

Paideia Seminar Plan

Text: [Haudenosaunee Great Law of Peace](#)

Pre-Seminar Content

Launch Activity

Begin by asking the lesson's inquiry question: "Did the colonists really bring democracy to the Americas?" Allow students to share their knowledge about the structure of government and the protection of individual rights in colonial America.

A brief class discussion may include examples of colonial governments, the rights of citizens provided in the Magna Carta, and the powers of royal authority. Ask students what they know about the government structure of the indigenous people. Tell students that today, you will explore the Haudenosaunee Great Law of Peace, also known as the Iroquois Confederacy Constitution.

Inspectional Read

1. Distribute copies of the [Haudenosaunee Great Law of Peace](#).
2. Assign students to six groups; each should be assigned to a different section.
3. One group member will read their assigned section aloud. While listening, other group members will annotate the section by circling unfamiliar words or phrases.

Background Information: Provide the following background information for the students.

The Haudenosaunee Great Law of Peace is one of the oldest living constitutions. In the tradition of the Haudenosaunee people, the Great Law of Peace was shared orally, not in writing, and the exact date of its origin is unknown. Most scholars acknowledge 1451 as its inception date; this is 336 years before the drafting of the U.S. Constitution. Oral tradition tells of a Mohawk visionary named Dekanawida, who convinced the nations to unite to establish peace and to protect life, liberty, and property.

Also known as the Iroquois Confederacy Constitution, this system still governs the Haudenosaunee people today. Through this constitution, all members of the Haudenosaunee have an equal voice in the nation's affairs. The Great Law of Peace also outlines a system of checks and balances, guarantees political and religious freedom, and relies on consensus for decision-making.

Before colonization, the Haudenosaunee called the lands from present-day Canada in the north to the present-day Ohio Valley in the west and as far south as present-day North Carolina home. After the arrival of the Europeans, a majority of the Haudenosaunee people were concentrated in present-day New York. The Haudenosaunee Grand Council is the oldest governmental institution in North America that still maintains its original form.



The Founders saw essential principles in the Great Law of Peace. Many scholars believe that Benjamin Franklin favored facets of the Great Law of Peace and used his position to influence other Founders. One virtue held by the Haudenosaunee people that surprised the Founders was the political power provided to women, which was not common in early American life. Ultimately, the Haudenosaunee principles of life, liberty, and property, as well as the system of checks and balances, found their way into the United States Constitution.

Vocabulary

Have participants share the words and phrases they found unfamiliar while a volunteer lists them on the interactive whiteboard. Be sure to include the following:

- confederate
- obstinacy
- variance
- welfare
- manifest
- erring
- divest
- depose
- sanction
- contrary
- irrespective
- progenitors

Definitions are provided within the selected text. Instruct students to pause at the bolded words and process the respective definition that follows in brackets. Discuss as a class, as needed, until all participants are comfortable with the surface meaning of the text.

Analytical Read

Instruct each group to reread the text selection, slowly highlighting the three most impactful lines or sentences. Then, in the selections' margins, write notes on what makes those lines or sentences compelling. To support the students' efforts to annotate the text, consider providing the following guidance:

- Think about which three sentences/statements in your assigned section are most powerful or important and highlight them.
- Why do you think the statements you highlighted are among the most important in this section? Note your reasoning in the margin near each highlighted statement.
- Consider what message or purpose Dekanawidah had in mind when he issued that statement. Note your reasoning in the margin near the highlighted statement.



Pre-Seminar Process

Define and State the Purpose of the Seminar

Tell the students that a Paideia seminar is a collaborative, intellectual dialogue about a text facilitated with open-ended questions. The primary purpose of this seminar is to arrive at a fuller understanding of the textual ideas and values of ourselves and each other.

Describe the Responsibilities of the Facilitator and Participants

In my role as the Facilitator, I am primarily responsible for asking challenging, open-ended questions. I will take various notes to keep up with the talk's turns and flow of ideas. I will help move the discussion forward by asking follow-up questions based on my notes.

In your role as the Participant, I ask each of you to think, listen, and speak candidly about your thoughts, reactions, and ideas. You can help each other do this by using each other's names.

You do not need to raise your hands to speak; rather, the discussion is collaborative in that you try to stay focused on the main speaker and wait your turn to talk.

You should try to both agree and disagree courteously and thoughtfully. For example, you might say, "I disagree with Joanna because..." focusing on the ideas involved, not the individuals.

Have Participants Set a Personal Goal

Instruct students to reflect on how they normally participate in a discussion as a group. Ask students to set a goal for themselves that will help the flow and meaning of the seminar using the Before the Seminar section of the [Paideia Seminar Civil Dialogue Organizer](#).

Please consider the list of personal participation goals:

- To speak at least three times
- To refer to the text
- To ask a question
- To speak out of uncertainty
- To build on others' comments

Ask students if there is one that is relevant for them individually. Please choose one goal from the list or one goal that you feel is best, and commit to achieving it during the discussion we are about to have. Write down or circle your personal goal.

Agree on a Group Goal

Tell students, "For this seminar, I will suggest that our group goal should be..." (display for all to see or have a brief discussion to decide and post the group goal). The teacher will select the class goal from the [Paideia Seminar Civil Dialogue Organizer](#).



Seminar Questions

Opening (Identify Main Ideas from the Text)

- Which phrase or idea from the Great Law of Peace do you think is the most democratic? (round robin)
- Explain why you identified that phrase or idea as the most democratic. (spontaneous)

Core (Analyze Textual Details)

- Does the Great Law of Peace provide for equality?
- How does the Great Law of Peace account for the rule of law?
- How well does the Great Law of Peace protect rights?
- Do the Haudenosaunee people value individual rights or the common good? Explain.
- In what ways is the Great Law of Peace similar to the U.S. Constitution?
- What democratic concepts are present in the Great Law of Peace but do not appear in the U.S. Constitution?

Closing (Personalize and Apply the Ideas)

- Why do you think the Great Law of Peace was created?
- How democratic is the Haudenosaunee Constitution? What principles articulate this best?
- Where do you see the strongest connections to the democracy we have today?
- Did the colonists really bring democracy to the Americas?



Post-Seminar Process

Thank the students for their focused and thoughtful participation in the seminar.

Post-Seminar Reflection

Encourage students to complete the After Seminar section of the [Paideia Seminar Civil Dialogue Organizer](#). Allow time for students to reflect on their participation and that of the class. Students will self-evaluate the success of accomplishing their personal goal and the class goal, as well as reflect on the seminar experience.

Main Text Selections

- Excerpts from the [Haudenosaunee Great Law of Peace](#)

Additional Sources

- [Haudenosaunee Guide for Educators](#)