

How did Societies Organize and Govern Themselves?

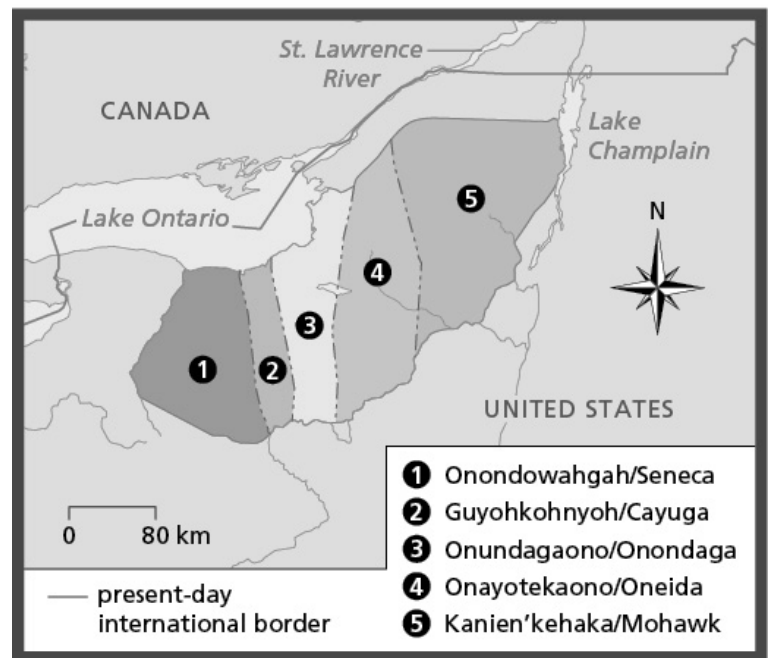
As we learn about the alliance created by the **Haudenosaunee** of North America and about the **feudal system** that developed in Europe, consider how each form of social organization influenced people's worldviews - and how people's worldviews influenced each form of social organization.

The Haudenosaunee

For hundreds of years after the arrival of Europeans, the five nations of the Haudenosaunee Confederacy were known by their English names. Many members of these nations have now returned to using their own language to identify the nation they belong to (see map).

Question: what does this return to using their own language reveal about the perspective of present-day Haudenosaunee on their heritage?

The Haudenosaunee Confederacy



The Haudenosaunee Confederacy

The Haudenosaunee Confederacy was an **alliance** of five First Nations who lived in neighbouring territories. The exact date of the confederacy's founding is unknown, although it is said to be **time immemorial** - before memory or record.

Haudenosaunee oral history describes the founding of the confederacy. At the time, the Haudenosaunee nations were at war with one another. According to the oral history, the Creator was upset by the fighting. So the Creator sent a messenger, called the **Peacemaker**, to travel among the Nations and create peace. The Peacemaker met Hayo'wetha, also known as **Haiwatha**, who was a leader of the Onondagoano. Haiwatha joined the Peacemaker, and the two journeyed among the nations, urging them to stop fighting.



To help persuade the nations to form an alliance, the Peacemaker said, "a single arrow is weak and easily broken. A bundle of arrows tied together cannot be broken. This represents the strength of having a confederacy. It is strong and cannot be broken."



Question: what do the Peacemaker's words show about his perspective on how the nation should live together?

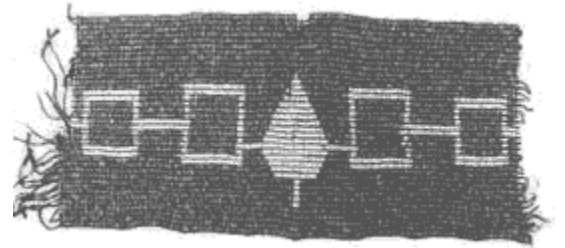
Five of the nations supported the message of peace and called their alliance the **Haudenosaunee Confederacy**. Haudenosaunee means "they made the

house."

Question: what does the choice of the name "Haudenosaunee" reveal about the Haudenosaunee perspective on the alliance?

The Haudenosaunee System of Government

The agreement among the five nations was known as the **Great Law of Peace**. The Great Law of Peace was the Haudenosaunee constitution. It reflected values of unity, peace, and respect for the land and one another. It also provided a guide for all aspects of life, including how the Haudenosaunee governed themselves.



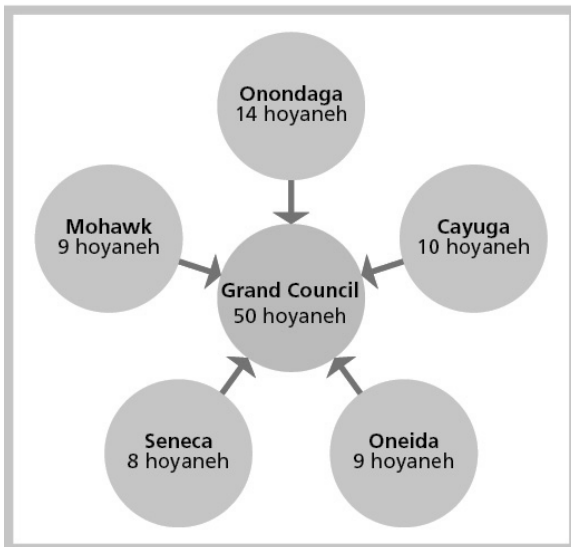
The Grand Council

According to the Haudenosaunee oral history, the Peacemaker asked each of the five nations to choose men to be their leaders. Each leader, or **hoyaneh**, which means "caretaker of the peace," was the chief of his clan and joined the **Grand Council**. The Grand Council made decisions for the entire confederacy, based on the principles in the Great Law of Peace. All the members of the Grand Council were required to agree before decisions were made. This process is called achieving or reaching a consensus.

Each hoyaneh was chosen by the **clan mother**, who was the female head of the clan and had watched the hoyaneh grow up. The clan mother also had the power to remove a hoyaneh who was not serving the people.

Question: what does the Haudenosaunee system of governing reveal about their perspective on what was important when making decisions?

The Haudenosaunee Grand Council



The number of hoyaneh a nation sent to the Grand Council was based on the number of clans in the nation. As in the Grand Council, the hoyaneh of each nation had to achieve consensus among themselves when making decisions.

Question: how did this decision-making process reflect the Haudenosaunee perspective on building understanding? How do you think being governed by consensus would have affected the worldview of the Haudenosaunee?

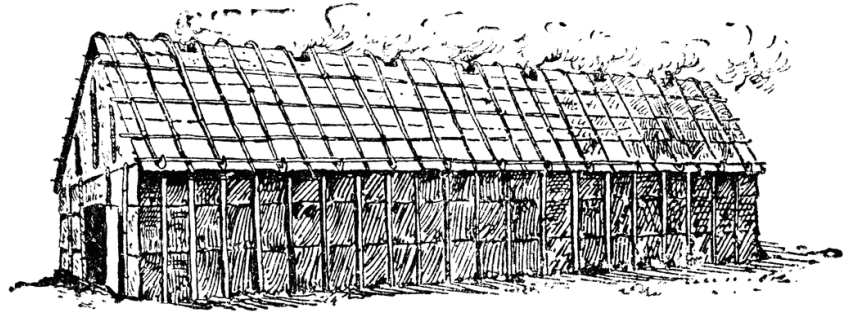
"True consensus is built through talking, listening, and considering different ideas until a new understanding takes place, and the decision makers come to 'one mind' about what to do. Everyone must have a voice. Everyone has their own stories, their own perspectives - gifts they bring to the process that create balance. No one is left out." - Norma General, *Elder of the Wolf Clan, Cayuga Nation, 2007*

The Clan System

The Haudenosaunee lived in extended family groups, called **clans**. Children

belonged to their mother's clan. Under this **matrilineal** system, membership in a clan was - and continues to be - based on a person's blood relationship with their mother.

Clan members lived together in a **longhouse**. When a couple married, the man moved into his wife's longhouse, although he continued to belong to his own clan and carry out responsibilities in his mother's family.



The **clan mother** was the head of the clan. She played an important political and social role, which included:

- Choosing and advising the hoyaneh
- Making major decisions for the clan
- Knowing and keeping the Great Law of Peace
- Assigning names to clan members
- Influencing decisions
- Ensuring that the way of life continued and that children were raised in the customs of the longhouse
- Providing guidance when there were questions or disputes

Question: what do the clan mother's responsibilities reveal about the Haudenosaunee perspective on the role of women?

The title of clan mother was handed on through female relatives. Sometimes, the title went to a sister or a daughter. If an appropriate relative could not be found, however, a woman from a different part of the clan could be selected.

Question: How do you think living with extended family in a longhouse would affect the worldview of the Haudenosaunee?

Explain Perspective

Taking a perspective means **identifying and understanding** the worldviews, values, and beliefs of individuals and groups. Understanding a perspective involves **using evidence to make inferences** about their beliefs and values to gain deeper insights into their worldview.

In this activity, you will explain how the perspective expressed in the Great Law of Peace continues to influence the perspective of today's Haudenosaunee.

1. REFLECT: think about what you already know about Haudenosaunee values, beliefs, and worldviews.
2. ANALYZE: read the quotations on the following page. The first is from a written version of the Great Law of Peace. The second is a more recent quotation from a speech delivered at a conference of First Peoples.
3. COMMUNICATE: create a drawing, a mind map, or paragraph response that shows how the perspective expressed in the Great Law of Peace continues to influence how the Haudenosaunee of today believe they should act.

Quote #1: The Seventh Generation Principle

The following excerpt is based on section 24 of the Great Law of Peace. The excerpt

explains the Seventh Generation Principle, which urges people to think ahead seven generations when considering the effects of their actions.

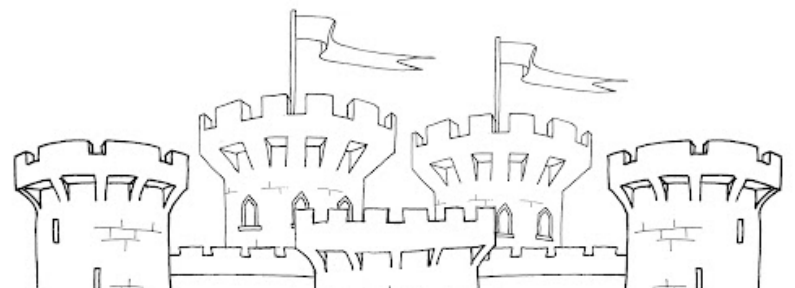
"Your heart shall be filled with peace and goodwill and your mind filled with a yearning for the welfare of the people of the Confederacy. With endless patience you shall carry out your duty and your firmness shall be tempered with tenderness for your people. Neither anger nor fury shall find lodgement in your mind and all your words and actions shall be marked with calm deliberation. In all of your deliberations in the Confederate Council, in your efforts at law making, in all your official acts, self-interest shall be cast into oblivion ... Look and listen for the welfare of the whole people and have always in view not only the present but also the coming generations, even those whose faces are yet beneath the surface of the ground - the unborn of the future Nation."

Quote #2: Cry of the Earth

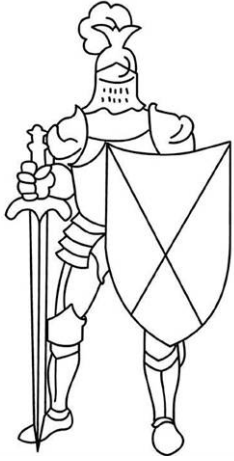
In November 1993, First Peoples leaders gathered at the United Nations in New York City for a conference called Cry of the Earth. The following excerpt is from a speech by Leon Shenabdoah, who was chief of the Haudenosaunee Grand Council.

"We were instructed to carry a love for one another and to show great respect for all beings of the earth ... we must live in harmony with the Natural World and recognize that excessive exploitation can only lead to our own destruction. We cannot trade the welfare of our future generations for profit now ... We must stand together ... as the one family that we are, in the interest of peace. We must abolish nuclear and conventional weapons of war ... we must raise leaders of peace. We must unite the religions of the world as the spiritual force strong enough to prevail in peace. We are the spiritual energy that is a thousand times stronger than nuclear energy. Our energy is the combined will of all people with the spirit of the Natural World, to be with one body, one heart, and one mind for peace."

The Feudal System



After the fall of Rome in the 400s, rival leaders in Europe fought over territory. The political and social system that emerged from this turmoil was called the **feudal system** by later historians.



During the feudal period, kingdoms were organized according to a system of rights and obligations involving **land ownership**.

The **monarch**, who owned all the land in a kingdom, granted land, called a **fief**, to each **noble**. As a result, nobles grew wealthy and powerful. In exchange, the nobles pledged loyalty to the monarch. The nobles, in turn, granted fiefs to **knights**, who agreed to fight for the noble and the monarch.

Peasants and **serfs** were at the bottom of the feudal social hierarchy. Peasants and serfs were allowed work a small portion of their overlord's fief, but they had little freedom.



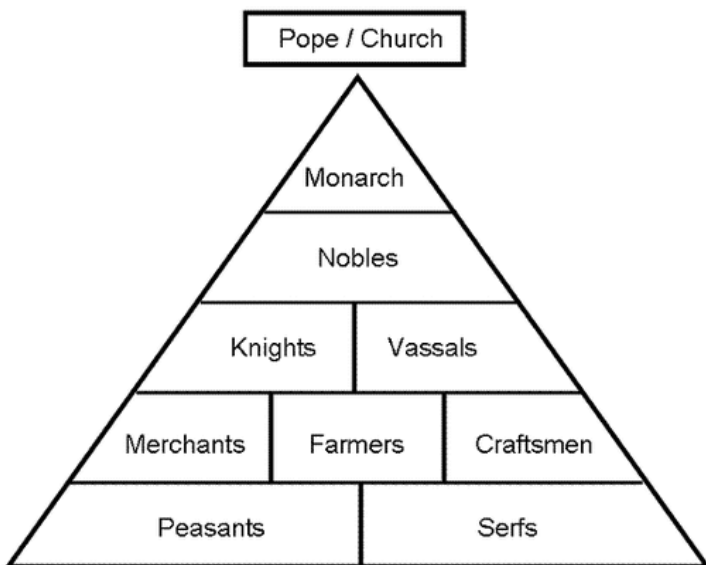
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Merchants and others not tied to a fief existed outside the feudal hierarchy. Their independence, however, did not raise their social status. They were barely a step above peasants.

Question: read Jean Froissart's description of a serf's duties. What do Froissart's words reveal about Europe's perspective on the rights of peasants during this time?

"The nobility ... have great power over the common people, who are their serfs. This means that they are bound by law and custom to plow the fields of their masters, harvest the corn, gather it into barns, and thresh and winnow the grain; they must also mow and carry home the hay, cut and collect wood, and perform all manner of tasks of this kind."

- Jean Froissart, writer and historian, c. 1395



This pyramid shows the **feudal social hierarchy**.

Question: what does this pyramid reveal about the importance of the Catholic Church in Europe during the feudal period?



This illustration, created in the 1400s, shows peasants and serfs lined up to pay taxes to their **overlord**. The overlord, in turn, paid taxes to the monarch.

Question: examine the details in the illustration. What do they tell you about the artist's perspective on the feudal system?

Women's Roles under the Feudal System

Under the feudal system, a small number of women assumed leadership roles. Most women, however, were controlled by their father and later by their husband. A woman had to marry a man chosen by her father and, once married, was considered the property of her husband.

The wives of peasants worked alongside their husbands on the overlord's land. Children also helped with the work, and few peasants could read or write.

Noblewomen could inherit property, and some were educated, but they had little power. Their land and wealth were controlled by their husbands.

The daughters and wives of merchants, traders, and craftspeople had a little more freedom and power than other women. They were more likely to be educated, especially if they lived in a town. They often helped with - and sometimes even ran - their family's trade or business.

Women who did not marry had few legal rights. Joining a convent, a community of nuns, was the only acceptable alternative to marriage. Becoming a **nun** enabled a woman to educate herself. Only men, however, could become priests and officials of the Catholic Church, which was the only Christian church for much of the feudal period.

A nun could become an **abbess**, the leader of a convent. Some abbess also governed monasteries. Hilda of Whitby (c. 614 to 680), for example, was in charge of the convent and monastery at Whitby in northern England. Known for her wisdom, Hilda often advised kings, princes, and nobles.

Question: think about the role of women in the Haudenosaunee Confederacy and feudal Europe. What does the role of women in each society reveal about the society's view of women? How do you think this view would have affected the perspective of women in each society?
