

Aligned Lesson: The United States Constitution And The Iroquois Confederacy

Overview

This lesson will show how the U.S. Constitution has its roots in The Great Law of Peace created by the Iroquois Confederacy. It will help students see the similarities between the two covenants and acknowledge the contribution of The Great Law of Peace to the U.S. Constitution.

Assessed Standards and Benchmarks-Jefferson County

HISTORY STANDARD 5

Benchmark 5.1:

Students understand how democratic ideas and institutions in the United States have developed, changed and/or been maintained.

Benchmark 5.1A Intermediate:

Explain the historical development of democratic institutions and principles.

CIVIC STANDARD 2:

Benchmark 2:

Students understand the basic principles and the democratic values basic to the United States constitutional republic.

Benchmark 2.1:

Students will know the central ideas of American Constitutional government, including popular sovereignty, written constitution.

Addressed Standards and Benchmarks: Language Arts Standards 4 and 7

Assessment

Students will list the similarities between The Iroquois Great Law of Peace and the U.S. Constitution.

Prerequisite Skills

Knowledge that the Constitution divides power between the national and state governments and that it separates the government into three branches (executive, legislative and judicial).

Instructional Strategies

*Introduce the lesson with these questions:

- *What is the purpose of the Constitution? (divide powers, branches of government)
- *Do other countries have constitutions? (yes)
- *Why do we have constitutions? (reduce conflict, promote order)
- *Who wrote our constitution? (List names of founding fathers)
- *When was our Constitution written? (1787)
- *Where did they get the idea for the structure of government? (students guess)

*Read the following aloud to the class:

“Sometimes around the year 1142, about 870 years ago, and before the Europeans came to Indian territory, five Native American groups got together and made an agreement for peace. This group was called the League of the Iroquois, and included the Mohawk, Oneida, Seneca, Cayuga and Onandaga tribes. They formed a confederation, and each tribe sent representatives to the meetings. Important issues were discussed and decided upon by all of the tribes.

*Show on the overhead “Wampum Our Historical Record”. Discuss the seating arrangement.

<https://oneida-nsn.gov/dl-file.php?file=2016/04/WAMPUM-OUR-HISTORICAL-RECORD-9.13.pdf>

*Share with the class the significance of wampum from:

<https://history4508.wordpress.com/2011/04/11/the-importance-of-wampum-belts-in-the-haudenosaunee-culture/>

Additional resources: *The Circle of Fifty Wampum* and *Wampum: A Symbol More Powerful Than Paper* by John Mohawk.

Stress that although wampum was valuable, it was not money. It was instead a tangible reminder of oral agreements and was used at meetings to encourage people to think openly and positively in friendship.

*On the overhead, or from individual copies, read aloud together *The Great Tree of Peace* by Paula Underwood Spencer in *Three Strands in the Braid*. In small groups, discuss and list the similarities and differences between the Iroquois Covenant and the U.S. Constitution.

*In a large group, discuss the similarities and differences.

*Similarities may include the purpose, the branches of government, and the concept of sending representatives.

*Differences include The Great Law of Peace providing for the rights of women, children and the Earth.

*Why do you think that credit was not given to the Iroquois Confederacy toward the development of the U.S. Constitution?

*Share with the class the Resolution passed by Congress acknowledging the contributions of the Iroquois Confederacy (Congressional Resolution 76, Sept. 16, 1987).

Transfer

Make classroom rules or review them. Sit in a circular arrangement. Make a string of wampum, each bead representing a student, that can be used to remind the students of the agreements they made. Consequences for breaking a rule can be imposed in class meetings.

Resources

Franklin Listens When I Speak, by Paula Underwood