1818, they left the new state of Illinois, moving first into treaty lands in the Missouri Territory, then on to Kansas treaty territory, and finally to Oklahoma after the 1867 treaty.
QUESTION

How would this area had been different had the French not come to Illinois? How would Illinois have been different had the French not lost their empire to the English?

ACTIVITIES

1. In the style of a newspaper investigative report, students will compose two paragraphs that summarize the main themes (migration/diversity, business/commerce, (contact/conflict) and raise questions that peak their curiosity.

2. A great civilization existed long before the French came. The Grand Village of the Illinois, to which Marquette alluded and of which Deliette wrote, has been unearthed by archaeologists. It had been occupied by the Kaskaskia and Peoria subtribes during the 17th century and features remnants of many of the cultural artifacts and subsurface pits that characterized the day-to-day life of these people. Dr. Margaret Kimball Brown has chronicled the story of the Illinois, especially those who dwelt in the Grand Village of the Kaskaskia in the Starved Rock/Peoria area. Her work is archaeological, and the pamphlet, The First Kaskaskia: The Zimmerman Site, is readable and illustrated extensively, as well as enhanced with excerpts of eyewitness accounts. In addition, see the museum’s website: www.museum.state.il.us/.

   • Draw a picture of the Grand Village of the Kaskaskia, including as many of the details about which you read. List the sources used to verify and identify the Grand Village. What additional sources did you find?

   • Conduct a history research project: What happened to the Grand Village?
UNIT EXTENSIONS

Did Native Americans Stay in One Place?
Trace the movement of the various tribal peoples who lived in the region that became Chicago or Illinois. When did changes occur and why? More about Native peoples of Illinois is available at the Illinois State Museum website:

http://www.museum.state.il.us/muslink/nat_amer/index.html


Integrate the Arts into Explorers’ Journals
Read Marquette’s journal or DeLiette/DeGannes account of their travels in Illinois. With either account, select from the following activities:

- create a play based on either of the narratives
- create a visual image (mural, picture, sculpture) inspired by their words
- rewrite the account from the perspective of the Native peoples they encountered.

Discover More Explorers
Many other French explorers travelled in the Illinois country or the Great Lakes region—before and after Marquette, Jolliet, and DeGannes. Find out about them. Check out the website for the Museum of New France based in Canada too. Consider creating a “talk show” where a variety of French explorers could be interviewed about their perceptions of Illinois, the people, their relations with the Indians, and their intentions.