

Indigenous Lacrosse – Post Practice Powwow

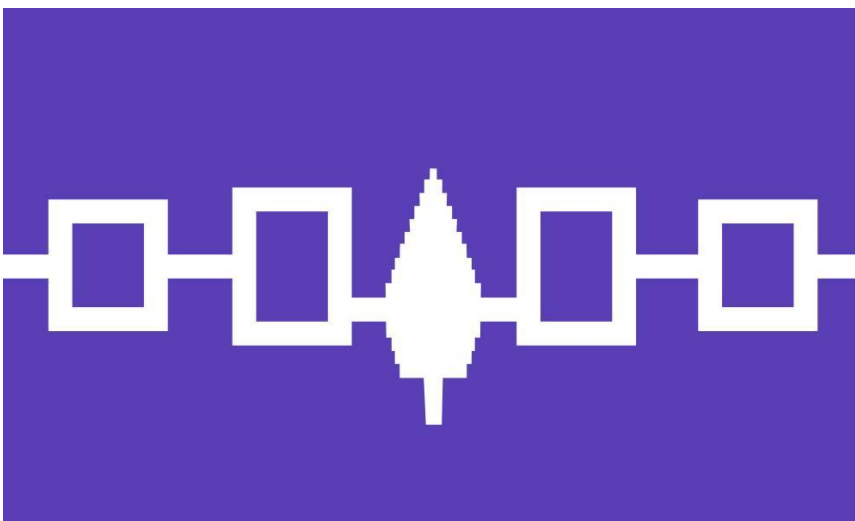
1. Who were the first to play lacrosse?

I asked this once of a Kindergarten team and was told it was the dinosaurs. His mom brought this picture to the next practice.



Indigenous = the original people of a place, or something that naturally originates there.

Many tribes played stickball games in North America, from the Choctaw in Mississippi on the Gulf of Mexico, the Cherokee in North Carolina, the Haudenosaunee in Upstate New York, and the Kugluktuk near the Arctic Circle in Canada. The sticks and games varied by region, but the lacrosse games that we play is most closely associated with the Haudenosaunee. They had five original tribes that came together in 1570. They lived in the finger lakes region of upstate New York. Here is their flag.



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[Get help in holding the flag]

The five symbols represented five original tribes.

- **Mohawk** - People of the Flint (To strike fire) and Keepers of the Eastern Gate (Protecting the Nations' Flank) Open the Great Council meetings.
- **Oneida** - People of the Standing Stone (Standing firm)
- **Onondaga** - People of the Hills (That see from above) and Keepers of the Flame (Home of the central council where they "Keep the fire bright so the minds of the people stay clear.")
- **Cayuga** - People of the Great Swamp (Cayuga Lake) or People of the Pipe (Represents clarity of thought)
- **Seneca** - People of the Great Hill and Keepers of the Western Gate (Protecting the Nations' Flank) Close the Great Council meetings.

A sixth tribe, the **Tuscarora**, joined in 1622. They were People of the Shirt (Protecting their members with skilled crafts)

2. How did the tribes come together?

[Review the flag: Add or recall tribe descriptions]

Haudenosaunee is what the tribes call themselves. It means people of the long house. Which also described their confederacy. They had been historically referred to as the Iroquois. That name was used by their enemies and was an Algonquin word with a French ending. It means "black snake". French Jesuit Priests were the first Europeans to see lacrosse and named it after a Bishop's staff.

The tribes of the Haudenosaunee came together in 1570 when the Great Peacemaker (Huron Chief from the North) and Hiawatha (Medicine Man from the Mohawk) brought the leaders of the tribe together for a meeting.



The Great Peacemaker asked one of the chiefs to break an arrow. The chief held the arrow straight out and snapped it in two. The Great Peacemaker then took five arrows and tied them together with a piece of leather. The chief was asked to again hold the arrows straight out and break them. HE COULD NOT!

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Five arrows tied together could not be broken. He told the gathered chiefs it is the same with the tribes. One tribe can defeat another, but if five tribes worked together, they would be strong and could help each other. In unity, none of them would be defeated again. The hatchet of war was buried underneath a white pine tree and an eagle kept guard at the top of the tree.

The History Stick traces the history of the Haudenosaunee tribes. One thumb equals ten years of time. The entire History Stick covers 450 years of history.

[Introduce the History Stick]



Yellow for the sun starts at the bottom of the stick and goes about halfway up the stick ($206/450= 45\%$). This was a time of peace between the tribes. The central council met at the fire kept by the Onondaga tribe. Disputes were settled by discussion instead of a war, or sometimes a game of lacrosse to determine a winner.

3. One Hundred Years of War

[Review the flag: Add or recall tribe descriptions]

The peace of the Haudenosaunee confederacy came to an end in 1776 when the Declaration of Independence was signed in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. The colonists in America rebelled against the rule of the British King and fought for their independence. Some of the tribes fought on the side of the colonists and some on the side of the British. This meant that tribes that were at peace before, now fought each other again. The eternal fire at the Onondaga nation went out.

After the war was won by the colonists and the United States of America was formed, westward expansion began. The United States took the indigenous people's land to settle. Treaties were signed by the indigenous people. Many times, the terms were broken by the US government. In 1838 the President of the United States forced Native American tribes like the Cherokee from their lands to resettle in Oklahoma. The tribes were forced to march in brutal conditions on a "Trail of Tears" where many died from disease, starvation and exposure.

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In 1876 the Native Americans defeated Geroge Custer and the 7th Cavalry at the battle of the Little Bighorn. This was the last victory of the Native American tribes. The overwhelming number of settlers and military force put an end to their way of life. The vast amount of indigenous land had been reduced to reservations where they were forced to live. Government schools attempted to erase indigenous language and culture and separated families. The history stick shows this time as red for the all the blood that was spilled.

4. Lacrosse is the Medicine Game

[Review the flag: Add or recall tribe descriptions]

[Show the time on the Haudenosaunee history stick]

Throughout the times of peace and war, the Haudenosaunee played lacrosse. They considered the game a gift from the Creator. They played for the enjoyment of the Creator, to give thanks and as a way of healing individuals that were sick. This also helped the spirit of the community. Playing lacrosse was a sacred duty. They played with humility and gratitude. They believed that when a game was played on the earth, a game was also played in the spirit world by the players from generations long ago.

Lacrosse is still played today in Haudenosaunee communities.



(Brett Bucktooth – Onondaga)

Lacrosse is an international sport and will be played in the Olympics starting in 1928. The Haudenosaunee national team is one of the best in the world. They have a World Championship every four years with about one hundred teams. Many Haudenosaunee play for the best college and professional teams.

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Equipment has evolved over the years. Haudenosaunee sticks hundreds of years ago were made from natural hickory wood, leather and rawhide. Now sticks are made of metal, plastic, and nylon strings.



[Sticks and Equipment may be displayed]

Helmets, goggles, mouthpieces, arm and shoulder pads are all worn for player protection. Technology may advance, but lacrosse remains a spiritual game. The best story I know is that of the two wolves.

A Cherokee grandfather that was teaching his grandson about life:

"A fight is going on inside me," he said to the boy. "It is a terrible fight, and it is between two wolves.

"One is evil - he is filled with anger, fear, ignorance, selfishness, arrogance, and hate.

"The other is good - he is filled with patience, courage, wisdom, kindness, humility, and love.

"This same fight is going on inside you - and inside every other person, too."

Then the grandfather was silent. The grandson thought about it for a minute and then asked his grandfather, "Which wolf will win?"

The old man simply replied, "The one that you feed."



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Additional lessons in time of the sun

Great Seal and Clans -stories about how the Great Seal shows the clans and that each clan had their own responsibilities in the tribe to hunt, medicine, clothing, growing food, etc.

Matrilineal Democracy – stories about how the chiefs were elected by the women of the tribe, and how young men when they married became part of their wife’s clan.

Decisions made for seven generations – when decisions were made it was always considered about how it would impact the next seven generations of the tribe.

Three sisters – how corns, squash and beans are grown depending on each other to feed the tribe.

Wampum – as it was used as currency before replaced by glass beads, and how it was used to record important agreements and tell stories. The wampum belt of Hiawatha became the flag of the Haudenosaunee.

Additional lessons in time of the blood

Irish Kindred Spirits -tells the story of how the Choctaw collected money for the starving Irish during the potato famine of 1845. The Irish built a statue of a bowl of feathers in Cork Ireland to thank the Choctaw. In 2022 World Games in Birmingham, Alabama the Irish game their spot so that the Haudenosaunee could play. The Haudenosaunee were excluded by rule.

Additional lessons in lacrosse today

First game – story of the winged animals and the land animals. The flying squirrel and bat were created by the winged animals after a squirrel and a mouse were rejected to play by the land animals. The creatures created were important contributors to the victory of the winged animals.

The Kugluktuk tribe near the Arctic Circle learned lacrosse and they healed their community. The movie The Grizzlies shows the Kugluktuk story. It has mature themes like suicide and poverty, and the movie is not suitable for young players.

Skywalkers – stories about the how the Mohawk tribe erected many of the skyscrapers of Manhattan by welding the girders of buildings like the Empire State Building and Chrysler buildings.