

LESSON 1

1000

2000

Late 1500s
Five tribes join
to form the
Iroquois League

Today
50,000 Iroquois
live in Canada and
the United States



The Eastern Woodlands

PREVIEW

Focus on the Main Idea

People of the Eastern Woodlands developed a variety of cultures based on hunting and farming.

PLACES

Iroquois Trail
Eastern Woodlands
cultural region

PEOPLE

Deganawidah
Hiawatha

VOCABULARY

tribe
league
cultural region
longhouse
wampum
reservation



► Hiawatha

You Are There

The campfire crackles and glows before you. An old man rises to tell a legend.

Long ago, he begins, your people often went to war. The battles were bloody and cost many lives. But then a man named Deganawidah (day gahn uh WEE duh) had a vision. He told the warring groups to stop their endless battling. They should agree to deal fairly with one another and establish a lasting peace.

The old man continues the legend by telling of Hiawatha (high uh WAH tuh), who convinced five warring groups to join together in a “Great Peace.” People of the five groups buried their weapons. Over these weapons Deganawidah planted a magnificent white pine called the “Tree of Peace.”



Summarize As you read, look for ways to summarize the ways of life of people who lived in the Eastern Woodlands.

The Iroquois

The legends about **Deganawidah** and **Hiawatha** are part of the early history told by the Iroquois (IR uh koy) people. The five groups were tribes of American Indians. A **tribe**—a group of families bound together under a single leadership—is a term often used to describe people who share a common culture.

The five tribes were the Seneca, Cayuga, Onondaga, Oneida, and Mohawk. Scholars think that in about 1580, these tribes came together to create the Iroquois League. A **league** is an organization that people form which unites them for a particular purpose. Later, a sixth tribe, the Tuscarora, joined the Iroquois league.

The five tribes sent 50 representatives—all men—to a Great Council. This council made decisions for the League as a whole. The

older women of the tribes chose—and could remove—these representatives.

The **Iroquois Trail** linked the lands of the League. Find it on the map below. Today, the New York Thruway follows part of the route of the Iroquois Trail.

The Iroquois lived in the **Eastern Woodlands cultural region** of North America. It is just one of several regions that you will study in this chapter. Native American tribes within each of these regions developed similar cultures, using the resources of their environments. Each different one is a **cultural region**—an area in which people with similar cultures live.

REVIEW How did the tribes of the Iroquois League work together to govern themselves?

Main Idea and Details



Eastern Woodlands Cultural Region



► The Iroquois, who created moccasins such as those above, lived in the Eastern Woodlands cultural region.

MAP SKILL Use **Directions** in which directions did the Iroquois Trail lead?

Living in the Woodlands

The Eastern Woodlands region provided rich resources for the Iroquois and other woodland people. Thick forests offered nearly endless supplies of wood. People hunted animals that were plentiful in the area—such as deer, bear, elk, and beaver—for food. They used the skins and furs of these animals for clothing. Thousands of lakes, rivers, and streams provided water and fish. Native Americans grew such crops as corn, beans, and squash in the fertile soil.

Look at the diagram on this page. It shows a **longhouse**, an Iroquois building used for shelter. Young trees provided poles for the frame, and slabs of elm bark served as walls. You may be wondering why it was called a longhouse. It could be as long as 150 feet, half of a football field. Each longhouse was divided into living areas for as many as 12 different families. Rows of shared cooking fires were placed in a center aisle of the longhouse. An Iroquois village or town could have as many as 150 longhouses.

The Iroquois called themselves the Haudenosaunee (*hoo dee noh SHAW nee*), which means “People of the Longhouse.”

The name *Iroquois* originally came from other tribes, speakers of the Algonquian (a GONG kwee in) language. Algonquian speakers included the Wampanoag, Powhatan, and Pequot.

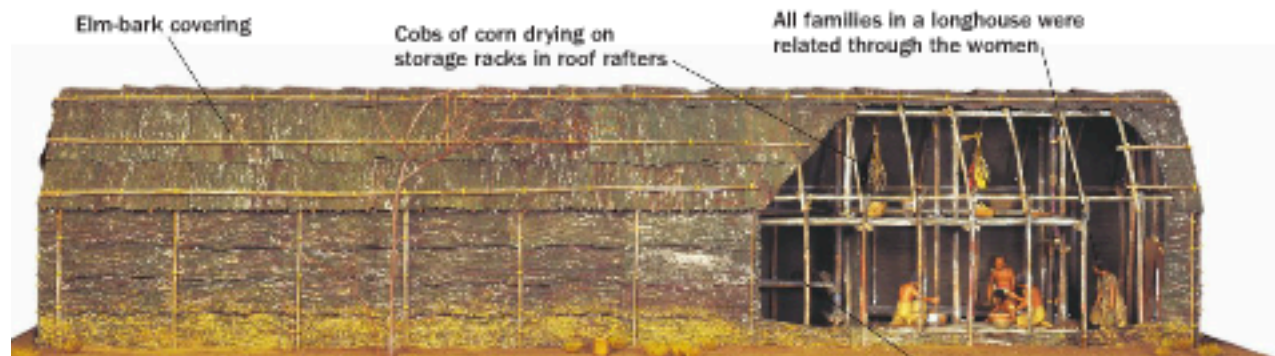
The Iroquois also used trees to make their swift birch-bark canoes. They bent birch saplings to make the frame. They then stretched wide strips of bark over the frame. First they used sharp, pointed tools called bone awls to punch holes in the bark. Then they used bone needles to sew the pieces together. Finally, they covered the seams with tree gum to make the canoes watertight.

The Iroquois used the woodlands for both food and clothing. For example, men hunted for deer. They used the animal hides for clothing and the meat for food. Women tanned the hides and sewed them into shirts and leggings. They also cleared parts of the woodlands of trees to make fields for crops. In spring, they attached birch-bark containers to the maple trees and gathered the sap for maple syrup.

REVIEW Why do you think the Iroquois had so many different uses for trees?

Draw Conclusions

An Iroquois Longhouse



► This model shows an eight-family Iroquois longhouse. There were four shared cooking fires along the central aisle.

DIAGRAM SKILL Where were the drying cobs of corn kept?



Iroquois Beliefs and Customs

Like other Native Americans, the Iroquois felt a deep connection to the animals, the trees, and other resources around them. When an Iroquois hunter killed a deer, he knelt beside it and spoke to it. He thanked it for the food and clothing it would provide for his family. Only then did the hunter take out his skinning knife.

At harvest time, the Iroquois gave thanks for their crops:

“Great Spirit in heaven, we salute you with our thanks, that you have preserved so many of us for another year, to participate in the ceremonies of this occasion.”

The photograph on this page shows **wampum**, polished seashells that were hung on strings or woven into belts. Wampum was highly valued by the Iroquois. A wampum belt might serve as a gift to honor a marriage. It might be given to comfort someone after the death of a loved one. Some belts were created to symbolize an important event. Wampum could

▶ Iroquois people sang and danced to the rhythms of rattles and drums. This rattle was made from a turtle shell.



▶ Iroquois wampum belts could be many feet long.

even be used as an invitation to peaceful talks.

REVIEW How did the Iroquois show appreciation for nature’s resources?

Summarize

Literature and Social Studies

The Rabbit Dance

This Mohawk story, *The Rabbit Dance*, shows the Iroquois respect for nature. It tells of a group of hunters who see a giant rabbit, but decide not to kill it. In return, the rabbit teaches them a dance.

One Iroquois explains:

The Rabbit Chief has given us this special dance so that we can honor its people for all that they give to the human beings. If we play their song and do their dance, then they will know we are grateful for all they continue to give us. We must call this new song The Rabbit Dance and we must do it, men and women together, to honor the Rabbit People.

So it was that a new social dance was given to the Iroquois people. To this day the Rabbit Dance is done to thank the Rabbit People for all they have given, not only food and clothing, but also a fine dance that makes the people glad.





▶ A “high iron” Mohawk man works on a New York City skyscraper.

The Iroquois Today

There are about 50,000 Iroquois today. Many live on **reservations**—land set aside by the United States government for Native Americans—in northern New York state. Fifty

members still form its Great Council. They meet a few miles south of Syracuse, New York, on the Onondaga reservation.

League members, mainly from the Mohawk tribe, have become skilled builders of city skyscrapers. They are known as “high iron” men, putting up girders as high as a thousand feet above the ground.

REVIEW What opportunities draw Iroquois to cities today? **Draw Conclusions**

Summarize the Lesson

- Five Iroquois tribes came together to form the Iroquois League.
- Iroquois people used their surrounding resources of the Eastern Woodlands to meet their needs.
- The Iroquois showed appreciation for nature in different ways.

LESSON 1

REVIEW

Check Facts and Main Ideas

1. 🌀 **Summarize** On a separate piece of paper, fill out the chart below. Choose the most important details from the lesson and organize them into a brief sentence.

2. How did the Iroquois **League** make decisions?

3. How did the **tribes** of the Eastern Woodlands use natural resources to support themselves?
4. **Critical Thinking: Point of View** Explain the point of view of Deganawidah and Hiawatha about cooperation among the five tribes.
5. Where do the Iroquois live today?

Link to



Writing

Solve Problems Suppose you are an Iroquois representative at the Great Council. Write about the different problems that might arise among the tribes. What are your ideas to solve the problems?