



LESSON 4



Native Americans of the Eastern Woodlands

Read Aloud

"Into our bundle we have gathered the causes of war. We have cast this bundle away. . . . Our great-grandchildren shall not see them," spoke the Mohawk leader Hiawatha (hi uh WAH tuh). Hiawatha helped to bring peace to the Iroquois (IHR uh kwah).

Focus Activity

READ TO LEARN

How did the Iroquois bring peace among their people?

VOCABULARY

- longhouse
- wampum
- clan
- Iroquois Confederacy
- compromise

PEOPLE

- Deganawida
- Hiawatha

PLACES

- Hadenosaunee Trail

THE BIG PICTURE

As you have read, hundreds of years ago Humid America was almost completely covered by forest. The people of this region are known as Native Americans of the Eastern Woodlands.

In the southern woodlands lived the Cherokee and the Creek peoples. Today the Creek call themselves Muscogee (mus KOH gee). In the northern woodlands lived the Penobscot (puh NAHB skaht) and the Lenape (LEN nah pee). The Potawatomi (poh tuh WAH tuh mee) and the Winnebago (wihn uh BAY goh) lived near the Great Lakes.

There were two major language groups. The larger group spoke a language called Algonkian (al GAHNG kee un). The other group, the Iroquois, spoke Iroquoian. By the 1700s the Iroquois had become a major power.

THE EASTERN WOODLANDS

As you saw on the Infographic on page 76, the Eastern Woodlands is a huge area that extends from the Atlantic Coast to west of the Mississippi River. In addition to its forests, this region has many lakes and rivers.

There are many natural resources. The Atlantic Ocean, the lakes, and the rivers are rich sources of fish. The forests provide animals for food and wood for building homes and canoes. Wild rice grows in the Great Lakes area. Along the coastal plains and river valleys, the soil is excellent for farming.

North and South

In what is now Maine, the Penobscot lived in mountainous areas where farming was difficult. They moved from place to place, hunting animals for food. The

Penobscot also gathered fruits, nuts, and berries from the forests. In the cold winters, they wore warm clothes made from deerskin.

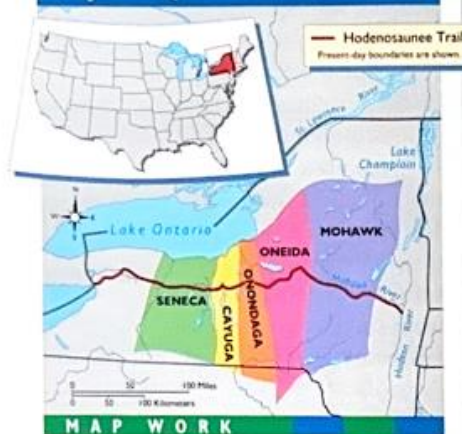
The Natchez, descendants of the Mound Builders, lived in what is now the state of Mississippi where the climate is mild much of the year. The Natchez and other peoples depended mostly on farming. The Natchez wore light clothes woven from the fibers of plants.

Overall, Native American peoples throughout the Eastern Woodlands had much in common. Most were farming people who lived in villages. They built homes out of wood and grew crops of corn, squash, and beans. In addition to farming, they hunted and fished. Using the area's many lakes, rivers, and streams, Native Americans of the Eastern Woodlands traveled far in their canoes. They shared similar beliefs and traditions.



In Iroquois culture, women (below) were mainly responsible for growing and harvesting crops.

MAJOR IROQUOIS PEOPLES, 1500



The hunting grounds of the five major Iroquois peoples once extended well beyond present-day New York State to the Mississippi River.

1. Which people lived near Lake Champlain?
2. Which peoples lived closest to the Onondaga?

THE IROQUOIS

In the 1500s the Iroquois lived mostly in what is now New York State. The map on this page shows the location of the five Iroquois peoples in this area. Historians have called them the Iroquois because of the Iroquoian language they spoke. But the Iroquois call themselves *Hodenosaunee* (hoh den oh SAH nee). In Iroquoian this means "people of the **longhouse**." Longhouses are long buildings made of poles covered with sheets of bark.

A longhouse can be over 200 feet long. In the 1500s each longhouse was home to several families. Cooking fires divided the space.

Each family had its own living space on either side of the fires. The diagram on the next page shows what a longhouse looked like.

The Iroquois Homeland

During the 1500s the homelands of the Iroquois were connected by well-used trails. One central route, the **Hodenosaunee Trail**, ran through the main villages of all five peoples. This winding path ran 250 miles through Iroquois territory.

The Iroquois were expert farmers. Women did most of the farming. They grew 15 types of corn and over 60 different kinds of beans. From the forest, the Iroquois obtained animals for meat, and also maple syrup, nuts, roots, vegetables, oils, fruits, all kinds of berries, teas, and herbs for medicines.

Wampum

Wampum (WAHM pum) was one thing the Iroquois did not get from the forest. Wampum was small, polished beads that were made from shells. They were strung into necklaces or woven into belts. These beads took a long time to make by hand. You can see an example of wampum on page 106.

Often a wampum maker would create a piece to remember an important event. Wampum was very valuable and often given as a gift on special occasions. In the early 1600s the Iroquois began trading wampum to the Europeans for other goods.

The Clan Mother

Women held much power in the Iroquois world. They decided how the land would be used and who would use it. They were leaders of the **clans**. A clan is a group of families sharing the same ancestor.

Almost all Iroquois property was controlled by clans. Women were the owners of the land. They owned the longhouses and everything in them. When a man married, he moved into his wife's longhouse and lived with her family. The head of each clan was called a **clan mother**.

No important decision could be made without the clan mother. Although the leaders of each village were men, it was the clan mothers who chose them.

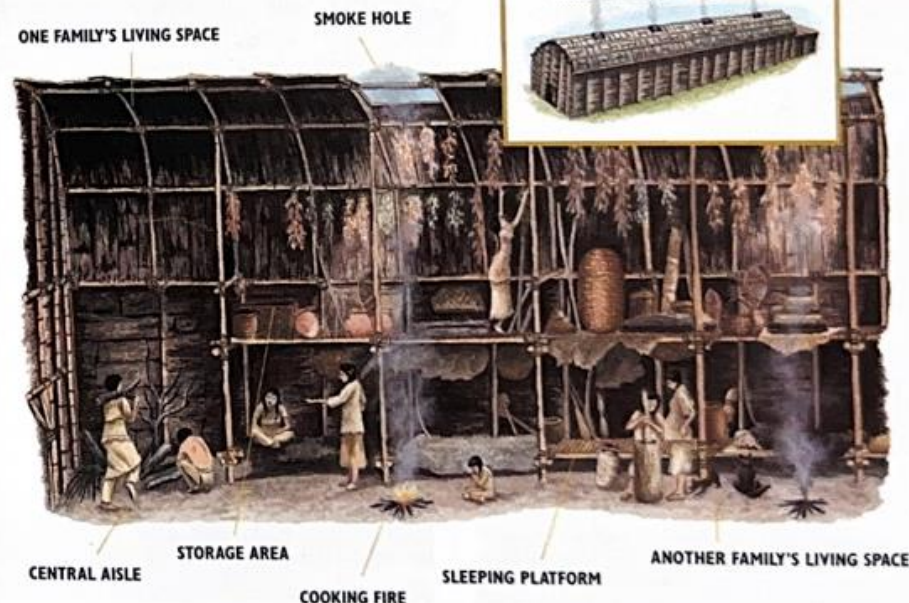
Conflicts Among the Iroquois

As long as the Iroquois peoples remained small in number, they cooperated on many matters. Then, around 1300, when their numbers began to grow, arguments arose and fighting broke out. They also fought other Eastern Woodlands peoples. These conflicts were often over hunting grounds.

The Iroquois believed that if one person was wronged, it hurt the peace of the whole clan. For this reason, wrongs had to be punished. Warfare soon became a constant problem for the Iroquois peoples.

IROQUOIS LONGHOUSE, 1500s

What kinds of activities took place inside an Iroquois longhouse?



IROQUOIS CONFEDERACY

According to the Iroquois legend, two Iroquois leaders, **Deganawida** (day gahn uh WEE duh) and **Hiawatha**, saw that fighting was destroying their people. Read Hiawatha's speech below. How will uniting help the Iroquois?

MANY VOICES

PRIMARY SOURCE

Excerpt from a speech
by Hiawatha in about 1570,
as told by Iroquois chief
Elias Johnson, 1881.

Friends and Brothers: You being members of many tribes, you have come from a great distance; the voice of war has aroused you up; you are afraid . . . [for] your homes, your wives and your children; you tremble for your safety. Believe me, I am with you. My heart beats with your hearts. We are one. We have one common object. We come to promote our common interest, and to determine how this can be best done.

To oppose those **hordes** of northern tribes, singly and alone, would prove certain destruction. We can make no progress in that way. We must unite ourselves into one common band of brothers. We must have but one voice. Many voices makes confusion. We must have one fire, one pipe [of peace] and one war club. This will give us strength.

hordes: crowds

The Great Laws

In about 1570 five separate Iroquois peoples joined together to form the **Iroquois Confederacy**, also known as the Iroquois League. A confederacy is a union of people who join together for a common purpose. The five peoples of the Iroquois Confederacy were the Onondaga (ahn un DAW gah), the Mohawk, the Oneida (oh NI duh), the Seneca (SE nih kuh), and the Cayuga (kah YOO guh).

Deganawida became known as the Peace Maker. Deganawida and Hiawatha developed rules for the Iroquois to follow. These were called the Great Laws. The Great Laws were not only rules. They were also guidelines for living together in peace.

The Grand Council

Deganawida described the Iroquois Confederacy as a great longhouse that stretched the length of the Hadenosaunee Trail. To keep peace, Deganawida set up a Grand Council.

This Iroquois **wampum** belt (above) was made in the early 1800s. It was made to honor the founding of the Iroquois Confederacy.

Representatives to the council were chosen by the clan mothers from each of the Iroquois peoples. The Grand Council made important decisions through discussion and **compromise**. A compromise is the settling of a dispute by agreeing that each side will give up something.

WHY IT MATTERS

Deganawida's ideas helped make the Iroquois powerful. By the 1700s they influenced Native Americans from the St. Lawrence River to present-day Tennessee and to Michigan in the west. Today the Grand Council governs the Iroquois, using discussion and compromise.



Reviewing Facts and Ideas

SUM IT UP

- Algonkian and Iroquoian were two major language groups in the Eastern Woodlands.
- Most Native Americans in the Eastern Woodlands, such as the Iroquois, were farming peoples.
- Women had a great deal of power in Iroquois communities of the 1500s, and they still do today.
- According to Iroquois legend, Deganawida and Hiawatha formed the Iroquois Confederacy around 1570. The Confederacy brought peace and unity.

THINK ABOUT IT

1. How did Native Americans of the Eastern Woodlands use natural resources in their environment?
2. What role do clan mothers play in Iroquois communities?
3. **FOCUS** How did the Iroquois Confederacy help to bring peace?
4. **THINKING SKILL** What are some **generalizations** you might make about the different Eastern Woodlands peoples around 1500?
5. **GEOGRAPHY** Look at the Infographic on page 76. Make two lists: one of Native American peoples of the Eastern Woodlands and one of peoples of the Plains.

A present-day Iroquois couple (left) joins in a traditional community dance.