

Discovering Alabama

Teacher's Guide Marble City

Suggested Curriculum Areas

History
Science
Social Studies

Suggested Grade Levels

4–12

Key Concepts

Geologic Time
Geologic Deposition
Artistic Expression

Key Skills

Map Reading
Research
Observation

Synopsis

Artists, scientists, and entrepreneurs have for centuries been inspired by a snowy white layer of ancient calcium carbonate buried beneath the soils of Talladega County, Alabama. Known as Sylacauga marble, this earthen marvel is famous worldwide for its pureness and beauty. *Discovering Alabama's "Marble City"* explores the geological history, the industrial history, and the art history of this unique Alabama marble.

This project is supported by a grant from the Alabama Humanities Foundation, a state program of the National Endowment for Humanities.



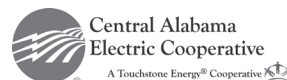
THE UNIVERSITY OF
ALABAMA



Discovering Alabama is a production of the Alabama Museum of Natural History in cooperation with Alabama Public Television. For a complete list of titles in the *Discovering Alabama* series, as well as for information about ordering videos and accompanying Teacher's Guides, contact us at either: *Discovering Alabama*, Box 870340, Tuscaloosa, AL 35487-0340; phone: (205) 348-2039; fax: (205) 348-4219; or email: orders@discoveringalabama.org. Also visit our website: www.discoveringalabama.org.

This program was produced with support from the following organizations:

*The Solon and Martha
Dixon Foundation*



Alabama Department Of
Conservation and Natural Resources
State Lands Division

Before Viewing

1. Display for the class a number of commercial products that incorporate calcium carbonate (see back panel of this guide for a list of such items). Ask students to examine the items and try to determine (or give their best guess) as to the geological substance that is common to all the items. Place students in small groups and have them discuss their ideas and work to reach group consensus about the common substance.

2. Share with the class that this particular geological substance has many differing uses, from constructing buildings to sculpting artwork. Give each small group a large geological map of Alabama (see **Additional References and Resources** for recommended map sources) and ask them to find what this substance might be and where it is found in the state. Introduce the video without revealing the title or the topic, but by simply explaining that the video presents an intriguing story of the history of this special Alabama resource.

While Viewing

Have students note the various uses of this unique substance.

Video Mystery Question: The superb quality of Alabama's Sylacauga marble has been compared to the high-quality marble found in another part of the world. Where? (**Answer:** Italian marble has been the singular most prized

marble since Roman times—until the discovery of Alabama's comparable Sylacauga Marble.)

After Viewing

1. Return students to small groups to spend a few minutes compiling their notes about the uses of Sylacauga marble. Discuss how Sylacauga marble has contributed economically, culturally, and artistically.

2. Have students examine the geological map and find the region that has Sylacauga marble. Next have them find the geological region in which your school is located. Discuss how geological resources in your part of the state have contributed economically, culturally, and perhaps artistically. (Such resources might include local minerals, soils, construction materials, special geological formations, landscapes, etc.).

Extensions

1. View other *Discovering Alabama* programs that present significant Alabama geological features. Examples include "Alabama's Geological History," "Tracks Across Time," "Alabama Caves," "Little River Canyon Preserve," "Black Belt," and "Wetumpka Impact Crater."

2. Visit the Alabama Museum of Natural History and view exhibits of a variety of geological items, including an array of marble samples from around the world.

Philosophical Reflections

The video concludes with revisiting the fact that Sylacauga marble is a unique wonder from within the earth and that this substance is crafted by skilled artisans to yield uniquely beautiful sculpture—thus the video theme "from earth to art." History reveals that humankind has long expressed a desire for creating artistic imagery through nature, from cave paintings of prehistoric periods, to arts and crafts of American Indians, to the marble sculpting that continues today. Do you think such artistic creation is a cognitive, utilitarian function of the human mind, or do you think it is an expressive need of the human spirit?

Nature in Art

Invite an artist (preferably a local artist) skilled in crafting, drawing, constructing, photographing, or sculpting, using nature or natural materials as a chief medium. Challenge students to each create their own artistic item with nature or natural materials as a chief medium.

Community Connections

As the video reveals, Sylacauga marble has contributed significantly to the history, economy, and culture of the Sylacauga area. Have students research the role/contributions of similarly significant natural resources in your area (for example, forests, water, coal, limestone, sand/gravel, soils, oil/gas, etc.).

Additional References and Resources

A Brief History of Sylacauga Marble by Ruth Cook. B.B. Comer Memorial Public Library Foundation, 2009.

A Brief History of the Marble Industry in Sylacauga by Ed Dodd. *Alabama Heritage*, vol. 20 (Spring 1991).

“Giuseppi Moretti” in *Encyclopedia of Alabama* (encyclopediaofalabama.org/)

Interesting websites

B.B. Comer Memorial Public Library, Sylacauga, Alabama (in their collection is a variety of Sylacauga-marble reference materials and they host the Sylacauga Marble Festival), <http://www.bbcomerlibrary.net/>, (256) 249-0961.

Alabama Museum of Natural History (exhibit display of marble from around the world), amnh.ua.edu, (205) 348-7550.

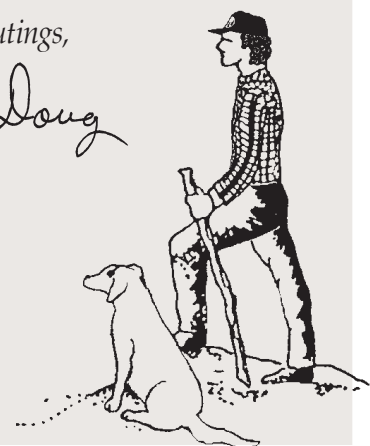
Parting Thoughts

Over the years it has been my good fortune to have many friends and acquaintances from Sylacauga, including a number of city officials and other local leaders. I've always been impressed with the character of the people and the spirit of the community. Thus I am honored that Discovering Alabama has always been warmly welcomed at events in Sylacauga. The Discovering Alabama staff is pleased at the opportunity to partner with Sylacauga, the Alabama Humanities Foundation, and the Alabama Arts Council in celebrating the annual Sylacauga Marble Festival. With the support of these partners and the generosity of the other contributing program sponsors, Discovering Alabama's "Marble City" presents the natural history and human history that combine to constitute the interesting legacy of Alabama's Sylacauga marble.

Oh yeah, I almost forgot. The name Sylacauga is a derivation of the early name, sylocogga, given by Shawnee settlers to the area in 1748. The earlier term means "buzzard roost," though the Shawnee apparently enjoyed the area and used the marble in making arrowheads.

Happy outings,

Dr. Doug





Discovering
Alabama

Activity/Information Sheet

Marble City

Calcium Carbonate

End Uses

Paint

- Wall Paint
- Traffic Paint
- Industrial Paint

Rubber

- Electric Wire Covers
- Tires: White Sidewalls
- Cove Base

Caulks & Sealants

- Road Joint Sealer
- Tube Caulks
- Joint Compound
- Glazing Compounds
- Plywood Patch

Paper

- Fillers
- Coatings
- Special Purpose

Other Uses

- Rug Backing
- Shoe Polish
- Tooth Paste
- Food
- Chewing Gum
- Rice Polishing
- Cleaners
- Cultured Marble
- Carpet Cleaner
- Acid Neutralizer
- Blackboard Chalk

Plastics

- PVC Piping
- Furniture
- Wallpaper
- Siding
- Flooring
- Electric Wire Coverings
- Plastics
- Cove Base/Stair Treads
- Polyesters
- Automotive Body
- Frozen Food Dishes
- Trays
- Tubs & Showers
- Caskets
- Polyolefin
- Diapers