

**GRADE 4, MODULE 1: UNIT 1, LESSON 4**  
**The Great Law of Peace (Iroquois Constitution)**

**Overview and Background Information: Oral Tradition**

Dekanawidah (day-gahn-na-WEE-da), The Great Peacemaker, convinced The Seneca, Cayuga, Onondaga, Oneida, and Mohawk nations to join together in peace. They established a Confederacy. This means that each tribe kept its own land, language, and culture, but they all agreed to some rules that would help them make decisions and get along peacefully. The set of rules as called the Great Law of Peace and as the Iroquois Constitution. These rules were not written down at first. Dekanawidah shared these rules out loud at a meeting near present-day Syracuse, NY. He was talking to the leaders of the five nations. He said the words specifically to Adodarhoh, also known as Tadodahoh, the leader of the Onondaga nation, and other leaders who were at the meeting. Others who heard Dekanawidah say the rules of peace retold the rules to their own families. Over the years the rules were told and retold. Someone finally wrote the words down. Because the rules were told out loud for a long time, it is hard to know if the versions that are written down say exactly what Dekanawidah said.

The Great Law of Peace has more than 100 rules that are about everything from making decisions to adopting children to what to say at a funeral. Below are just a few sections of one version of the Great Law of Peace, retrieved from

<http://www.indigenouspeople.net/iroqcon.htm>.<sup>1</sup>

**Section 1 of the Great Law of Peace**

1. I am Dekanawidah and with the Five Nations' Confederate Lords I plant the Tree of Great Peace. I plant it in your territory, Adodarhoh, and the Onondaga Nation, in the territory of you who are Firekeepers.

I name the tree the Tree of the Great Long Leaves. Under the shade of this Tree of the Great Peace we spread the soft white feathery down of the globe thistle as seats for you, Adodarhoh, and your cousin Lords.

We place you upon those seats, spread soft with the feathery down of the globe thistle, there beneath the shade of the spreading branches of the Tree of Peace. There shall you sit and watch the Council Fire of the Confederacy of the Five Nations, and all the affairs of the Five Nations shall be transacted at this place before you, Adodarhoh, and your cousin Lords, by the Confederate Lords of the Five Nations.

<sup>1</sup>Overview and Background Information written by Expeditionary Learning for instructional purposes. © 2012.

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**Section 4 of the Great Law of Peace**

4. You, Adodarhoh, and your thirteen cousin Lords, shall faithfully keep the space about the Council Fire clean and you shall allow neither dust nor dirt to accumulate. I lay a Long Wing before you as a broom. As a weapon against a crawling creature I lay a staff with you so that you may thrust it away from the Council Fire. If you fail to cast it out then call the rest of the United Lords to your aid.

**Section 7 of the Great Law of Peace**

7. Whenever the Confederate Lords shall assemble for the purpose of holding a council, the Onondaga Lords shall open it by expressing their gratitude to their cousin Lords and greeting them, and they shall make an address and offer thanks to the earth where men dwell, to the streams of water, the pools, the springs and the lakes, to the maize and the fruits, to the medicinal herbs and trees, to the forest trees for their usefulness, to the animals that serve as food and give their pelts for clothing, to the great winds and the lesser winds, to the Thunderers, to the Sun, the mighty warrior, to the moon, to the messengers of the Creator who reveal his wishes and to the Great Creator who dwells in the heavens above, who gives all the things useful to men, and who is the source and the ruler of health and life. Then shall the Onondaga Lords declare the council open.

**Section 24 of the Great Law of Peace**

24. The Lords of the Confederacy of the Five Nations shall be mentors of the people for all time. The thickness of their skin shall be seven spans – which is to say that they shall be proof against anger, offensive actions and criticism. Their hearts shall be full of peace and good will and their minds filled with a yearning for the welfare of the people of the Confederacy. With endless patience they shall carry out their duty and their firmness shall be tempered with a tenderness for their people. Neither anger nor fury shall find lodgement in their minds and all their words and actions shall be marked by calm deliberation.

**Keeping Track: Things We Might Want to Tell Tim about the Iroquois Great Law of Peace**

Name:	
Date:	

**Section 4 Questions**

- a. How many “Cousin Lords” will help Adodarhoh keep the space around the council fire clean?
- b. What is the Long Wing for?
- c. What should they do with the staff if a creature comes into the area?

a. \_\_\_\_\_

b. \_\_\_\_\_

c. \_\_\_\_\_

d. \_\_\_\_\_

**Section 7 Questions**

- a. What is the first thing council members do when gathering for a meeting?
- b. What do council members give thanks for? List several examples from the section.
- c. What is this section mostly about?

a. \_\_\_\_\_

b. \_\_\_\_\_

c. \_\_\_\_\_

**Section 24 Questions**

- a. Who is this section addressing? In other words, who is this law for?
- b. What is a mentor?
- c. What are qualities of a good mentor according to this section? List several examples from the section.
- d. What is this section mostly about?

a. \_\_\_\_\_

b. \_\_\_\_\_

c. \_\_\_\_\_

d. \_\_\_\_\_