

Historica Canada Education Portal

Peacemaker

Overview

This lesson is based on viewing the [Peacemaker Heritage Minute](#). Centuries ago, the five Iroquois (Haudenosaunee) Nations created the Iroquois Confederacy that bound these nations together in peace and unity. The origins of this Confederacy are explained in the legend of the Tree of Great Peace.

Aims

Students will focus on the storytelling aspects within the "Peacemaker" Heritage Minute, to consider the story's meaning, message, and symbolism. Teachers may want to use this lesson as an introduction to a unit on traditional stories. Older students can compare the Iroquois Confederacy to the Canadian constitution, and use the Peacemaker story for a discussion about dispute resolution strategies as well.

Activities

1. Passing down the stories

The mini-drama of Peacemaker shows a grandfather telling the story to

his granddaughter. The story comes alive as he tells it.

- Before viewing the Minute or reading the story, discuss what older generations have to teach young people. What kind of stories are often told? Do young people learn anything from the stories? Students may want to tell stories from their families or from their culture.

- Tell the students that the Minute shows an important story being passed from one generation to another. Have them read the story of Peacemaker and think about the lessons it teaches.

- Watch the Minute more than once. Between viewings, help students clarify the events in the film.

- After watching the Minute, discuss the "lessons" the story teaches (the story appears fairly simple at first, but it gives moral lessons and some practical ways that peace can be created. Students should be aware that the story of peacemaker has been the "constitution" of the Iroquois Confederacy for many centuries.) Why does the grandfather tell the story to his granddaughter? What does it teach about solving conflict? What model of behaviour does Peacemaker exemplify? Discuss the symbolism of the tree of peace.

- Ask students to name other stories that teach lessons that have been passed down from generation to generation in an oral and/or written form (fairy and folktales might be examples). Discuss what the stories teach. Students from non-Western traditions may have some unfamiliar stories to tell their classmates.

2. A teaching story

The story of Peacemaker has been retold for centuries by the Iroquois people for the message it passes down.

- What does the story teach about a code of life and about how to make peace and harmony?
- What other teaching stories can you name that make abstract or complex ideas understandable and vivid? Teaching stories appear in traditional literature (in folktales, fables, myths, and legends) as well as in contemporary children's and adult literature.

3. The politics of peace

The Iroquois Confederacy is a respected model for political organization. The authors of the American constitution studied it and consulted with the Iroquois elders when they were framing their national laws.

- The story of Peacemaker concerns the creation of a government in accord with moral principles. The separate Iroquois nations retained individual powers, but they also gave some powers to a central, representative government, the Iroquois Confederacy. Compare this model with the Canadian constitution.

4. Mediating peace

Peacemaker was a kind of outside mediator to the Iroquois inter-tribal warfare, serving in a position similar to a mediator in a labour dispute or in international diplomacy today.

- Why can an outsider sometimes settle disputes more effectively than the combating parties themselves? Find examples of effective mediators in

local, national, or international events.

- Atotarho changed from the aggressor to a good leader of confederacy. Why was it a clever tactic to give him, of all people, the responsibility for keeping the peace? Would this tactic work in other situations?

Resources

- [Heritage Minute: Peacemaker](#)
- [Aboriginal Arts & Stories](#)
- [The Canadian Encyclopedia: Haudenosaunee \(Iroquois\)](#)
- [The Canadian Encyclopedia: Hiawatha](#)
- [The Canadian Encyclopedia: Dekanahwideh](#)
- [Heritage Minute: Inukshuk](#)

- [Heritage Minute: Tommy Prince](#)