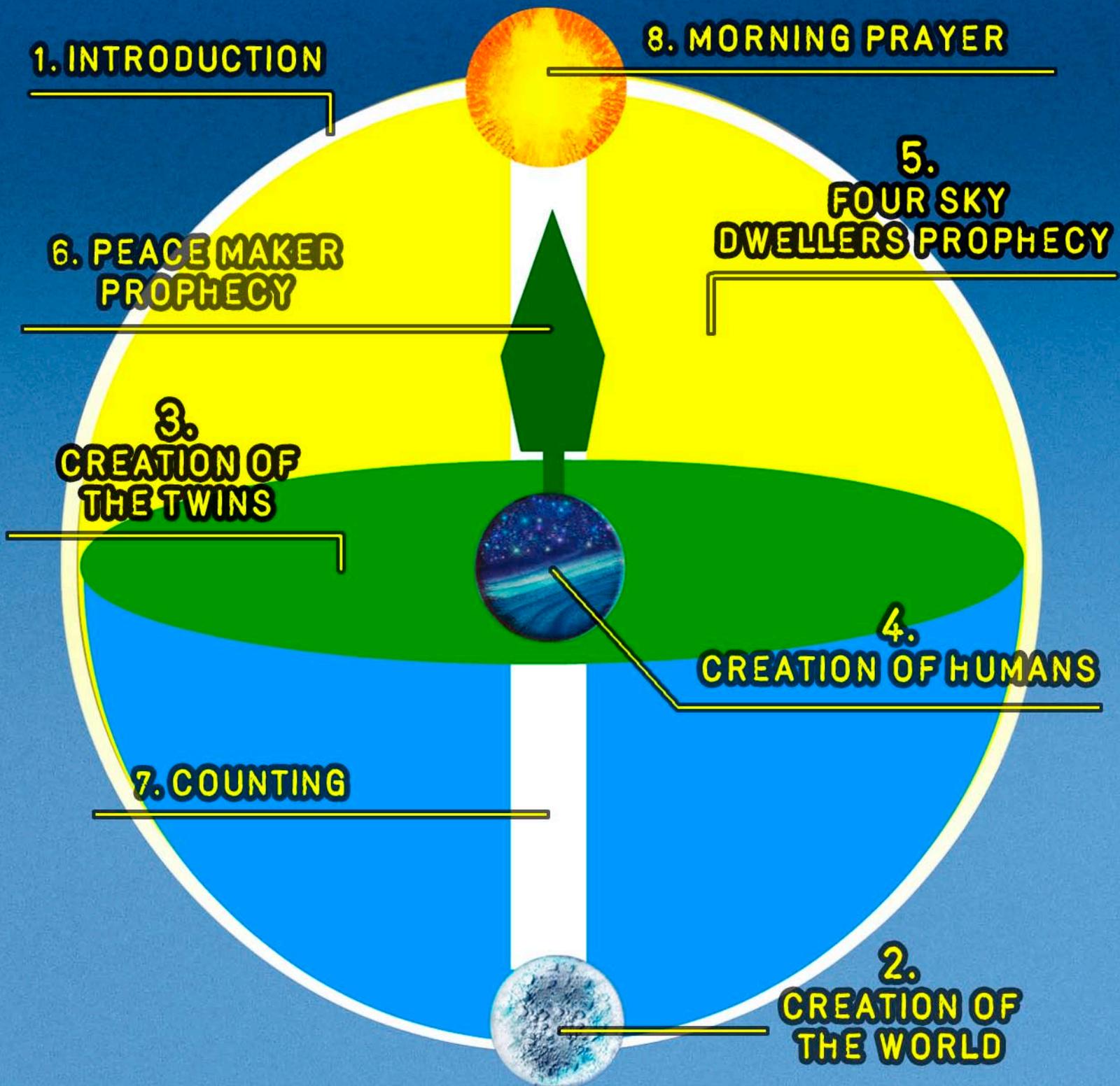


Diagram for MOHAWK Curriculum



MOHAWK (HAUDENOSAUNEE) TEACHING

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INTRODUCTION

The Iroquois or Haudenosaunee people are a confederacy of the Mohawk, Oneida, Onondaga, Cayuga, Seneca, and Tuscarora nations. We are people of the Longhouse, which is the centre of our traditional life and spiritual practices. Our languages are all related, but the western and the eastern Iroquois have a bit of a different dialect. For example, the Mohawks say “Lodeenosaunee,” and the Senecas, they say “Haudenosaunee.”

We are a matrilineal people, so our clan comes from our mother. In Haudenosaunee cultures, you are born into a clan; you cannot buy into it or dream about it. So whatever your mother is, that’s what you are. And traditionally, when a man marries a woman, he has to move to her village, and everything has to go to the woman, including all the children. And you have to marry into another clan. So Wolf Clan cannot marry another wolf, or turtle marry another turtle, because they’re considered brother and sister.

A while ago some of us moved back down to the heart of the original Mohawk country - our ancient living grounds in the Mohawk Valley, not too far from Albany, New York. We had been gone for a long time. See, when the Europeans came here, there was conflict with them. And the Mohawk fought with them for a little over a hundred years, trying to stay here and maintain the land. But with the smallpox and measles epidemics that killed so many Mohawks, and the wars and trickery and everything that the Europeans used, the Mohawks finally got tired and went up north. But when they left, our ancestors said that someday their great grandchildren would come home. And so that’s the first reason we came back here to the homeland, because it was prophesied that we would do that.

The second reason we came back is to revitalize our traditions.

What we’re trying to do here is to set the foundation for a spiritual mindset. If you’re going to talk about a traditional way of understanding, then you can’t view it the way a European views it; you can’t hear it the way a European hears it. You have to have a mind that has been trained how to interpret the life forces in the world that we live in, in a way that is very different from the European way.

CREATION OF THE WORLD

In our Creation Story there was a woman that came from another world. And at one time, that world came close to this planet. And that woman came here

during that time. She is our great, great Grandmother for humans. She had different names. One was *Ajinjagaayonh*, which means A Matured Flower. Sometimes we call her Sky-woman.

When Sky-woman came here, this planet had no land; it was a planet of water. And she was aided by the birds to get here safely. And a turtle came up and they put the woman on that turtle's back. And She brought things from that other world when she came here: strawberries, and raspberries, and peaches. So when she was on the turtle, the animals went after the dirt that's under the water. And they all died except one, but they brought that dirt up, and they put it on the turtle. And Sky Woman walked counter-clockwise around that turtle's back, and that's what made the miracle of birth happen. That's what made seeds turn into humans, and what made a little tiny corn get to be a tall corn stock. And as she went around counter-clockwise, she chanted songs that came from that other world. Some people say that's where our feather dance came from; that's what she was doing. And as she went further, that miracle of birth was multiplied. And the turtle turned into the Earth, this continent, and the ground multiplied, and grew. So that's why in all our Longhouse ceremonies we keep going in our circle that way, so the corn and beans will keep growing, and the trees will keep growing - because She made it grow. And She told us, that's the way it's done where she came from. Since that time, we never stopped going around in a sacred circle, counter-clockwise, following our Grandmother.

In Ojibwe or Lakota country, they go the other way, clockwise. But my elders taught me to respect that. Because when the Creator talked to the Ojibwe and Lakota, he told them what to do, and I cannot question that. So when I go to Ojibwe or Lakota country, I follow how they go, with no questions, with complete respect. They dance clockwise, and if they ask me to dance, I go right with them. And when the real Ojibwe or Lakota come here, they're the same. They dance our way with us, no hesitation. This is the way we were told to do it by our Elders – with respect.

CREATION OF THE TWINS

So the Sky-Woman's daughter is our Mother Earth. And that daughter died giving birth to twin brothers. And when that Sky Woman's daughter died, she lay on the ground and they covered her with a mound of dirt. See, they used to mound the dead; they didn't dig down and bury them deep in a grave. All through the Midwestern States, you see mounds that are a quarter mile high, and sometimes miles long. That's from a long time ago. It's all tied to those stories.

And of the two twin brothers that were born of Sky-Woman's daughter, one is the night, and the other is the day - that's the sun. And the Sky Woman favoured the nighttime brother; she didn't like the other twin. There's a whole long story behind that. But that's why we call the Sky Woman Grandmother Moon: when

you see the moon, that's her. And Grandmother Moon is always with the night. Once in a while you see her shining in the daytime: because, periodically, she will go and visit her other son, who she didn't like.

So that's why we call them Old Brother Sun, Mother Earth, and Grandmother Moon. See, the Sky-Woman, who became Grandmother Moon, gave birth to Mother Earth, who in turn gave birth to the twins, the night and the day – or the sun, our Old Brother.

CREATION OF HUMANS

The twins, the night and the day, created us humans. See, the sun is like the Creator, in a way, making life. The light of the sun is the hands and arms of the Creator. And he's balanced by his brother, the night.

And our spirits have three parts because when the twins finished making humans and animals, they put them in a fire and cooked them. And then when they finished cooking them, they opened their mouths, and blew in there three times. That's what made their eyes blink and their arms move, and they had life.

And so, when we are born, each one of us has three spirits, or souls. It's like sweetgrass: when you take three parts and braid them, they become one. And so when we are born, three different sources of energy make us the one person that we are. And then when we die, that braid comes unraveled. And each one has to go back to its origin.

And one of them goes back to the other world far above us, the place in the sky where that old Grandmother came from. Because she used the twins to make humans, and one part of our spirit came from that skyward direction. So one part of us goes back there.

And the second part came from the energy power of this planet below us, from our Mother Earth, from where the twins, the night and day, were born. It's like taking coals from a big fire and moving them to make a new fire. That power came from that first fire, and when it's done, that's where it's going back.

And then the third part, that's the material soul. That's the one that's from the dirt, the body of our Mother Earth. So it goes back there.

So there's three parts of our spirit that go back at death: two to the Earth and one to the Sky. And because we live here, our main home is here, and most of our life is here, there's two that go back here, and one up there.

That's why, whenever Lodenusaunee people pray, at the sunrise, or tobacco burning, they always take three big breaths of air and holler three times: to show

the Creator and Mother Earth that we never forgot how we got here, and why we're here – to show that we still know, that nothing ever derailed us since the beginning of time; nothing ever made us forget that original truth. And that's why when you see the Senecas or Mohawks or Cayugas burn tobacco, you always hear them holler real loud three times first, proclaiming their humbleness: that it is You that give us this life, and the privilege to be here. Recognizing those three parts. Then they pray.

FOUR SKY DWELLERS PROPHECY

There are four winds in the four directions that bring the changing of the seasons: the east and the north, the south and west wind. And there are the four sacred beings, called Sky Dweller beings, sent at the beginning of time, commissioned by the Creator as his helpers, and his messengers. And the four winds, and the four Messengers, and the four directions, and the four seasons that we know in this part of the world, are all intertwined; all have an association with four.

Sometime we refer to the four Sky People as the Four Brothers, or we just call them the north, east, south and west. Some say there are two sets of twins. And they've got different jobs to do. For example, Mother Earth gets tired of giving birth by the millions every day, and feeding all her children – the corn gardens, the grass growing, all the plants and creatures. So when she gets tired, her sons, the winds from the east and the north, bring a white blanket of snow to cover her, so she can rest. And then, when she has sufficiently rested, her other sons, or the twins from the south and the west, will come and take that snow blanket off, and then her body will become a carpet of green grass and rebirth. And that's the job of the four brothers.

But the Four Brothers are also messengers of the Creator. Because the Creator himself is so powerful that He can never appear to us; if we saw him, we'd burn up, disintegrate in a split second. We're not strong enough to be in his direct presence. So he has these messengers. That's why you would hear some Indians long ago say, after fasting, "The tree talked to me." Well, that's the Creator talking, but He goes into a tree so he won't kill you - or maybe he would go through the birds, or the lightning. Only after we're done here, maybe it will be all right to see our Creator directly, but with the power that we have on this Earth, we can't.

Sometimes we think of the four Sky People as if they were human beings, and it's all right to do that. But they don't have faces or bodies as we would know them. They are powers that dwell in the Sky World, from the Earth to the atmosphere. And their job is to carry the messages of our Creator, and protect us from the dangers of the universe. They can manifest themselves as humans when they're messengers, born like a baby, from an actual woman. And when

they're growing, or grown up, that's when they teach the message the Creator sent through them. Then they die, and go back to their jobs.

There are only certain times in history when these beings would come. One of them was the Peacemaker himself. Another time, a baby was born that came to give us all our Longhouse ceremonies. Another time, one came into a man that was already grown and took his body, and became the one that gave us our clans and clan structures.

PEACEMAKER PROPHECY

Whenever the people forget their teachings, the Creator calls upon the Sky Dweller beings to reintroduce what was forgotten. So throughout history, they've been sent here when we got unruly or forgot our spiritual teachings. Every once in a while, one of them is born to deliver a message from the Creator about what we should be doing. That's where our Great Law came from. The Bringer of that Great Law was our Peacemaker.

When the Peacemaker came, He used the Tree of Peace, and he said at the base of the Tree would be Four White Roots, for east, north, west and south. That would proclaim the peace of nations in the world. That's been in effect for many centuries, since he was born here as the Peacemaker.

The Real Iroquois never say the Peacemaker's name, except when they're raising a chief, or having an official reading of the Law. And it has to be prayed on, or tobacco burnt for it. But commonly, we never say that name, except with kids. I can tell my young son or daughter that name. But when I tell them, I say, "I'm not going to tell you anymore. From here on you'll never say that name.

We don't say that name, because there's a prophecy: when you hear people say that name, we are coming toward the end of the civilization of the world, where the world will something like almost end, and another one will start in a different way – a purification. The prophecy says that there will come a time when there will be discord amongst the leaders, and the people, and things will get really bad, like we've never seen before, in terms of disunity - great disrespect going on between humans. And that time is when there will be three left that still believe in what the Creator gave us. Nobody understands what it means when they say three left - if it's three nations, or three clans or three people. But whatever it means, three will be left. And they will go into the virgin forest, when they find it, if you can find it, where the big trees are - a real forest. And they will build a sacred fire there. And at that time they will cry the Peacemaker's name three times. And then the Peacemaker will come back to lead us from all this turmoil, again. And so that's why we're not allowed to say that name just anytime. Only when we're truly desperate will we cry it in that ceremony, and then he will come

back. But if you say it every day, when you really need Him, He thinks you're just talking about his name – he's not going to come back.

In the prophecy of the Great Law, it talks about that: when you hear people saying that name in regular conversation, that's one of the signs we're headed towards the other world. We tried telling some young people that, and they don't listen. But that's also part of what they told us would happen.

COUNTING

All numbers have significance; you might say that all numbers have a story. For example, whenever the Lodenusaunee people count from one to ten, we are reciting our Creation story, in a very short form.

When we say our word for "one", that refers to the Sky-Woman that came first.

And then our word for "two" refers to the Sky Woman's daughter, who had twin babies. So the word "two" comes from the word for "twin."

When we say "three" in Mohawk, it refers to when they put the Sky-Woman in the middle of that Great Turtle's back. So our word for three comes from being "in the middle."

In our language, four refers back to when life was given - when the four races of people began breathing, blinking their eyes, and moving. It means, "It's now proper; it's correct." So when you say four, it refers to the creation of life on the back of the Turtle.

And so it is with all the numbers up to ten, which remind us and teach us of the Brother who became the night, of the Sky Woman's passage to Earth, of the sacredness of the body, of balance, and of where we came from, right back to that Sky World.

And when you get to the number ten, it refers to making a full circle.

So whenever we Mohawks count from one to ten, we are automatically reciting our Creation Story. No matter what we count - could be beans, money, anything. That's inherent in our language. And the Creator probably did it like that because He knew what was going to happen to us - that we were going to get lost, and be colonized. So he hid our identity in different places. That's why we couldn't be colonized completely or effectively. See, there's not supposed to be any more Mohawks today, or Lakotas or Ojibwes. We're supposed to have all forgotten who we were. But we refused to die, to lose who we are. And it's thanks to these kinds of things that the Creator placed in our cultures that help us not to

get lost. When they attacked us, it was not obvious about the numbers. And yet there lie our Creation stories, just in those numbers. It's in the language.

MORNING PRAYER

One of the first things we would do is teach a child to pray.

One time, when I was still very small, I was lying in bed early in the morning. And Grandma came over and sat on the bed, and woke me up. And she says, "Do you know that *Sonkwaiatison*, our Creator, is coming from the Sun, who we call our Old Brother? And his job is to watch over us, and that's why he's way up there: so he can see us every day. And when he's watching us, he sends his light here. And that sunlight is what makes the trees grow, and the corn, and the muskmelons and berries. And in fact, it makes us grow too. And if the sun does go out, all life will cease to exist."

And then she says, "Did you know that when the sun is shining, when you see those roads, those rays going out from the sun, that those are the hands and fingers and arms of our Creator?"

"And so," she says, "when you're still sleeping on that bed, early in the morning, when the sun hasn't even shown his face yet, that light is coming down before him. And that sun comes through that window. And when he finds you, that's our Creator's hands and body and arms. And where you're lying in bed, he holds you on your head with his hands and fingers; then he holds your body, and your legs, and feet. He caresses and envelops your whole body with his arms. Why? Because that's your father, and He loves you."

"...So what are you going to do about it?" she says.

And I'm just a kid, so I say, "I don't know." And she says, "Well, I'm going to tell you. Every morning, as soon as your eyes open, before you even put your foot over the bed to get up, because the Creator has embraced you, you say this: 'Nia: wen – Thank you - You-Who-Made-Me; I thank you, I greet you, and I give you my love.' That's all you've got to say. And the Creator will be happy."

So I've been saying that for all the sixty some years I've been living, since she told me. And the real Iroquois people, we must do about fifty or sixty prayers in one day. And this was natural. It wasn't like a chore. When you were trained by your elders, you don't have to think twice about it; it's just part of you.