



Close Reading

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

Close-Reading Instructions

Introduce Inquiry Question

Present the lesson's inquiry question: "Did the colonists really bring democracy to the Americas?" Allow time for a brief discussion and for students to offer their own supporting questions.

Steps to Implement Close Reading

1. Distribute copies of the [Haudenosaunee Great Law of Peace](#).
2. Using your routine strategy for setting up groups, divide the class into six collaborative groups of approximately three to four student members. Each group will be assigned one of the six sections of the text.
3. Share background information with students to provide context on the Haudenosaunee people and the Great Law of Peace.
4. For the first round of close reading, students will work collaboratively in groups to read and discuss their respective sections of the [Haudenosaunee Great Law of Peace](#).
5. For the second round of close reading, instruct students to pause at the bolded vocabulary words in their text section and process the respective definition that follows in brackets.
6. For the third round of close reading, students will work collaboratively to answer the [close-reading discussion questions](#) for their respective sections.

Background Information

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.

Close-Reading Discussion Questions

Section 1

1. Dekanawidah is considered the Great Peacemaker and the founder of the Haudenosaunee people. Explain the metaphor he uses to describe the Five Nations of the Haudenosaunee.
 - Possible answers may include the following: Tree of the Great Long Leaves or Tree of the Great Peace, which protects the Five Nations; the Five Nations are united and stronger together.
2. The Five Nations that make up Haudenosaunee include the people of the Mohawk, Oneida, Onondaga, Cayuga, and Seneca lands. In what ways are the people of the Five Nations expected to act or behave with one another?
 - Possible answers may include the following: The people are expected to “obey the laws” to make sure their “minds are clean and they are obedient and promise to obey the wishes of the Confederate Council,” and to remain loyal and peaceful.
3. How are the Five Nations similar to the newly declared independent states in 1776?
 - Possible answers may include the following: The 13 newly independent states are trying to form a confederation or political union.

Section 2

4. How is business to be conducted by the Five Nations Confederate Council? Does the process seem familiar to you?
 - Possible answers may include the following: Business is “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. This is similar to how a bill becomes a law moving through the two houses of Congress.”
5. Why do you think “a unanimous decision” is required?
 - Possible answers may include the following: A unanimous decision helps to ensure peace among the Five Nations.



6. Under the Five Nations Confederate Council, what happens if a decision is not unanimous? Why do you think this step is in place?
 - Possible answers may include the following: Each side is asked to “reconsider the matter.” The precaution helps to encourage compromise and to keep the peace.

Section 3

7. If the men and women of the Five Nations believe their leader is not obeying the laws, what steps can the people take?
 - Possible answers may include the following: The leader who disobeys the laws can be removed from office. “The War Chiefs shall then divest [take away] the erring Lord of his title by order of the women.”
8. Does anything surprise you about the Five Nations’ process to remove a leader who has disobeyed the laws?
 - Possible answers may include the following: Haudenosaunee men and women are a part of this process. During colonial times, American women were not empowered to vote, hold office, or own property, nor were they afforded other rights that the Haudenosaunee women were. This process can be compared to our impeachment proceedings.
9. Why do you think the Haudenosaunee believe their leader needs to be attentive to the welfare of the people?
 - Possible answers may include the following: The leader should be responsive to the needs of the people’s health, happiness, and well-being. A leader cannot ignore those they represent.

Section 4

10. What qualities and characteristics do the Haudenosaunee think make good candidates to serve on the Confederate Council?
 - Possible answers may include the following: Men with “special ability or [who] show great interest in the affairs of the Nation, if he proves himself wise, honest and worthy of confidence,” he may be elected.
11. What is a requirement of those being considered for office? Does this requirement surprise you?
 - Possible answers may include the following: Candidates must come “from the eligible sons of the female families holding the head Lordship titles.” Throughout much of American history, a patriarchal system existed where power and position came through men.
12. What duties are required of the War Chief?
 - Possible answers may include the following: It is the War Chief’s “duty to lay the cases, questions and propositions of the people before the Confederate Council.” The War Chief is responsible for carrying out the wishes of the people he represents.



Section 5

13. How do the Haudenosaunee view ownership of land and property?
- Possible answers may include the following: Clans or families “shall be the sole owners and holders of the soil of the country.” This ensured that property was protected for the people.
14. Why do you think members of the Haudenosaunee must recognize and accept other members of the Five Nations as relatives?
- Possible answers may include the following: Considering each of the nations as your family would lessen the chance of arguments, war, or other disputes.
15. What rights and protections do Haudenosaunee women enjoy?
- Possible answers may include the following: Women “own the land and the soil” in this matriarchal system, where power and position come from the women.

Section 6

16. What role does the consent of the governed play in the decisions made by the Confederate Council?
- Possible answers may include the following: “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.” The decisions made by the leaders should reflect the will of the people.
17. How does the Haudenosaunee view on the rights of the people differ from the colonial view?
- Possible answers may include the following: The Haudenosaunee council of men “shall have the same rights as the council of the women.” The Haudenosaunee people believe in equal rights for their citizens. In colonial America, wealthy, white, land-owning men held power and enjoyed the majority of rights.
18. How do the Haudenosaunee people view the role of the rule of law in their society?
- Possible answers may include the following: Their actions and decisions are “governed always by the laws and rules of the council of the Confederacy and by the Great Peace.”