



HISTORY  
OF  
PHILIP'S WAR  
COMMONLY  
THE GREAT INDIAN WAR

# The Haudenosaunee (Iroquois) Great Law of Peace: A Precursor to the United States Constitution

## GUIDING QUESTION:

How did the Haudenosaunee Great Law of Peace influence the Constitution of the United States of America?

## CO-AUTHORS:

Jodi Belford, Western Hills Middle School, Cranston, Rhode Island

Joe Russell, Ph.D., Plano East Senior High School, Plano, Texas

## ► OVERVIEW

Benjamin Franklin was an early proponent of unity among the American colonies and an advocate for the Albany Plan of Union. In 1751, the colonies faced crises on the western frontier that led to the French and Indian War. Franklin wrote a letter to a printer, James Parker, extolling the virtues of a governmental structure similar to that of the Haudenosaunee (hoe-dee-no-SHOW-nee) Confederacy, referred to at the time as the Iroquois Confederacy. Many scholars believe that Franklin's promotion of the principles of the Great Law of Peace influenced other founders and framers, which ultimately led to these principles finding their way into the United States Constitution. In this lesson, students will analyze portions of the Great Law of Peace and discuss the Indigenous roots of the United States Constitution.

## ► OBJECTIVES

At the conclusion of this activity, students will be able to:

- › Explain how the Great Law of Peace influenced the U.S. Constitution; and
- › Compare and contrast the Great Law of Peace and the U.S. Constitution.

## ► STANDARDS CONNECTIONS

### CONNECTIONS TO COMMON CORE

- › CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RH.9-10.3 Determine the central ideas or information of a primary or secondary source; provide an accurate summary of how key events or ideas develop over the course of the text.

- › CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RH.9-10.4 Determine the meaning of words and phrases as they are used in a text, including vocabulary describing political, social, or economic aspects of history/social science.

### CONNECTIONS TO C3 FRAMEWORK

- › D2.His.12.9-12. Use questions generated about multiple historical sources to pursue further inquiry and investigate additional sources.
- › D3.1.9-12. Gather relevant information from multiple sources representing a wide range of views while using the origin, authority, structure, context, and corroborative value of the sources to guide the selection.

## ► DOCUMENTS USED

### PRIMARY SOURCES

Dekanawidah and Ayonwatha, The Constitution of the Iroquois Confederacy (The Great Law of Peace) (excerpt) Modern History Sourcebook, Fordham University <https://sourcebooks.fordham.edu/mod/iroquois.asp>

Letter, Benjamin Franklin to James Parker, March 20, 1751 Founders Online, National Archives and Records Administration <https://founders.archives.gov/documents/Franklin/01-04-02-0037>

The United States Constitution National Constitution Center <https://constitutioncenter.org/media/files/constitution.pdf>

## SECONDARY SOURCES

Haudenosaunee Guide for Educators  
Smithsonian's National Museum of the American Indian  
<https://americanindian.si.edu/sites/1/files/pdf/education/HaudenosauneeGuide.pdf>

The United States Constitution for Kids  
Center for Civic Education  
[https://www.civiced.org/images/stories/downloads/United\\_States\\_Constitution\\_for\\_Kids.pdf](https://www.civiced.org/images/stories/downloads/United_States_Constitution_for_Kids.pdf)

## ▶ TEACHER-CREATED MATERIALS

- › Compare and Contrast: The Great Law of Peace and the U.S. Constitution

## ▶ ACTIVITY PREPARATION

- › Organize students into groups of three or four students each.
- › Make one copy of The Great Law of Peace and the U.S. Constitution for each student. Based on the level of your students, you may choose to use the original text from the National Constitution Center or segments of the adapted text from the Center for Civic Education.
- › Make one copy of the Compare and Contrast: The Great Law of Peace and the U.S. Constitution for each student.
- › Review the letter from Benjamin Franklin to James Parker and the Haudenosaunee Guide for Educators.

## ▶ PROCEDURE

### ACTIVITY ONE (30–40 MINUTES)

- › Organize students into groups of three or four students each.
- › Distribute one copy of the Compare and Contrast: The Great Law of Peace and the United States Constitution to each student and one copy of the The Great Law of Peace and the U.S. Constitution to each group.
- › Explain to students that Benjamin Franklin was an important Founding Father of the United States. His ideas about government and how it should work were highly influential in the crafting of the republic.
- › Franklin was both a Founding Father and a Framer of the U.S. Constitution. He was one of the few people who helped craft the Declaration of Independence and the U.S. Constitution.
- › Franklin wrote a letter in 1751 discussing his admiration of the way the Haudenosaunee (Iroquois) people organized their confederacy. The confederacy was an organization of five Native Nations, including the

## Students interested in this topic might be interested in researching the following for an NHD project:

- › The Haudenosaunee Confederacy
- › The French and Indian War (1754–1763)
- › Pontiac's Rebellion (1763–1765)
- › French Revolution (1789–1799)
- › Haitian Revolution (1791–1804)

Mohawk, Oneida, Onondaga, Cayuga, and Seneca Nations. Later the Tuscarora Nation joined the confederacy. Many scholars believe the Great Law of Peace influenced the U.S. Constitution through Franklin.

- › Using the prompts on the Compare and Contrast sheet, facilitate groups through a discussion of the U.S. Constitution and Great Law of Peace.
- › Further the discussion by asking:
  - › *Does the U.S. government have anything like the Pine Tree Chief described in section 35 of the Great Law of Peace?*
  - › *How are the rules on property rights in paragraphs 42–44 of the Great Law of Peace similar to those in the U.S. Constitution, and how do they differ?*
  - › *In what ways do paragraphs 96–97 reflect the principles of federalism?*
  - › *What new questions do you have? What would you like to investigate further?*

## ASSESSMENT OPTIONS

- › Ask students to write two additional questions connected to specific passages of the text.
- › Ask students to respond to the guiding question, *How did the Haudenosaunee Great Law of Peace influence the Constitution of the United States of America?*

To access a PDF containing all of the sources and materials to complete this lesson plan, go to: [nhd.org/RevIdeals](http://nhd.org/RevIdeals).

## The Great Law of Peace (excerpts)

Dekanawidah and Ayonwatha, The Great Law of Peace (excerpt)  
Modern History Sourcebook, Fordham University  
<https://sourcebooks.fordham.edu/mod/iroquois.asp>

1. I am Dekanawidah and with the Five Nations' Confederate [Alliance] Lords I plant the Tree of Great Peace. I plant it in your territory, Adodarhoh, and the Onondaga Nation, in the territory of you who are Firekeepers. I name the tree the Tree of the Great Long Leaves. Under the shade of this Tree of the Great Peace we spread the soft white feathery down of the globe thistle as seats for you, Adodarhoh, and your cousin Lords. We place you upon those seats, spread soft with the feathery down of the globe thistle, there beneath the shade of the spreading branches of the Tree of Peace. There shall you sit and watch the Council Fire of the Confederacy of the Five Nations, and all the affairs of the Five Nations shall be transacted at this place before you, Adodarhoh, and your cousin Lords, by the Confederate Lords of the Five Nations.

2. Roots have spread out from the Tree of the Great Peace, one to the north, one to the east, one to the south and one to the west. The name of these roots is The Great White Roots and their nature is Peace and Strength. If any man or any nation outside the Five Nations shall obey the laws of the Great Peace and make known their disposition to the Lords of the Confederacy, they may trace the Roots to the Tree and if their minds are clean and they are obedient and promise to obey the wishes of the Confederate Council, they shall be welcomed to take shelter beneath the Tree of the Long Leaves . . .

3. To you Adodarhoh, the Onondaga cousin Lords, I and the other Confederate Lords have entrusted the caretaking and the watching of the Five Nations Council Fire. When there is any business to be transacted and the Confederate Council is not in session, a messenger shall be dispatched [sent] either to Adodarhoh, Hononwirehtonh or Skanawatih, Fire Keepers, or to their War Chiefs with a full statement of the case desired to be considered. Then shall Adodarhoh call his cousin (associate) Lords together and consider whether or not the case is of sufficient importance to demand the attention of the Confederate Council. If so, Adodarhoh shall dispatch messengers to summon all the Confederate Lords to assemble beneath the Tree of the Long Leaves.

When the Lords are assembled the Council Fire shall be kindled, but not with chestnut wood, and Adodarhoh shall formally open the Council. Then shall Adodarhoh and his cousin Lords, the Fire Keepers, announce the subject for discussion. . .

9. All the business of the Five Nations Confederate Council shall be conducted by the two combined bodies of Confederate Lords. First the question shall be passed upon by the Mohawk and Seneca Lords, then it shall be discussed and passed by the Oneida and Cayuga Lords. Their decisions shall then be referred to the Onondaga Lords, (Fire Keepers) for final judgement [sic]. The same process shall obtain when a question is brought before the council by an individual or a War Chief.

10. In all cases the procedure must be as follows: when the Mohawk and Seneca Lords have unanimously agreed upon a question, they shall report their decision to the Cayuga and Oneida Lords who shall deliberate upon the question and report a unanimous decision to the Mohawk Lords. The Mohawk Lords will then report the standing of the case to the Firekeepers, who shall render a decision as they see fit in case of a disagreement by the two bodies, or confirm the decisions of the two bodies if they are identical. The Fire Keepers shall then report their decision to the Mohawk Lords who shall announce it to the open council.

11. If through any misunderstanding or obstinacy [disagreement] on the part of the Fire Keepers, they render a decision at variance [in disagreement] with that of the Two Sides, the Two Sides shall reconsider the matter and if their decisions are jointly the same as before they shall report to the Fire Keepers who are then compelled to confirm their joint decision . . .

## The Great Law of Peace (Con't)

### Rights, Duties and Qualifications of Lords

19. If at any time it shall be manifest that a Confederate Lord has not in mind the welfare [well-being] of the people or disobeys the rules of this Great Law, the men or women of the Confederacy, or both jointly, shall come to the Council and upbraid [punish] the erring [causing the problem] Lord through his War Chief. If the complaint of the people through the War Chief is not heeded the first time it shall be uttered again and then if no attention is given a third complaint and warning shall be given. If the Lord is contumacious the matter shall go to the council of War Chiefs. The War Chiefs shall then divest [separate] the erring Lord of his title by order of the women in whom the titleship is vested. When the Lord is deposed [removed from power] the women shall notify the Confederate Lords through their War Chief, and the Confederate Lords shall sanction the act. The women will then select another of their sons as a candidate and the Lords shall elect him . . .

### Election of Pine Tree Chiefs

35. Should any man of the Nation assist with special ability or show great interest in the affairs of the Nation, if he proves himself wise, honest and worthy of confidence, the Confederate Lords may elect him to a seat with them and he may sit in the Confederate Council. He shall be proclaimed a 'Pine Tree sprung up for the Nation' and shall be installed as such at the next assembly for the installation of Lords. Should he ever do anything contrary to the rules of the Great Peace, he may not be deposed from office -- no one shall cut him down -- but thereafter everyone shall be deaf to his voice and his advice. Should he resign his seat and title no one shall prevent him. A Pine Tree chief has no authority to name a successor nor is his title hereditary. . . .

36. . . . The War Chiefs shall be selected from the eligible sons of the female families holding the head Lordship titles.

37. There shall be one War Chief for each Nation and their duties shall be to carry messages for their Lords and to take up the arms of war in case of emergency. They shall not participate in the proceedings of the Confederate Council but shall watch its progress and in case of an erroneous [in error] action by a Lord they shall receive the complaints of the people and convey the warnings of the women to him. The people who wish to convey messages to the Lords in the Confederate Council shall do so through the War Chief of their Nation. It shall ever be his duty to lay the cases, questions and propositions of the people before the Confederate Council . . .

38. When a War Chief dies another shall be installed by the same rite [ceremony] as that by which a Lord is installed.

### Clans and Consanguinity

42. . . . These clans distributed through their respective Nations, shall be the sole owners and holders of the soil of the country and in them is it vested [given to them] as a birthright [because they were born]..

43. People of the Five Nations members of a certain clan shall recognize every other member of that clan, irrespective [no matter what] of the Nation, as relatives. Men and women, therefore, members of the same clan are forbidden to marry.

44. The lineal descent of the people of the Five Nations shall run in the female line. Women shall be considered the progenitors of the Nation. They shall own the land and the soil. Men and women shall follow the status of the mother . . .

65. I, Dekanawida, and the Union Lords, now uproot the tallest pine tree and into the cavity thereby made we cast all weapons of war. Into the depths of the earth, down into the deep underearth currents of water flowing to unknown regions we cast all the weapons of strife. We bury them from sight and we plant again the tree. Thus shall the Great Peace be established and hostilities shall no longer be known between the Five Nations but peace to the United People . . .

## The Great Law of Peace (Con't)

80. When the Confederate Council of the Five Nations has for its object the establishment of the Great Peace among the people of an outside nation and that nation refuses to accept the Great Peace, then by such refusal they bring a declaration of war upon themselves from the Five Nations. Then shall the Five Nations seek to establish the Great Peace by a conquest of the rebellious nation.

81. When the men of the Five Nations, now called forth to become warriors, are ready for battle with an obstinate opposing nation that has refused to accept the Great Peace, then one of the five War Chiefs shall be chosen by the warriors of the Five Nations to lead the army into battle . . .

### **Rights of the People of the Five Nations**

93. Whenever a specially important matter or a great emergency is presented before the Confederate Council and the nature of the matter affects the entire body of the Five Nations, threatening their utter ruin, then the Lords of the Confederacy must submit the matter to the decision of their people and the decision of the people shall affect the decision of the Confederate Council. This decision shall be a confirmation of the voice of the people.

94. The men of every clan of the Five Nations shall have a Council Fire ever burning in readiness for a council of the clan. When it seems necessary for a council to be held to discuss the welfare of the clans, then the men may gather about the fire. This council shall have the same rights as the council of the women.

95. The women of every clan of the Five Nations shall have a Council Fire ever burning in readiness for a council of the clan. When in their opinion it seems necessary for the interest of the people they shall hold a council and their decisions and recommendations shall be introduced before the Council of the Lords by the War Chief for its consideration.

96. All the Clan council fires of a nation or of the Five Nations may unite into one general council fire, or delegates from all the council fires may be appointed to unite in a general council for discussing the interests of the people. The people shall have the right to make appointments and to delegate their power to others of their number. When their council shall have come to a conclusion on any matter, their decision shall be reported to the Council of the Nation or to the Confederate Council (as the case may require) by the War Chief or the War Chiefs.

97. Before the real people united their nations, each nation had its council fires. Before the Great Peace their councils were held. The five Council Fires shall continue to burn as before and they are not quenched. The Lords of each nation in future shall settle their nation's affairs at this council fire governed always by the laws and rules of the council of the Confederacy and by the Great Peace . . .

## Compare and Contrast: The Great Law of Peace and the United States Constitution

Look at Sections 1 and 2 of the Great Law of Peace and the Preamble of the U.S. Constitution. How are the ideas similar and/or different? Who is the source or claimed author of the text? What imagery is used in the text? What reasons do the texts give for creating the system of government?

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Look at Section 3 of the Great Law of Peace and Article I, Section 1 of the U.S. Constitution. How are the Adodarhoh similar and/or different from Congress?

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How does the language differ in what has been analyzed so far? How does this give a sense of the culture, values, and beliefs of the Adodarhoh?

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Look at Sections 9–11 of the Great Law of Peace and Article I, Section 7 of the U.S. Constitution. How is the process of a bill becoming a law similar between the two documents? How does the process differ?

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Look at Section 19 of the Great Law of Peace and Article II, Section 4, of the U.S. Constitution. How do both documents provide for the removal of a bad leader? How are the processes similar and different?

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Look at Sections 35–37 of the Great Law of Peace and Article II, Sections 1 and 2 of the U.S. Constitution. What powers do the two documents give their leaders? How are the positions of war chief and president similar and different?

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