

## Iroquois Government 5.1.3

When the Iroquois people were a small group, they cooperated on many matters. Then, around 1300, when their numbers began to grow, arguments arose and fighting broke out among them. The Iroquois believed that if one person was wronged, it hurt the whole clan. For this reason, wrongs had to be punished. The Iroquois also fought with other Eastern Woodlands peoples, often over hunting grounds. Warfare soon became a constant problem among the Iroquois.

According to Iroquois history, two Iroquois leaders, Deganawida and Hiawatha, saw that fighting was destroying their people. In the 1500s Hiawatha and Deganawida urged the Iroquois to join together to keep peace with each other. You can read what Hiawatha said below. What does Hiawatha encourage the Iroquois to do?

## The Iroquois Unite

In about 1570, five separate Iroquois peoples joined together to form the **Iroquois Confederacy**, also known as the Iroquois League. The five nations 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). After the Tuscarora joined in 1722, the Confederacy was called *Six Nations*.

Wampum ►



## Primary Sources

### A section from **A Speech by Hiawatha**

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; you are afraid . . . [for] your homes, your wives, and your children . . . Believe me, I am with you. My heart beats with your hearts. We are one. We have one common object . . . We must unite ourselves into one common band of brothers. We must have but one voice. Many voices make confusion. We must have one fire, one pipe [of peace] and one war club. This will give us strength.”**



**Why does Hiawatha believe uniting will help the Iroquois people?**



## The Grand Council

To keep peace the Iroquois people developed the Great Law, which is a set of rules for the Iroquois people. Deganawida also set up a Grand Council. The clan mothers of each nation sent representatives to the council. The council made decisions through discussion and **compromise**. A compromise is the settling of a dispute by each side agreeing to give up part of what it wants.

The Great Law was more than a set of rules. It was also a set of guidelines for the Iroquois nations to live together in peace. Some historians believe the Great Law may have influenced the plan of the American government. The Grand Council continues to make decisions for the Iroquois today.

**REVIEW** What was the Iroquois Confederacy? *Summarize*



This Iroquois turtle is decorated with wampum. ►

## What You Learned

- 5.1.1 The peoples of the Eastern Woodlands used their plentiful resources to develop unique ways of life.
- 5.1.2 People within three different language families in the southeast woodlands had distinct cultures.
- 5.1.2 Native Americans in the northeast woodlands belong to two language groups—Algonkian and Iroquoian.
- 5.1.3 The Iroquois Confederacy united Iroquois nations to maintain peace.

## Lesson Review

1. **Focus Question** How did the Iroquois bring peace to their people?  
5.1
2. **Vocabulary** Write a paragraph about a group in this lesson. Use some of these words in your writing.  
5.1  

clan	Iroquois Confederacy
compromise	longhouse
Creek Confederacy	wampum
3. **Geography** How did life differ for the Penobscot in the northern part of the woodlands from the Natchez in the southeastern part of the woodlands?  
5.1
4. **Critical Thinking Make Decisions** Why did the Iroquois nations decide to form the Iroquois Confederacy?  
5.1.3
5. **Reading Strategy Identify Cause and Effect** Use the chart to record the effects the Creek Confederacy had on the Creek people.  
5.1.2  
ELA  
R2.4  

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6. **Write about THE BIG IDEA** How did the people of the Eastern Woodlands use the natural resources of the forests surrounding them?  
5.1.1  
ELA  
W2.3
7. **Link to Science** You read that Native Americans in the Eastern Woodlands used slash-and-burn agriculture to keep the soil fertile. How did burning the land make the soil fertile? Research slash-and-burn. Write a paragraph about your findings.  
5.1.2  
ELA  
W2.3