

# 4

## What was the Iroquois Confederacy?

### Chapter Focus Questions

- What was the social structure of Iroquois society?
- What opportunities did people have to participate in decision making?
- What were the ideas behind the government of the Iroquois Confederacy?

The last chapter explored the government of ancient Athens. This chapter explores another government with deep roots in history: the Iroquois **Confederacy**.

The Iroquois Confederacy formed hundreds of years ago in North America — long before Europeans first arrived here. The structure and **principles** of its government influenced the government that the United States eventually established.

The Confederacy united five, and later six, separate **nations**. It had clear rules and procedures for making decisions through representatives and consensus. It reflected respect for **diversity** and a belief in the equality of people.

### Pause

The image on the side of this page represents the Iroquois Confederacy and its five original member nations. It is a symbol as old as the Confederacy itself. Why do you think this symbol is still honoured in Iroquois society?

## What are we learning in this chapter?

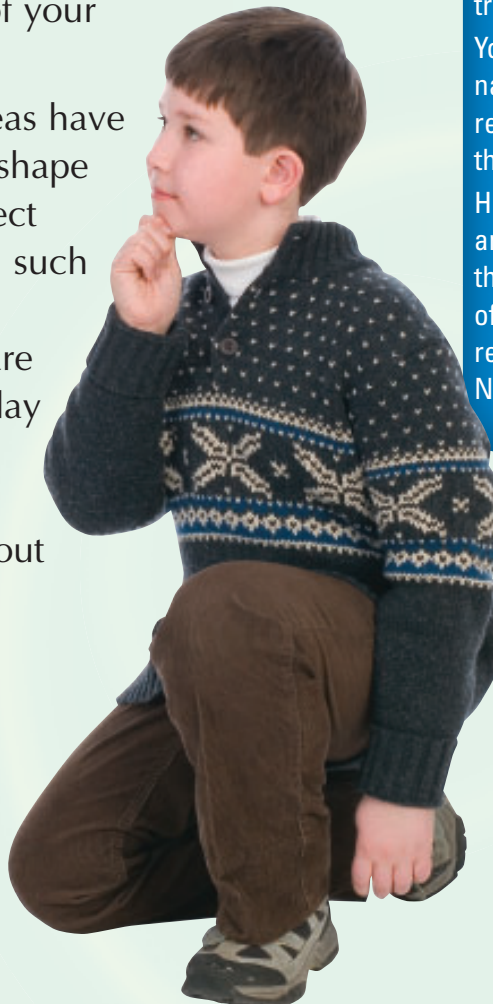
This chapter explores the social structure of Iroquois **society**, which showed particular respect for women and for people of other cultures.

It also explores the structure and processes of Iroquois government. Think back to Chapter 3, where you saw how the social structure of ancient Athens determined the way people participated in its government. In this chapter, you will learn about the roles and responsibilities of people in the Iroquois Confederacy.

## Why are we learning this?

When you look around your community, what traces of the past can you see? For example, what is the oldest building in your community? What road first connected your community to other parts of your region?

Just like buildings and roads, ideas have roots in the past. The ideas that shape Canada's government today reflect ideas from other, older societies, such as the Iroquois Confederacy. By exploring the Confederacy, we are exploring ideas that affect us today — ideas such as equality, consensus and respect for diversity. We can learn more about them and discover how they influenced democracy.



### Iroquois versus Haudenosaunee

There are two names for the Iroquois people today: Iroquois (ear-o-kwa) and Haudenosaunee (how-den-o-show-nee).

Iroquois is a name that dates from the fur trade during the 1600s. The French learned this name from the Ouendat (wen-dat), an enemy nation of the Iroquois.

Haudenosaunee is what the people call themselves in their own language. It means “people of the longhouse” and comes from the name for the people’s traditional dwelling.

You need to know both names when you do research online or in the library.

How do the names *Iroquois* and *Haudenosaunee* reflect the different perspectives of peoples? How do they reflect the history of North America?

# Chapter 4 Inquiry Task

## Creating a multi-media presentation about the Iroquois Confederacy

### Introduction

The Past to Present Exhibition is on the move! Directors of the exhibition have just unveiled their plans for a new multi-media presentation which will travel to Grade 6 classrooms. The purpose of the presentation is to share information about the society and government of the Iroquois Confederacy.

### The Task

The Past to Present Exhibition has asked you to research and create a presentation entitled: “Democracy in Action: the Iroquois Confederacy.”

To provide background information for Grade 6 students, you will need to explain historical context. Historical context means when and where something existed or happened. Provide information on the following points:

- The structure of the Iroquois Confederacy
- The role of women in the Iroquois Confederacy
- The use of consensus in the Iroquois Confederacy
- The importance of **wampum** belts to Iroquois identity

Your presentation must conclude by giving evidence to answer the following question:

- How did the Iroquois Confederacy establish the democratic ideas of fairness and equity?

Since this presentation will be for Grade 6 students, you must think of an innovative and intriguing way of sharing this information. Remember to create a reference list so that people who attend the exhibition will know where you found your information and where they can find more information themselves.

## Things to think about before starting the task

As you work through the chapter, you will be gathering information that will help you with the task. When you are researching you should cite, or record your **references**. This means acknowledging the contribution of other people's ideas. Use the following guidelines to reference your resources.

### Books

Author (publication date). Title. Publication Location: Publisher.

Example:

Cairo, Mary & Soncin, L (2003). *Faces of Government*. Edmonton: Duval House Publishing Inc.

### Encyclopedias

Title. (publication date). Publication Location: Publisher

Example:

Encyclopedia Britannica. (2002). Chicago: Encyclopedia Britannica.

### On-Line Resources

Great Lakes Information Network. (2007) *Native Peoples of the Region: Settlements and Warfare: Flag of the Five Nations*. Retrieved September 20, 2007 from the Great Lakes information network website.

## SKILLS at Work

Plan a system for recording your references as you go. You could use a **database** or a chart. What system will work best for you?

- include references in an organized manner as part of research



## SKILLS at Work

Before you begin this section, list some questions you have about Iroquois society and government. Consider whether the information in this section answers your questions. Jot down new questions you have, based on what you learn from this section.

- formulate new questions as research progresses
- determine the reliability of information filtering for point of view and bias



## Getting Started

# How did the Iroquois Confederacy begin?

### What's important?

Understand that the Iroquois Confederacy is made up of separate nations, bound by the Great Law of Peace, and that it is many centuries old. It still exists today.

### Founding the Iroquois Confederacy

Five different nations founded the Iroquois Confederacy: the Seneca (Sen-e-kuh), Cayuga (Ky-you-guh), Onondaga (On-on-da-guh), Oneida (O-nee-duh), Mohawk (Mo-hawk). Each nation kept its own territory, language and culture.

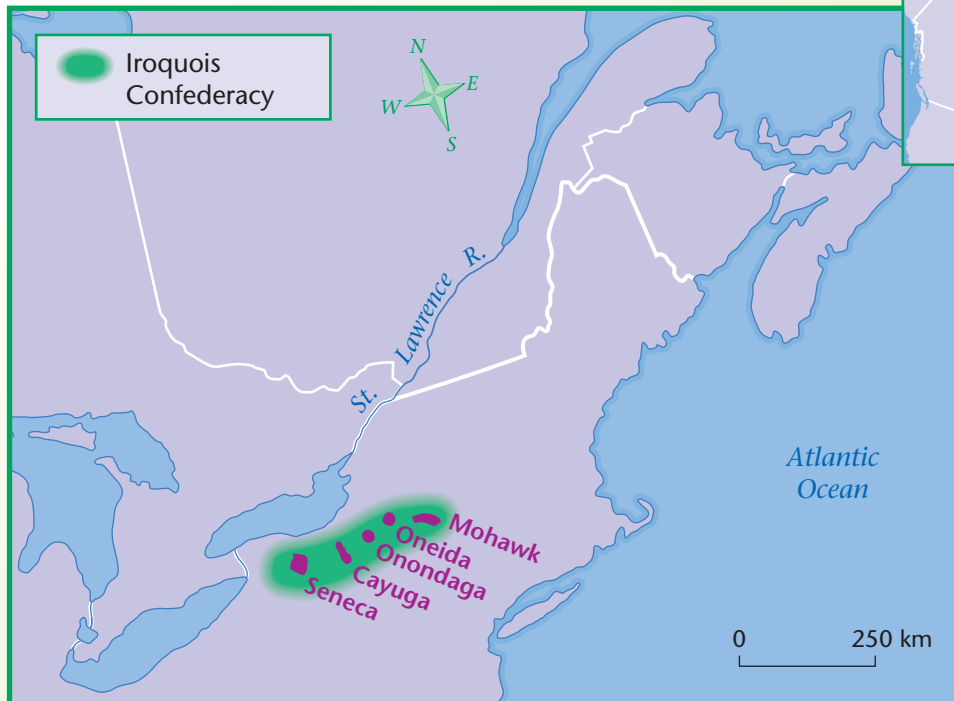
Before the founding of the Confederacy, the nations fought wars against each other. The history of the Iroquois records that a leader came to the nations with a message of peace and unity. This leader was named Dekanawidah (da-ga-na-wee-duh), the Peacemaker. With the help of Hiawatha, he persuaded each nation to accept the Great Law of Peace. The Great Law of Peace established a government — the Iroquois Confederacy — that allowed the nations to work together and respect each other.

### Pause

The Great Law of Peace established an **alliance** among the member nations of the Iroquois Confederacy. An alliance is an agreement among a group of nations to support each other. The alliance that established the Iroquois Confederacy ended war among its member nations. What other advantages might an alliance have?

# Where was the Iroquois Confederacy?

## The Lands of the Iroquois Confederacy before 1500



The white lines on this map show borders that exist today between Canada and the United States, and between Canadian provinces. We have included them to help you interpret the location of the map.

This map shows the location of the original five nations of the Iroquois Confederacy.

Within the Confederacy, each nation had a role. For example, the Mohawk were the Keepers of the Eastern Door. They defended the Confederacy from the east. Based on the map, who were the Keepers of the Western Door? The nations on guard to the east and west were also called the “older brothers” of the Confederacy.

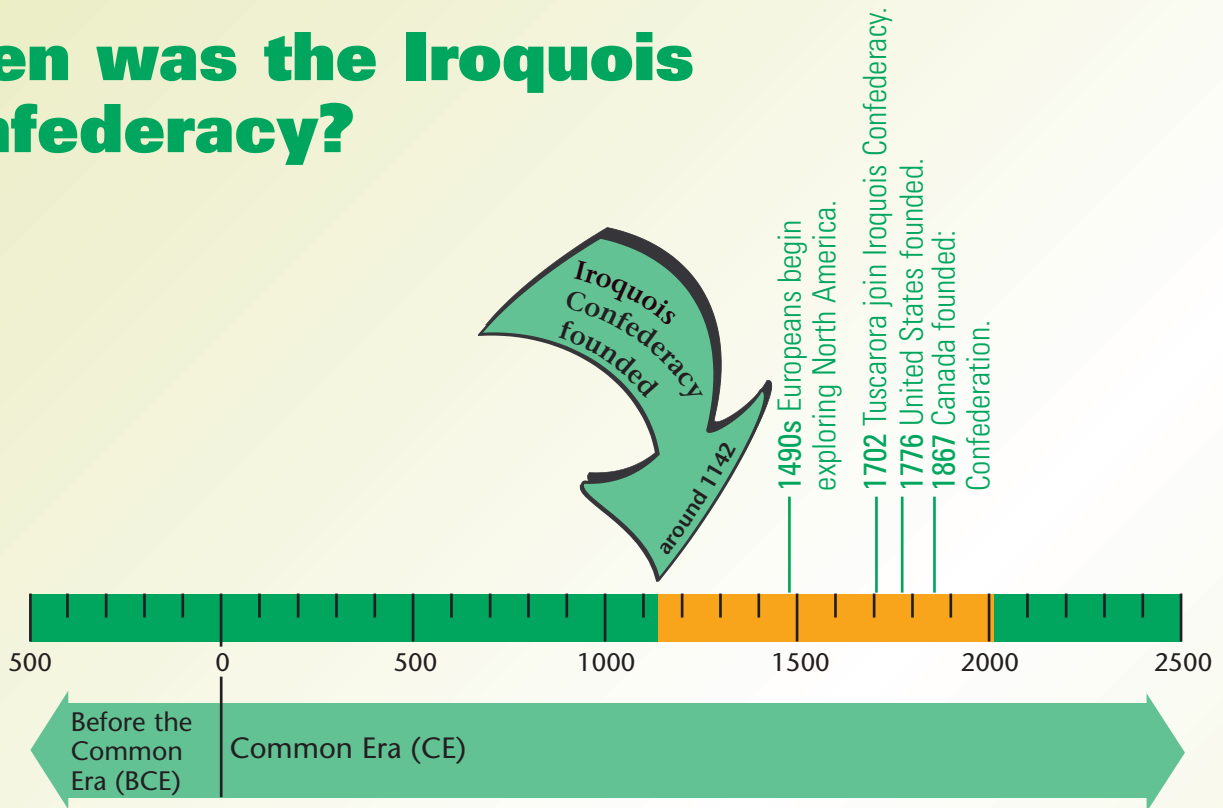
One nation of the Confederacy was charged with keeping the centre of the Confederacy firm — keeping its principles always alive. They were called the Keepers of the Council Fire. Check the map: which nation was this?

The nations between the guards and the centre were called the “younger brothers” of the Confederacy. Which nations were these?

### Pause

The map of Iroquois lands on this page dates from before contact with Europeans. Compare the map with a current map of the same region. What changes do you see? What reasons can you give for the changes?

# When was the Iroquois Confederacy?



## SKILLS at Work

How does the timeline establish that the Confederacy could have influenced the founding of the United States and Canada, but not the other way around?

- use examples of events in the past to describe cause and effect and change over time



The Iroquois Confederacy probably dates from around 1100, and continues to exist today. How many years has the Confederacy existed compared to the United States and to Canada? How can you use the timeline to establish this?

The timeline shows that the Confederacy existed before Europeans began to explore North America. What do you already know about First Nations societies before contact with Europeans?

A sixth nation, the Tuscarora (Tuh-skuh-roar-uh) left their southern homelands, in what later became North Carolina, due to European settlement. They joined the Iroquois Confederacy in 1702. The Confederacy then became known as the League of Six Nations. What happened when First Nations and Europeans began to encounter each other? Use your knowledge of history to help you understand the time when the Iroquois Confederacy began.



I remember how the French and British competed for trading partners during the fur trade. What alliances and conflicts happened because of the fur trade? I wonder how this might have affected the Iroquois Confederacy?

## Investigating Time

The timeline on page 88 dates the founding of the Iroquois Confederacy at around 1100. This reflects one theory of how old the Confederacy is.

**Oral history** records that the Seneca were the last of the original five nations to join the Confederacy, and that this happened just after a total eclipse of the sun.

Using astronomical data, researchers examined when solar eclipses occurred in the past. They consulted the oral record for a list of the Confederacy's leaders, and estimated the span of time the list represented. Then they matched data about angles of the earth and sun with descriptions from the oral record about the historic eclipse. When they put all the pieces of evidence together, they suggested that the first five nations of the Confederacy completed their alliance shortly after a solar eclipse on August 31, 1142.

### Pause

Oral history provides a record of the past. So does data from astronomy. What are some other ways to record history? In what ways are they the same? In what ways are they different?



This photo shows a solar eclipse. What do you know about solar eclipses? Why can researchers pinpoint when they will happen in the future and when they have happened in the past?

### What is oral history?

Different peoples have different ways of recording their past. The Haudenosaunee traditionally recounted their past in spoken, or oral, records. They had memory keepers who carefully learned and maintained these records from generation to generation.



# How did the Iroquois live?

## What's important?

Understand the role of clans in the Iroquois Confederacy.

## Clans

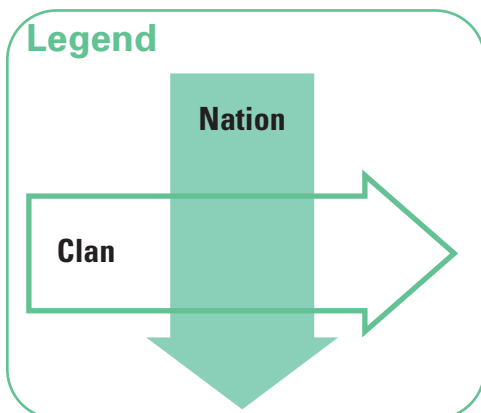
The Peacemaker established clans within the nations of the Iroquois Confederacy. The clan system united the nations and ensured peace among them. They are still an important part of the identity of Iroquois people today.

Clans were named for one of nine air, water or land animals. With one exception, each clan formed part of at least two nations, and three clans formed part of every nation.

The Peacemaker set up Iroquois society as **matrilineal**. This meant clan members traced their family history and ancestors through their mothers. Each clan was made up of a group of families that had a common female ancestor. When people married, the husband moved into his wife's longhouse. When a child was born, he or she became part of the mother's clan.

Members of the same clan were considered family members. So, they always extended hospitality to each other, even if they came from different nations. Also, people of the same clan did not marry each other.

Within each nation, members of the same clan lived together in a **longhouse**. You can read more about longhouses on page 92.



## About the clan graphic

The graphic on the next page comes from information posted by the Iroquois Museum in Howes Cave, New York. Use this legend to help you interpret it.

How does this graphic help you understand the way clans wove the nations of the Iroquois Confederacy together?

**Seneca**

Older  
Brothers  
Keepers of the  
Western Door

**Cayuga**

Younger  
Brothers

**Onondaga**

Keepers of the  
Council Fire

**Oneida**

Younger  
Brothers

**Mohawk**

Older  
Brothers  
Keepers of the  
Eastern Door

wolf



bear



turtle



snipe



deer



beaver



heron



hawk



eel



## What's important?

Understand the role of the longhouse in the Iroquois Confederacy.

## The Longhouse

Within each member nation, the Iroquois lived in settlements made up of several longhouses. Longhouses were large, open dwellings where many families of the same clan lived together: grandparents, parents, aunts, uncles, sons, daughters and cousins.

The longhouse was an important place in the government of the Iroquois. It was where men and women met in separate groups to discuss issues and events, and to advise their leaders. People were expected to attend these discussions, because the consensus — or agreement — of the group was crucial. By discussing issues, people came to understand how different choices would affect the group, and came to one mind about the best way forward.

You can read more about what consensus means on page 111.

This photograph shows the interior of a longhouse at the Ganondagon historic site in New York. The site is a reconstruction of a Seneca settlement.

In the longhouse, people lived their daily lives and met in groups to talk. What do you think children did when important discussions took place? What might they have learned from these discussions?





Moll, Herman (1736). *A New Map of the North Parts of North America Claimed by France*. London, England: T. Bowles.

Dutch geographer Herman Moll drew this scene of an Iroquois settlement in 1720. If 30 to 40 people lived in each longhouse, about how many people lived in this settlement?

## SKILLS at Work

Study the illustration carefully. What seems out of place?

Think about the European point of view of the artist and how this might have influenced what he included in this scene. To what extent does this illustration represent a reliable source of information about the Iroquois?

- determine the reliability of information filtering for point of view and bias



Longhouses were made with a wooden-pole framework covered in bark. If a clan grew, how do you think the longhouse grew? What conclusions can you draw from this picture?

# What was the social structure of Iroquois society?

## What's important?

Discover the roles of women and men in Iroquois society.

In the story, Kanatiosh and her brother stumble into a special meeting that was not part of daily life — a meeting of the Grand Council. The Grand Council always met in the Onondaga territory in a special longhouse. You can read more about the Grand Council on page 101.

## About this Story

This representation of historical events was written with the advice and assistance of educator Brenda Davis, Cayuga First Nation, Six Nations of the Grand River Territory, Ontario.

## A Decision for the Iroquois Grand Council

### Part 1: An Escape

“Come back here!”

Kanatiosh (kan-a-tee-osh) watched in horror as her little brother bolted straight into the doorway of the council longhouse, an imposing structure that sat along the north side of her village.

Thinking only to retrieve her brother before he disrupted the meeting, Kanatiosh followed after him. The dim interior of the longhouse momentarily blinded her, but as the magnificent scene before her materialized, she forgot all about her brother.

## Who's Who in the Iroquois Confederacy: Children

Children were often around and listening when adults held discussions.

Discussions were part of daily life in a longhouse. Children grew up hearing about issues and learning how decisions were made. Both women and men had important positions in the Iroquois Confederacy, so girls and boys knew they too would have important roles when they grew up.

This berry basket was made by Susan Bearskin of the Oneida Nation. Day-to-day routines — such as making baskets, preserving food, cooking, eating and sleeping — took place in the longhouse. Discussions of events and issues also took place there. Daily life in the longhouse played an important role in the way the Iroquois governed themselves.



She remembered her grandmother — who was a Clan Mother — telling her the reason for this important meeting. The Hoyaneh (hoe-ya-neh) were deciding whether to enter into a treaty with the British who had built a fort some distance away.

Now she could actually see the **Hoyaneh** her grandmother spoke of, sitting right before her. She could see all the distinctive headdresses that identified their nations. These were the men chosen by the Clan Mothers to represent each clan in the five member nations of the Iroquois Confederacy. And right beside them were the wise Clan Mothers themselves, sitting with straight spines, observing their Hoyaneh and listening intently to make sure they represented the needs and interests of the people in everything they said.

Kanatiiosh listened to the words of a tall man who addressed the Hoyaneh. From the look of his headdress, she could tell he was Onondaga, the nation responsible for opening the meetings and lighting the sacred fire that burned to purify the thoughts of everyone present.

“I ask you to remember our continuing conflict with the French,” the man said, his voice ringing out over the crowd. “Remember the sorrow on the faces of our people when French guns killed three of our kinsmen and twelve others were taken captive. We need to think carefully about how to defend ourselves.”

Kanatiiosh heard murmurs of acknowledgment ripple through the crowd. She, too, nodded her head in agreement, crouching there in her dark corner, remembering the tears her mother had shed when the news came that her uncle was dead.

Suddenly, Kanatiiosh felt a small hand slip into hers. “There you are!” she exclaimed to her brother, a little too loudly, for she noticed heads turning her way. “It’s time to leave,” she whispered in his ear, and slipped out.



In the story, the Iroquois Confederacy is considering a **treaty** with the British. The story takes place during the fur trade in the 1600s, when the Iroquois came into conflict with the French. The French had become **allies** with enemies of the Iroquois, including the Ouendat. This illustration shows the Ouendat and the French attacking an Onondaga village in 1615 and was drawn from the French point of view. How accurate do you think the drawing is? Why?

## Women in the Iroquois Confederacy

### Clan Mothers

- chose and advised the Hoyaneh
- had a strong indirect influence on decisions

### Women

- participated in Women's Councils which advised the Clan Mothers
- used consensus



Clan Mothers continue to play an important role in Iroquois society today. This photo shows Audrey Shenandoah, a Clan Mother of the Eel Clan of the Onondaga Nation. She participated in a Summit of the Elders at the United Nations in 1995, where she provided an Iroquois perspective on environmental issues.

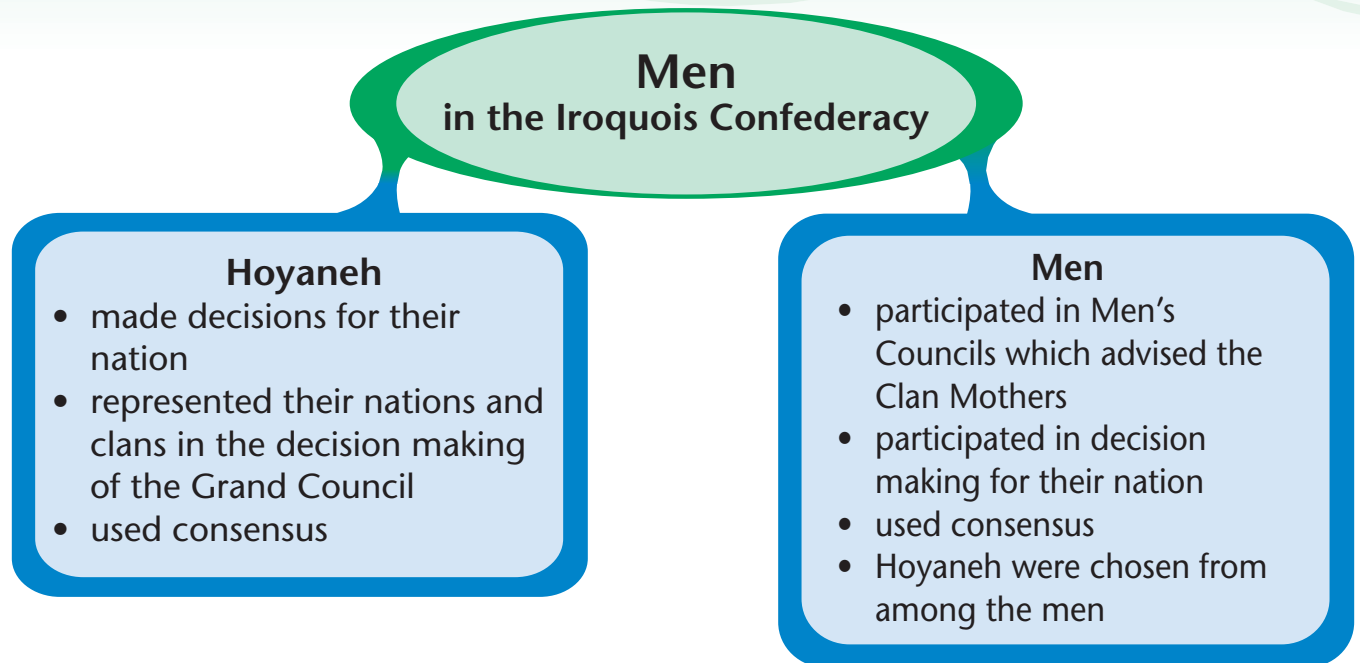
## Who's Who in the Iroquois Confederacy: Women

Women had two ways to make their voices heard: as Clan Mothers and through Women's Councils.

**Clan Mothers** were usually the oldest and most respected women in their clans. The title was **hereditary** and passed on to the woman relative that was thought to be best suited for the position. Clan Mothers were responsible for their clan's welfare and for maintaining harmony and balance within the clans and nations. They selected the **Hoyaneh**, the male leaders of the Iroquois Confederacy. The Great Law of Peace said the Hoyaneh had to put the needs of their people first. The Clan Mothers could replace Hoyaneh who failed to do this.

Within each clan, Women's Councils and Men's Councils advised the Clan Mothers. The Clan Mothers in turn advised their Hoyaneh of the people's position on issues. How did this process ensure that both men and women had a voice in their government?

**Women's Councils** developed positions on important issues. Women who were not Clan Mothers took part in councils. Through consensus, they advised the Clan Mothers.



## Who's Who in the Iroquois Confederacy: Men

Men had two ways to make their voices heard: as Hoyaneh and through Men's Councils.

**Hoyaneh** were the male leaders of each nation of the Iroquois Confederacy. *Hoyaneh* means "Caretakers of the Peace." Today we call them chiefs.

The Hoyaneh were chosen and advised by their Clan Mothers. Each nation had several Hoyaneh. Most of the time, they met to make decisions for their nation — decisions about whether to expand or move a village, for example. They used consensus to arrive at the best way forward.

The Hoyaneh also represented their nation at meetings of the Grand Council. You can read more about the Grand Council on page 101.

**Men's Councils** included all the men in a clan. They met and came to consensus on issues. They, like the women of clans, advised the Clan Mothers.



## Part 2: Preparing a Future Leader

That night, as Kanatiiosh climbed onto her sleeping platform in her family's longhouse, her grandmother came to her.

"What did you think of the meeting?" her grandmother asked.

Kanatiiosh felt her face go hot, and she didn't know what to say.

"I saw you slip inside the council longhouse. What were you doing there?" her grandmother pressed.

"My little brother ran in and I was just getting him out," Kanatiiosh answered. "I didn't think anyone saw me."

"Hardly anyone did. But my granddaughter, I saw you. And I want you to know I see a lot of things you don't think I see."

"Like what?"

"Like how patient you are when you show the children how to make baskets. And how quick you are to share the berries you pick in the summertime. If you stay on the good side of things, you'll make a great Clan Mother some day."

"Are you angry with me because of today?" Kanatiiosh asked sheepishly.

"No," her grandmother replied. "I actually think you should know more about these things if you're to become the great leader I think you can be."

At the Grand Council, the Hoyaneh wore distinct headdresses that identified them with their nation. In the Iroquois Confederacy, each nation was represented by its own Hoyaneh. How did this show respect for the diversity of the Confederacy's member nations?



Cayuga



Oneida

Kanatiosh lowered her eyes in respect.

"Oh, Grandmother, today I actually saw the sacred fire you've always told me about," Kanatiosh said, her words coming in a rush. "And I saw how closely the Hoyaneh listened to the Onondaga leader who spoke. Everything seemed so important. And serious."

"It is," agreed Skawennati. "Treaty-making is not taken lightly among the Iroquois."

"Are they any closer to making a decision?"

"Yes. Just today the Grand Council agreed to **negotiate** a treaty. Now the Hoyaneh must work out the terms and everyone must agree to them."

"Grandmother, can you tell me everything that happens when such an important decision is being made?"

"I can, Kanatiosh, but not tonight. You have to be at the cooking fires early to help feed the visiting Hoyaneh, so I'll tell you all about it tomorrow after the evening meal, all right?"

"All right," Kanatiosh echoed, barely stifling a yawn as her grandmother tucked her in.



Mohawk



Seneca



Onondaga

# What opportunities did people have to participate in decision making?

## What's important?

Understand the rights and responsibilities of men and women in the government of the Iroquois Confederacy.

True to her word, the next evening Skawennati described the Iroquois decision-making process.

"First the elder brothers, the Mohawk and the Seneca, must discuss the issue among themselves. When they reach a decision, they pass their consensus across the sacred fire to the younger brothers, the Oneida and Cayuga. The elder brothers listen while the younger brothers discuss the matter and arrive at their own consensus. When the older brothers and younger brothers agree, the Onondaga — the keepers of the Council Fire — are asked to give their judgement.

"What if the Onondaga Hoyaneh disagree?" Kanatiiosh asked curiously.

"Then their decision goes back through the process to the elder and younger brothers, who would have to reconsider the issue."

"So everyone has to agree on an issue before a decision is made?"

"Yes. It is how the Peacemaker taught us to govern ourselves. We must listen to each other. What each Hoyaneh brings to the discussion is important."

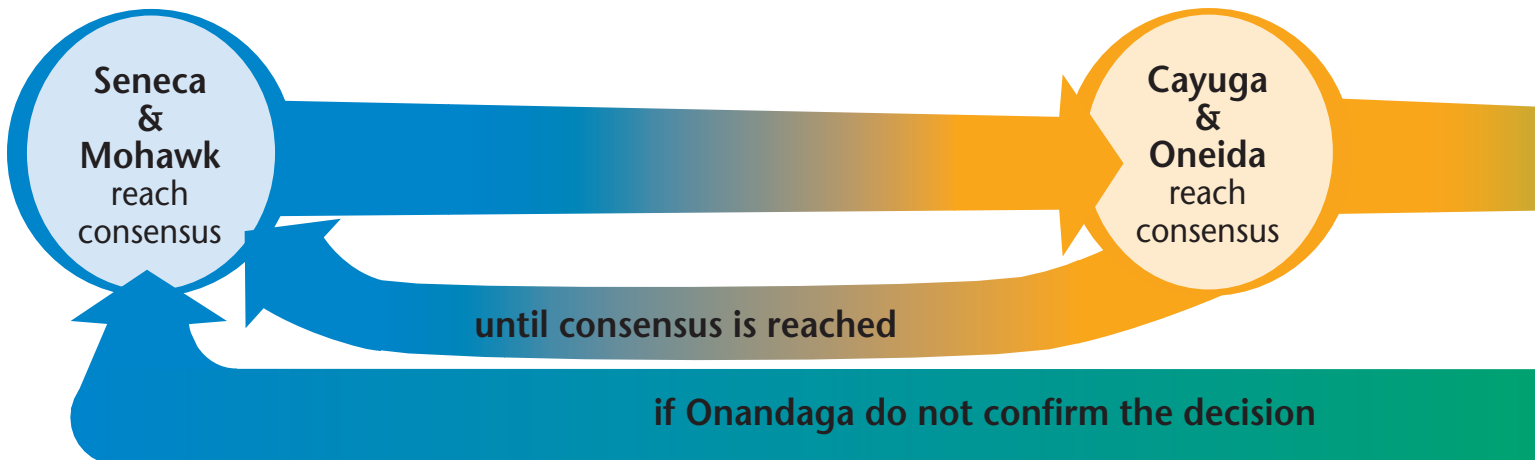
## How did the Grand Council make decisions?

### First Step

The Older Brothers

### Second Step

The Younger Brothers



# The Grand Council

The Grand Council met to discuss issues that affected the whole Iroquois Confederacy, such as peace treaties, trade agreements, and decisions to go to war.

The Grand Council was made up of the Hoyaneh from each nation — 50 in all. Although they rarely spoke at Grand Council meetings, all Iroquois people — men and women — had ways to make their voices heard in the decision making of the Grand Council. Through the Women’s Councils and Men’s Councils of their clans, they advised the Clan Mothers of their positions on issues. The Clan Mothers, in turn, chose and advised the Hoyaneh. If a Hoyaneh didn’t carefully consider the advice of his Clan Mother, the Clan Mother warned him. After the third warning, she removed him and chose someone else.

To make a decision, the Grand Council discussed issues in a set order. Council decisions had to be unanimous, so the Grand Council always worked towards consensus. This is the way decisions about traditional and cultural matters are made by the Iroquois today.

The order and procedure for a meeting of the Grand Council was given by the Peacemaker in the Great Law of Peace.

The Tuscarora, who joined the Confederacy in 1702, are considered part of the younger brothers and speak through the Oneidas in council.

## Pause

The Grand Council used **consensus** to make decisions. Decisions depended on building an agreement that included all nations, and discussion continued until the Grand Council had reached agreement.

- What advantages did this process have as a way to make decisions?
- What disadvantages might it have?

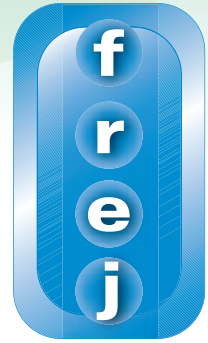
### Third Step The Keepers of the Council Fire

Onondaga  
give a  
judgement

if all nations *agree*

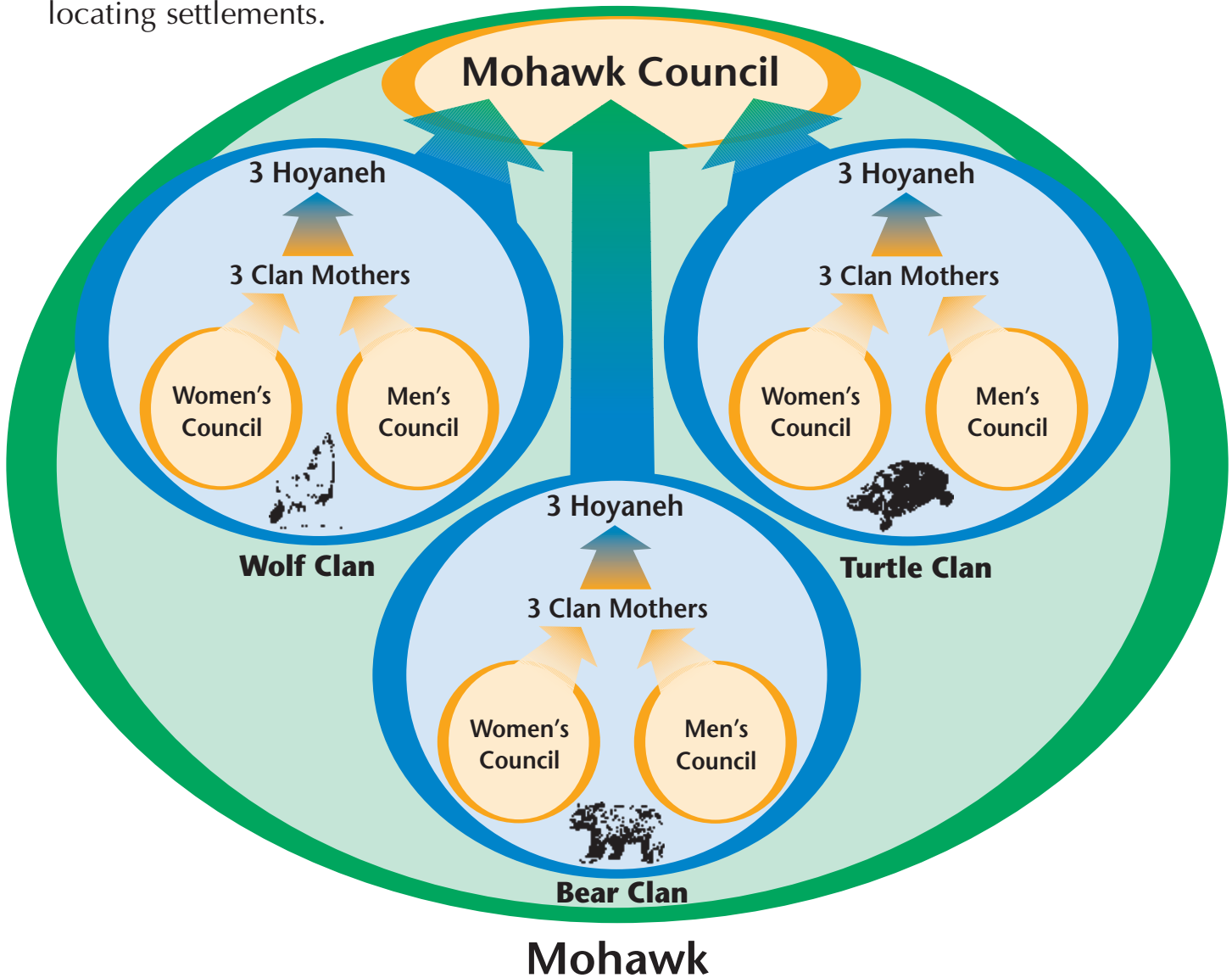
decision

# The Iroquois Confederacy: Structure of Government



Within each clan and nation, councils of men and women discussed issues and advised the Clan Mothers. The Clan Mothers chose the Hoyaneh to represent their people. This graphic shows the Mohawk Nation as an example of the process every nation used.

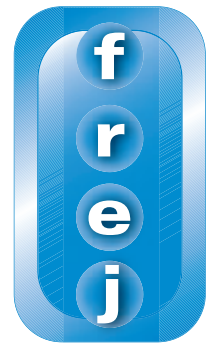
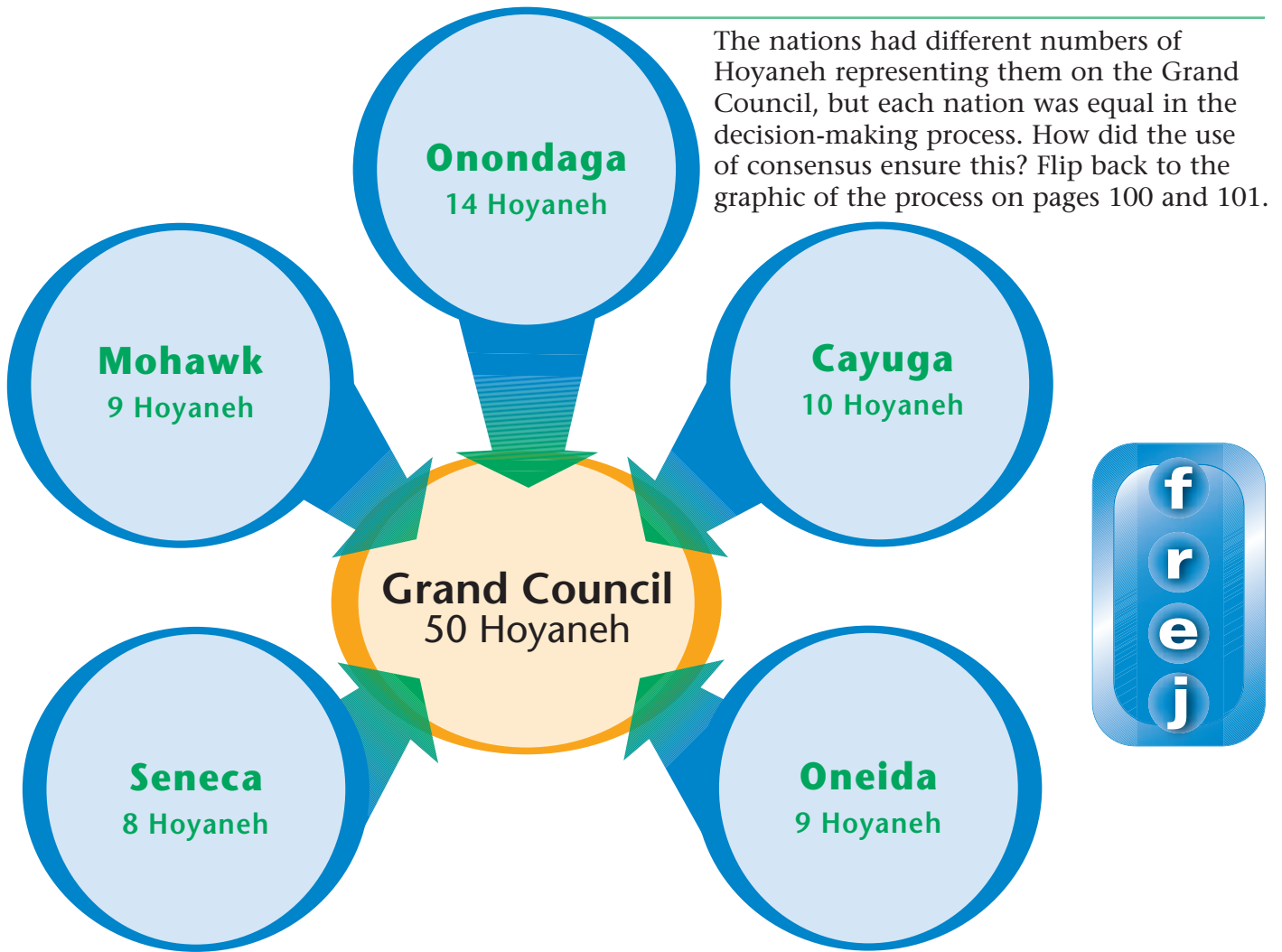
Within each nation, the Hoyaneh formed a council for that nation. This council made decisions that helped its nation function well, such as sharing resources and locating settlements.



**Legend**

- decisions made by consensus
- choose and advise
- represent
- advise

The Hoyaneh from each nation represented their people on the Grand Council. The number of Hoyaneh for each nation was established by the Peacemaker. The Grand Council met when a member nation called for a meeting. The role of the Hoyaneh at Grand Council meetings was to represent the people of their clan and nation. The Clan Mothers advised the Hoyaneh and attended Grand Council meetings to make sure their Hoyaneh fulfilled their role as representatives.



### Think About the Task

Part of your task in this chapter is to describe the role of consensus in the Iroquois Confederacy. Examine the diagrams on these two pages. How did the consensus of the Women's Councils and Men's Councils contribute to the consensus of the Grand Council? Try to summarize the connection between them.

## What's important?

Understand the meaning and importance of wampum.

### Part 3: A Treaty Revealed

Many days later, as Kanatiiosh worked beside other girls her age to keep the fires beneath the kettles of corn soup stoked, her grandmother called her into the shade of a huge oak tree.

"Granddaughter, I have brought something special to show you," her grandmother said, opening a container she held under her arm. "After the Hoyaneh decided upon the terms of the treaty, this was made as a lasting record of it."

Kanatiiosh's eyes grew large as her grandmother gently laid a magnificent wampum belt on the grass, woven with two rows of purple wampum beads against a background of white wampum beads.

"What does it mean?" Kanatiiosh asked, sucking in her breath.

"This," her grandmother said, "is the Guswentah (gus-wen-ta) — the Two Row Wampum Treaty. It describes the agreement between the Iroquois Confederacy and the British. The white stripes on it denote peace, friendship and respect between the two parties of the agreement. The two lines of purple beads signify the different customs and ways of our two peoples. The purple lines are parallel, never touching. The Two Row Wampum Treaty says 'neither of us will make laws nor interfere with the business of the other.'"

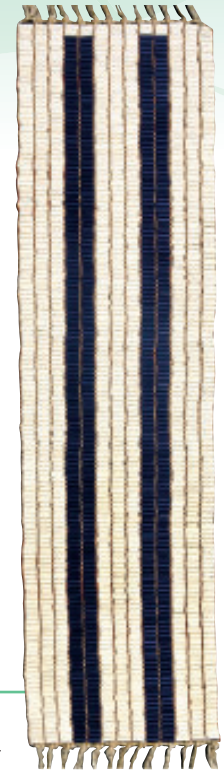
"It's the only way we can all live in peace," Kanatiiosh said thoughtfully, hoping the British would understand and live by the agreement the wampum belt represented.

This is a photograph of the Two Row Wampum Treaty. On page 105, read about the Treaty. What is the meaning of the stripes?

## The Guswentah, the Two Row Wampum Treaty

When the Iroquois first encountered Europeans, they discovered people with very different ways and **values** from their own. The Iroquois proposed a peace treaty — the **Two Row Wampum Treaty** — based on three values: friendship, peace and mutual respect. Each of the white lines in the Two Row Wampum Treaty represents one of these values. The Two Row Wampum Treaty defines the relationship between the sovereign nations who agree to the treaty.

The Iroquois concluded the Two Row Wampum Treaty with the British in 1674. They also made this treaty with other people of European descent, including the Dutch, French and the Americans.



This is a modern **replica** of the Two Row Wampum Treaty. Why might the Iroquois today create replicas of this historic treaty?

### The following interpretation of the Two Row Wampum comes from an Iroquois website:

The two rows symbolize two vessels, travelling down the same river together.

One, a birch bark canoe, will be for the Iroquois People, their laws, their customs and their ways.

The other, a ship, will be for the European people and their laws, their customs and their ways.

We shall travel the river together, side by side.

Neither of us will interfere with the affairs of the other.

Neither of us will try to steer the other's vessel.

—Adapted from Degiya'göh Resources. (2007) Guswentah (Kaswentha):Two Row Wampum. Retrieved October 18, 2007 from Degiya'göh Resources website.

## SKILLS at Work

Where does the information on this computer screen come from? What makes this a good source of information? How does documenting your sources of information help support your conclusions?

- include references in an organized manner as part of research





## Wampum

Among the Iroquois, wampum beads made from shells are woven into patterned strings or belts that record important events, ideas, contracts, pledges or treaties among nations. When Europeans began to arrive in North America, the Iroquois negotiated and concluded agreements with the newcomers and presented them with records of the agreements in wampum. Wampum strings and belts were used at councils and in ceremonies of the Iroquois, and still are.

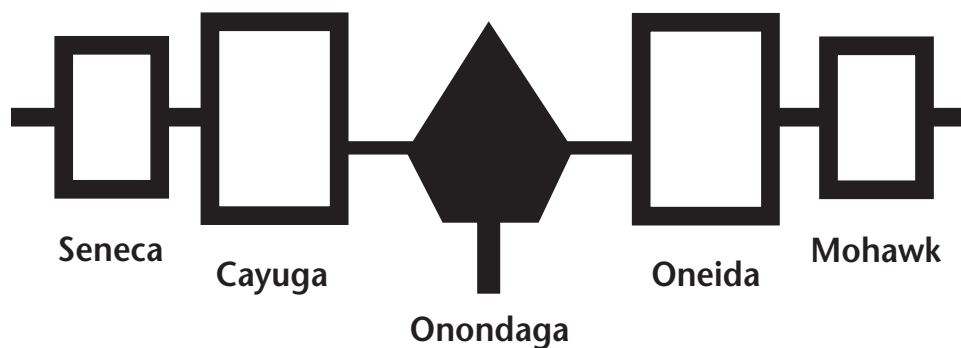
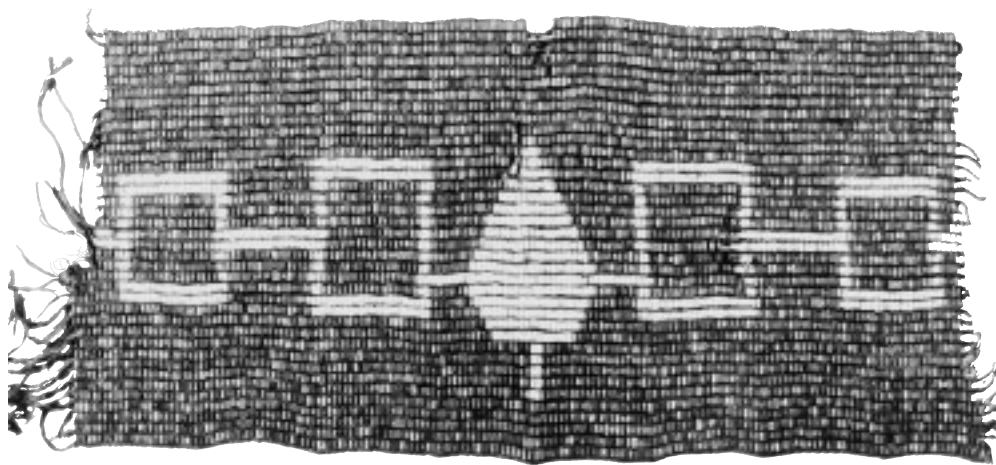
The wampum belts in this photograph were held by the Museum of the American Indian in the United States for years. In 1989, the museum returned them to the Iroquois. Jacob E. Thomas of the Cayuga Nation, on the right, is reading the belts for the museum's curator.

The belts are historical records. Why are historical records important to the **collective identity** of a people – their sense of themselves as a group? Why might the Iroquois have wanted these wampum belts returned?



## The Hiawatha Wampum Belt

This wampum belt records the structure and principles of the Iroquois Confederacy. Each of the figures on the belt represents one of the original five nations of the Confederacy, in their geographic order. The Tuscarora are not represented by a symbol on the Hiawatha Wampum belt because they joined the Iroquois Confederacy many years after it was founded.



This figure represents the Tree of Peace and it stands at the centre of the Confederacy. You can read more about the Tree of Peace on page 108.

The white line that joins the nations symbolizes the path of peace. It extends out from both sides of the belt. This invites other nations to follow the path of peace, accept the Great Law of Peace, and take shelter under the Tree of Peace.

## SKILLS at Work

What information about the foundation, structure and processes of the Iroquois Confederacy do wampum belts provide? Why are **primary sources** such as wampum belts valuable?

- use primary sources to interpret historical events and issues



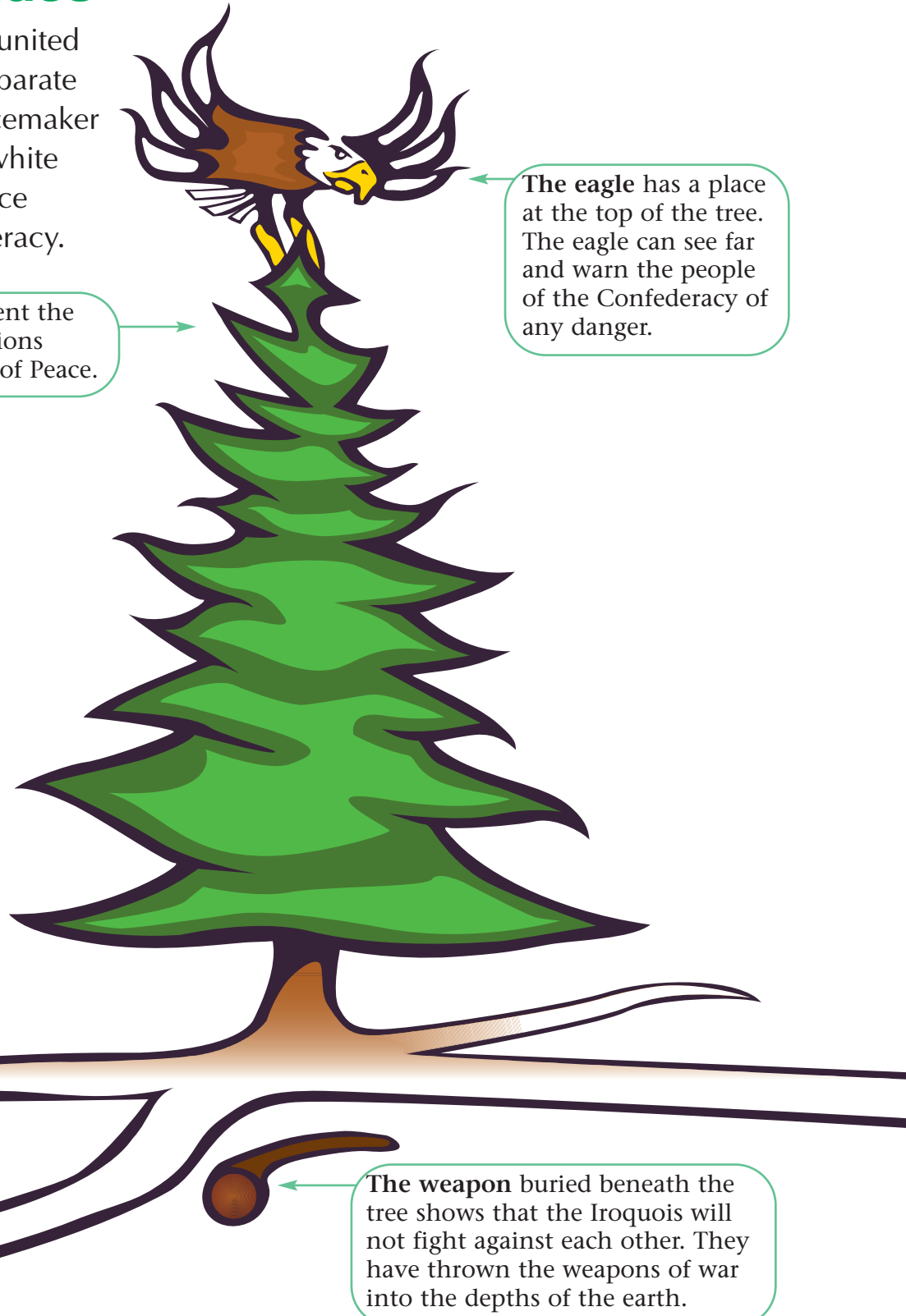
# What are the ideas behind the Iroquois Confederacy?

## The Tree of Peace

The Iroquois Confederacy united five, and eventually six, separate nations in peace. The Peacemaker used the Tree of Peace, a white pine, to symbolize the peace established by the Confederacy.

The **branches** represent the protection of the nations under the Great Law of Peace.

The **eagle** has a place at the top of the tree. The eagle can see far and warn the people of the Confederacy of any danger.



### Pause

The Tree of Peace is a symbol of the Iroquois Confederacy. Symbols represent ideas. What important ideas about the Iroquois Confederacy does the Tree of Peace communicate?

The **weapon** buried beneath the tree shows that the Iroquois will not fight against each other. They have thrown the weapons of war into the depths of the earth.

## The Great Law of Peace

The Peacemaker established the structure and procedures of the Confederacy, which is the Great Law of Peace. Below, you can read an excerpt from the Great Law of Peace that talks about the responsibilities of the Hoyaneh.

freedoms

representation

equity

justice

The Hoyaneh of the five nations shall be advisors of the people for all time. The thickness of their skin shall be seven spans – which is to say that they will disregard words said against them and wrongs done against them. Their hearts shall be filled with peace and goodwill. Their minds will yearn for the welfare of their people. They shall carry out their duties with endless patience, and firmness will be handed out with kindness. Anger and fury shall not find place in their minds, and everything they say and do will show calm deliberation.

– Based on versions of section 24 of the Great Law of Peace from the following sites: Six Nations Reclamation Information and Indigenous People's Literature.



### Pause

1. What characteristics does the Great Law of Peace say that the Hoyaneh need?
2. Think about the structure of Iroquois government and the role that the Hoyaneh played in it. Why do you think the Great Law of Peace specified these characteristics for the Hoyaneh?

The roots represent peace and strength. They spread out in the four directions: north, south, east and west. The roots lead anyone or any nation willing to follow the Great Law of Peace to the shelter under the tree.

### What's important?

The Great Law of Peace defines the roles of men and women in the traditional government of the Iroquois Confederacy. How did these different roles support Iroquois society and government?

## Iroquois Rights and Responsibilities

### Women's Rights and Responsibilities

As Clan Mothers:

- Knowing and keeping the Great Law of Peace
- Promoting the welfare of their clan
- Seeking the advice of the Women's Council and the Men's Council of their clan
- Choosing and advising the Hoyaneh

In Women's Councils:

- Building a consensus on issues
- Advising the Clan Mothers

### Men's Rights and Responsibilities

As Hoyaneh:

- Knowing and keeping the Great Law of Peace
- Knowing and fulfilling their role in ceremonies and the Grand Council
- Listening to the advice of the Clan Mothers
- Thinking of what's best for their people now and in the future

- Building a consensus on issues
- Being honest and kindhearted

In Men's Councils:

- Building a consensus on issues
- Advising the Clan Mothers

### Pause

What qualities do effective leaders have today?

# Consensus

## What's important?

Societies have different ways of putting the democratic ideals of equity and fairness into action. What do the statements below show about fairness and equity in the Iroquois Confederacy? What similarities and differences do you see between the Iroquois Confederacy and ancient Athens?

**True consensus is built through talking, listening and considering different ideas until a new understanding takes place, and the decision makers come to “one mind” about what to do.**

**Everyone must have a voice. Everyone has their own stories, their own perspectives — gifts they bring to the process that create balance. No one is left out.**

— From an interview with Norma General,  
Elder of the Wolf Clan,  
Cayuga Nation, May 2007.



Norma General lives in Ohsweken, Ontario. She is a member of the Cayuga Nation and an Elder, Wolf Clan. Her traditional name, Gaihohwakohn, means “holding the canoe.” She is a cultural educator across Canada and the United States, an instructor at McMaster University in Hamilton, Ontario, and an instructor at the First Nations Technical Institute in Tyandenaga, Ontario.

## Pause

Consider Elder Norma General’s explanation of consensus. How might what she says apply to you? Think about the personal guideline for participating in groups that you created in Chapter 1. What could you add to your guideline, based on the ideas of consensus? What advantages does consensus have as a way to make choices in groups?

# The Society and Government of the Iroquois Confederacy

**What is the structure of the society?**

- There were originally five, and later six, separate Iroquois Nations. Each has its own language and its own council.
- Each nation has specific clans which are extended families of the same clan of other nations.
- Families are connected through the women's lines.
- **Extended families** used to live in longhouses.

**What rights and responsibilities do members of the society have?**

- All members of society are expected to follow the Great Law of Peace.
- Clan mothers listen to their clan members, give advice and choose their Hoyaneh.
- The Hoyaneh listen to their Clan Mothers and are responsible for representing their own clan and nation. They are also responsible for helping make Grand Council decisions.
- Each member nation of the Confederacy is equally important on the council.

This photo shows Haudenosaunee people in a circle dance. In what ways does a circle represent something important about traditional Iroquois society and government?



**What is the procedure for making government decisions?**

- The Grand Council is composed of 50 Hoyaneh representing their clans and nations.
- The Grand Council makes decisions affecting the entire Confederacy.
- The member nations hold discussions in a set order.
- The Hoyaneh from each nation must reach consensus.
- Decisions are agreed on only after consensus from the entire Council.
- Decisions were traditionally recorded with wampum belts.

**How do members of society influence government decisions?**

- Clan Mothers choose the Hoyaneh and ensure they adequately represent their people.
- Both men's and women's voices are heard through the Men's Councils and Women's Councils that advise the Clan Mothers. The Clan Mothers advise the Hoyaneh.



**Pause**

The Iroquois planted corn, beans and squash together, calling these “the Three Sisters.” The cornstalks provided support for the growing beans, which provided nitrogen to fertilize the soil. Low lying squash leaves sheltered the plants roots and retained soil moisture. How can the Three Sisters provide a model for the way Iroquois society functioned?





This sign marks land along the Grand River in Ontario, where some members of the Iroquois Confederacy live today. The Iroquois moved to the Grand River because of the American War of Independence, from 1776 to 1783, in which the United States fought Britain. After the war, members of the Iroquois who had supported Britain during the war left the United States.

## SKILLS at Work

On a map of Canada, locate Brantford, Ontario. Brantford is named after Joseph Brant, the Iroquois leader who established the Six Nations of the Grand River Territory in Canada. The territory lies southwest of Brantford along the Grand River.

How does this location compare with the original location of the Iroquois Confederacy, where many Iroquois continue to live today? Consult the map on page 87 to formulate your conclusion.

- construct and interpret maps to broaden understanding of topics being studied
- use cardinal and intermediate directions to locate places on maps and globes



# Review! Review!

**f**reedoms  
**r**epresentation  
**e**quity  
**j**ustice

**1. What was the traditional social structure of the Iroquois?**

Construct a mind map or diagram to show the structure of the Iroquois society.

**2. What opportunities did the people have to participate in decision making?**

What was the role that different members of Iroquois people had when decisions needed to be made? Use your knowledge to complete the comparison chart. An example is given.

A young Iroquois woman	<i>She could discuss her ideas with the women's council or with the Clan Mother. The Clan Mother's advice and wisdom was sought by the Hoyandeh.</i>
A Clan Mother	
One of the Hoyaneh	
A young Iroquois man	

**3. How did the decision making process within the Iroquois Confederacy show equity and fairness?**

Answer this question orally, backing up your ideas with evidence. Hint: How would Kanatiiosh, the Clan Mother's granddaughter, have answered this question?

