

FOUR DIRECTIONS LEARNING ACTIVITIES

Elder	Tom Porter
Nation	Mohawk
Lesson Plan Grade Level	Senior (Grades 10-12)
Time Required	3 – 4 hours
Subject Strand Links	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • History
Traditional Teachings	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Four Sky Dwellers • Tree of Peace
Student Summary	<p><u>The Four Sky Dwellers</u> The number four has great significance for the Mohawk peoples. Like many other Aboriginal peoples, the Mohawk respect the four directions as messengers from the Creator, sent at the beginning of time. The Mohawk refer to the four directions as the Four Sky People, the Four Sky Dwellers, or the Four Brothers: East, South, West and North. Some believe that the North and East are twins and the South and West are twins. Together the four directions have the job of helping Mother Earth. South and West provide the climate for the growth of food for nourishment and survival, whereas North and East provide the relief and rest through cold and snow to allow Mother Earth to <i>rejuvenate</i>.</p> <p>Four is also a number representing the four seasons, the four winds. All of these forces are intertwined to represent completion and wholeness, <i>interconnectedness</i> and <i>interdependency</i>, as none of these elements can be removed from the others; all work in unison to sustain life. As we need them for our survival, we are obligated to respect them and treat them with great sensitivity.</p> <p>The Four Directions are considered to be messengers, as they help to communicate with people, as direct communication from the Creator would be so powerful it would overwhelm. Traditionally, the Mohawk believe, therefore, that important messages are received from nature, from plants and animals, from the wind and the water, and so on, as they see these energies as coming from the Creator. The messages are for protection and are taken seriously as having great importance.</p> <p><u>The Tree of Peace</u> The Four Sky People are powers that dwell in the Sky World and can <i>manifest</i> themselves as people when necessary in order to communicate with people. Mohawk believe this happens at critical times in history when extremely significant events are to take place with great impact on this nation. The interpretation of the messages is considered to be a responsibility of only the most respected individuals in the community. The visit of the great Peacemaker was one of these times, a spirit who came to give five warring Iroquois Nations (of whom Mohawk are one) a <i>constitution of peace</i>, as</p>

	<p>symbolized by the Tree of Peace, with four white roots reaching out to the Four Directions, and a bird on top keeping watch. The Peacemaker explained that all who committed to peace could take shelter under the tree, under which the warring nations buried their weapons (hachets).</p> <p>By the time of the <i>Declaration</i> of Independence in the USA, the Iroquois had been living peacefully for many years. This peace inspired European philosophers to such as Jean Jacques Rousseau and John Locke to learn more about the Great Law of Peace, using it as a basis for the formation of a new American government constitution. The Tree of Peace became the Tree of Unity and the bird on top the tree became the eagle, symbol of the American government. “Of the People, For the People, and By the People” became the motto of the government, based on the governing structure of the Iroquois.</p> <p>The Tree of Peace has since come to receive the attention of the United Nations as a profound model of peaceful disarmament, garnering international acceptance as a symbol of peace, and the Iroquois are termed the “oldest living participatory <i>democracy</i> on earth.”</p>
Learner Objectives	<p>Knowledge/Understanding:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To demonstrate understanding of peacemaking • To identify the roles of the Four Directions as understood by traditional Mohawk people • To relate the receiving of messages from the Four Directions as a means of spiritual communication and unity between people, plants and animals • To relate the Iroquois governance structure as a model for early American governance <p>Inquiry/Values:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To relate the symbolism of the Mohawk Tree of Peace • To identify the significance of maintaining respect for nature and the four directions <p>Skills/Applications:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To articulate ideas and opinions effectively
Strategy	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Using an American coin, explain that the eagle is a symbol of American government. Brainstorm ideas on what the eagle represents to Americans. Why is it such a strong symbol? Where else would you find the eagle used symbolically? Does anyone know how the American people came to use the eagle as its symbol? Do other cultures revere the eagle as well? Why? 2. Introduce Mohawk elder Tom Porter who has traditional teachings to share on the Four Directions and the Tree of Peace. His teachings explain how when five Iroquois nations were fighting with each other, the Creator sent a messenger, a peacemaker to teach them how to live peacefully. It was the Iroquois who formed a participatory democracy and set an example for the Americans to follow when they were forming their government following the American Revolution.

3. Visit www.fourdirectionteachings.com to hear traditional Mohawk teachings.
 - a) Go to "Introduction" to hear a brief background on the Mohawk people.
 - b) Go to "Four Sky Dwellers" to hear teachings on the Four Directions and the Tree of Peace.
 - c) Go to "Peacemaker Prophecy" to hear the prophecy of the future of the Mohawk.
4. Discuss Porter's teachings on the four directions. He explained how closely intertwined the forces of nature are and how completely dependent people are on nature, the four seasons, and the four directions. What is the meaning of four, and how does it exemplify completion?
5. Discuss the concept of relating to the four directions as people, as brothers. Was this story meant to be taken literally? How could the four directions manifest themselves into people?
6. It was through this closeness to nature and spirit that Mohawk people came to communicate with the Creator through plants and animals, at one time receiving the Great Law of Peace from the Peacemaker. How could they receive a message from a spirit? In what ways have spirits sent messages to people on earth in the past? Do they continue to communicate messages? How can you receive messages from spirits? What is their purpose? What must you do to demonstrate thankfulness to spirits who provide messages?
7. Discuss the Great Law of Peace and "burying the hatchet." Why is this a timeless model for people to follow worldwide?
8. Working in groups, research how Iroquois governance has become a model for participatory democracy worldwide.
9. Wrap up the lesson with a reading of the summary above and a selection of discussion topics and optional exercises below.

Discussion Topics:

- "The Art of Peace begins with you. Work on yourself and your appointed task in the Art of Peace. Everyone has a spirit that can be refined, a body that can be trained in some manner, a suitable path to follow. You are here for no other purpose than to realize your inner divinity and manifest your innate enlightenment. Foster peace in your own life and then apply the Art to all you encounter." This quote is by Morihei Ueshiba, Founder of the martial art Aikido, from the Art of Peace. Discuss. What do you believe your purpose on earth to be? Are you aware of your peacefulness? Can you feel the difference between being at peace and at odds with others? How do you control conflicting situations so as to maintain peace? Aikido is a martial art based on peace; how is this possible?
- The Peacemaker came to teach the Six Nations how to live in peace, as symbolized by the Tree of Peace. What are symbols of peace used in other cultures? What does "peace" really mean? How can people live in peace today? Is this any more difficult a process than it was hundreds of years ago?

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Tree of Peace was a triumph sent by a spiritual leader to bring peace to fighting nations. How does spirit accomplish what the physical cannot? • Traditional Mohawk people believe, as do other Aboriginal cultures, that communication takes place between all living things. Ceremonial practices allow for the sending and receiving of messages from humans to animal spirits, natural elements, plants, and so on. How does this open relationship with nature compare with how modern society views plants and animals? How can people learn to become more aware of plants and animals and the role nature plays in our lives on a daily basis? <p>Optional Exercises:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Conduct a tree planting exercise as a way of paying respect to Mother Earth. • Conduct a research project on the “Faithkeepers” of the Mohawk nation who believe that following the Great Law of Peace is a spiritual practice. Whereas contemporary society upholds the separation of church and state, traditional Mohawk society does not. Explain how the Faithkeepers maintain a balance between good governance and spiritual expression. • Research a contemporary leader recognized for working towards peace (eg. the Oslo Peace Accords made in the Middle East through the assistance of former US President Bill Clinton. How was Clinton able to bring leaders of warring Palestine and Israel together to establish agreements? What qualities did he demonstrate in this process?)
Vocabulary	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Declaration • Constitution • Rejuvenate • Interdependency • Interconnectedness • Democracy • Manifest
Materials Required	
Evaluation	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Teacher evaluation of student discussion responses 2. Teacher evaluation of research projects

STUDENT SUMMARY

The Four Sky Dwellers

The number four has great significance for the Mohawk peoples. Like many other Aboriginal peoples, the Mohawk respect the four directions as messengers from the Creator, sent at the beginning of time. The Mohawk refer to the four directions as the Four Sky People, the Four Sky Dwellers, or the Four Brothers: East, South, West and North. Some believe that the North and East are twins and the South and West are twins. Together the four directions have the job of helping Mother Earth. South and West provide the climate for the growth of food for nourishment and survival, whereas North and East provide the relief and rest through cold and snow to allow Mother Earth to *rejuvenate*.

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The Four Directions are considered to be messengers, as they help to communicate with people, as direct communication from the Creator would be so powerful it would overwhelm. Traditionally, the Mohawk believe, therefore, that important messages are received from nature, from plants and animals, from the wind and the water, and so on, as they see these energies as coming from the Creator. The messages are for protection and are taken seriously as having great importance.

The Tree of Peace

The Four Sky People are powers that dwell in the Sky World and can *manifest* themselves as people when necessary in order to communicate with people. Mohawk believe this happens at critical times in history when extremely significant events are to take place with great impact on this nation. The interpretation of the messages is considered to be a responsibility of only the most respected individuals in the community. The visit of the great Peacemaker was one of these times, a spirit who came to give five warring Iroquois Nations (of whom Mohawk are one) a *constitution* of peace, as symbolized by the Tree of Peace, with four white roots reaching out to the Four Directions, and a bird on top keeping watch. The Peacemaker explained that all who committed to peace could take shelter under the tree, under which the warring nations buried their weapons (hachets).

By the time of the *Declaration* of Independence in the USA, the Iroquois had been living peacefully for many years. This peace inspired European philosophers to such as Jean Jacques Rousseau and John Locke to learn more about the Great Law of Peace, using it as a basis for the formation of a new American government constitution. The Tree of Peace became the Tree of Unity and the bird on top the tree became the eagle, symbol of the American government. "Of the People, For the People, and By the People" became the motto of the government, based on the governing structure of the Iroquois.

The Tree of Peace has since come to receive the attention of the United Nations as a profound model of peaceful disarmament, garnering international acceptance as a symbol of peace, and the Iroquois are termed the “oldest living participatory *democracy* on earth.”

Diagram for MOHAWK Curriculum

