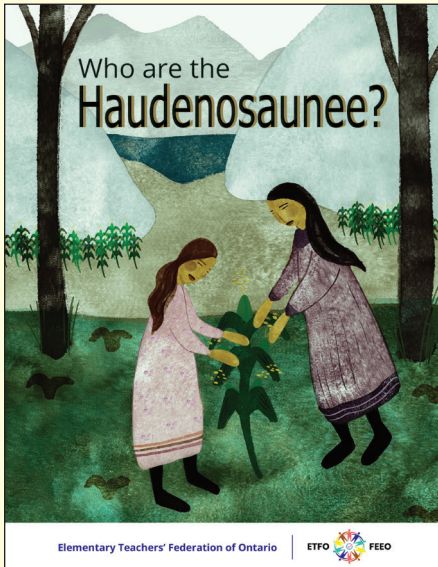


# WHO ARE THE HAUDENOSAUNEE?



*Who are the Haudenosaunee? This is a question asked by many non-Indigenous educators. This resource is intended to support teachers, education workers, and students in getting to know their neighbours, their colleagues, and their Treaty Partners. You can download the complete resource at [etfofmi.ca](http://etfofmi.ca).*

The Haudenosaunee Confederacy is one of the longest standing sovereign Nations, with treaties predating Confederation with Great Britain (Hill, R.). The Haudenosaunee are founders in democracy; and a People grounded in peace, equity and “Good Minds” (Lyons, O.). Many Canadians and Americans are unaware of the historical impact the Haudenosaunee have had on many aspects of our current way of life. For example, their influence in wars, the women’s rights movement, and environmental stewardship, just to name a few.

An essential understanding of the Haudenosaunee is sovereignty. It answers many long-standing educator questions with respect to nationality, flags, national anthems, self-identification, and travel. Many Haudenosaunee people do not self-identify as Canadian, First Nations, or American. They are first and foremost Haudenosaunee, Onkwehón:we, or identify by their own Nation and Clan. Citizenship acknowledges that a particular Nation has jurisdiction over a People. Treaties are made between Nations; and the Haudenosaunee have been making Nation to Nation agreements since the 1600s as a sovereign Nation, with the Dutch, Great Britain, the United States, and other European Nations. They have never relinquished these rights. It is important to continue to respect, acknowledge and honour their right to assert such sovereignty, especially within our classrooms, places of work and livelihood.

In this document you will notice that the Onkwehón:we mentioned will be referred to as Six Nations, not as First Nations. May the work of this resource support all in developing a deeper connection to, and intercultural understanding of our neighbours, colleagues, and Treaty Partners, the Hodinöhsö:ni.

It is important to note throughout the document, there will be a sharing of space for the various Haudenosaunee languages, Mohawk, Oneida, Onondaga, Cayuga, and Seneca, when available. There may be spellings that look inconsistent, but reflect the various dialects throughout the Confederacy.

## WHAT IS THE IMPORTANCE OF STORYTELLING TO THE HAUDENOSAUNEE?

*“My dear ones, our work is about to begin.” – Jo-Ann Archibald*

Historically and today, Haudenosaunee have shared important history, knowledge, and beliefs through the telling of stories. Storytelling is one of the ways that Onkwehón:we people preserve their identity, transmit knowledge, and pass on history, cultural beliefs, practices, and ceremonies to the next generation. “Stories are used to provide a sociocultural and historical account of the community knowledge from elders to youth, ensuring its survival with new generations”. (Fixico, D., 2003)

Where other cultures may use images to represent or share their culture or teachings, “the Haudenosaunee paint pictures with their words”. (Lance Keye, oral communication, 2021) Storytellers share their knowledge of the people, places, and traditions. Sharing what they have learned is their responsibility and must be shared in a way that is available for everyone to understand. Some stories are traditional in that they share teachings and values that have been passed down for generations, while others connect families to their community and its identity.

### Why should we teach children through the telling of stories?

The purpose of storytelling is to share the knowledge, traditions and life experiences of the people and places in the story. It is an integral part of the way of life and preservation of the culture and history. The meaningful education of children, through stories, has the purpose of preserving the culture, as well as teaching expected behaviour, treatment of others, and the environment. Storytelling not only offers others a model of how stories should be structured and told; it also allows for children to be introduced to other cultures and their



important values, beliefs, and customs. The strong oral tradition of Indigenous Peoples provides the opportunity to ground literacy development in oral stories that reflect the children's family, community relationships, and culture (Zepeda, 1995).

Storytelling provides a holistic way for children to learn. Children must not only listen, but also visualize the characters of the story, the characters' actions, and their emotions. They make inferences and important connections to themselves and the world around them. Some stories hold valuable life lessons, and some can be a process of learning; being left for the listener to apply the lesson to their own life and experience. "Lessons within stories connect to larger lessons, and act as reminders to other lessons. Lessons do not exist separately; they are part of a network of interconnected teachings and guidelines." (Lance Key, oral communication, 2021)

It is important to listen with "three ears: two on the sides of our head and the one that is in our heart." This emphasizes the importance of holism to the Haudenosaunee and the interrelatedness to our physical, spiritual, emotional, and intellectual beings.

Oral stories are an important strategy used to teach children about the structure of stories. When later they are given opportunities to write their own stories, this enables them to recognize how verbal expressions can become structured texts. By understanding the structure of a story, how stories are created, and how they are told, children become more competent with literacy and language-based tasks. Incorporating opportunities for children to practise storytelling along with the writing of their own stories supports literacy development.

### **How can accessing traditional knowledge help students and educators to build bridges?**

When we teach about another person's culture or identity, we must approach these teachings by being clear that we understand and accept that: "I will teach you what I was taught, as I was taught it, but it is not my teaching." (Lance Key, oral communication, 2021).

When you share a story with students, acknowledge where the story comes from, whose story it is, and the cultural context of the story. Be clear that the story does not belong to the storyteller, it belongs to the community or person the story comes from. Gather information about the story such as:

- Whose story, is it? What is the meaning, moral or purpose of the story?
- What is the historical and geographical context of the story?

Make time to tell stories every day and allow students the opportunity to share their own oral stories. Reflect on the meaning of the story and give students an opportunity to make connections and think about how it applies to them. Meet students where they are with the stories and be conscious of your own bias and lens as you engage with the text or story. Including authentic voices means creating space for authentic connections and learning. Use Indigenous story books to share with your students, and whenever possible, invite a knowledgeable person from the community to share their stories.

### **Suggested activities for storytelling**

- Connect with the Board Indigenous Education Lead to invite a Haudenosaunee storyteller or speaker to come into the classroom.
- Introduce Haudenosaunee stories into the classroom through oral storytelling (e.g., Corn Husk Dolls, Lacrosse, Creation Stories, etc.).
- Create a Three Sisters Garden or bushel basket post classroom visit.
- Incorporate the Thanksgiving Address into a Science inquiry.
- Connect story to sensory exploration, the Three Sisters, healthy living, Mathematics, Science and Social Studies.
- Use storytelling to bring treaties and significant historical figures to life.
- Use storytelling to introduce mathematical/scientific thinking in the classroom.
- Students discuss seasonal stories with family, Elders, or community members. Gather information about foods, plants, and jobs that are done during certain times of the year. Share these stories and the information you gathered in your reading groups.
- Share and illustrate a seasonal story from your family or community.
- Host a storytelling café in the classroom, or a family evening.
- Include storytelling as a format for communication in assessment and evaluation.
- Animate, draw, act out, create digital representations of significant characters from different stories.
- Explore the Mohawk creation story with Tom Porter ([fourdirectionsteachings.com](http://fourdirectionsteachings.com)).
- Create a storyboard illustrating a Haudenosaunee story.

