




Why does wampum matter?

Summary of the Inquiry	This 3-part lesson will help students to understand the historic and contemporary significance of wampum to Haudenosaunee (Iroquois) people by listening to, reading and observing a variety of media. Teachers can read source E: "Iroquoian Use of Wampum" or source F: "A Symbol More Powerful Than Paper" for background information.
Activity to generate curiosity about the topic	<p>Wampum flash cards: Listen to the provided video and audio clips to help students understand what wampum is and the vocabulary associated with it. Students can create wampum flash cards with the supplied PDF to build the vocabulary they will need to understand why wampum matters.</p> <p>Source A: PDF of wampum flash cards</p> <p>Source G: Glossary</p> 

Supporting Question 1
What have Haudenosaunee people historically used wampum for?
Activity that will help students to answer question 1
Students will listen to a read-aloud of two texts and will use the provided T-chart to write down the different examples of wampum's historic uses that they hear.
Featured Sources
<p>Source B: Wampum, excerpt from Haudenosaunee Guide for Educators</p> <p>Video F5: Haudenosaunee's Legendary Founding</p> <p>Source D: T-chart</p>

Supporting Question 2
How does wampum influence people today?
Activity that will help students to answer question 2
Students will do a second listen to the readings and watch the provided videos with a specific focus on the contemporary examples shared.
Featured Sources
<p>Source B: Wampum, excerpt from Haudenosaunee Guide for Educators</p> <p>Video F3: What is wampum?</p> <p>Video F2: The Living Tradition of Wampum</p>

Supporting Question 3
What different objects can wampum be found in?
Activity that will help students to answer question 3
Looking at historic and contemporary objects that incorporate wampum
Featured Sources
<p>Wampum Otgoa Exhibition Guide</p> <p>Collections search at the National Museum of the American Indian</p>

Summative Performance Task	ARGUMENT Why does wampum matter? Using the combined sources of the videos, audio clips with word definitions and the two provided articles, students should develop an argument for why wampum matters, using both historic and contemporary evidence.
	EXTENSION Students can make a replica wampum belt using one of the suggested techniques and share the significance of the belt and the treaty associated with it.
Taking Informed Action	<p>UNDERSTAND What misinformation about wampum do Haudenosaunee people feel needs to be rectified?</p> <p>ASSESS Investigate what upcoming opportunities (e.g. fairs, parent nights, school assemblies) will allow students to reach the widest audience.</p> <p>ACT Develop posters, displays, and presentations to educate the rest of the student body of your school about why wampum matters.</p>

New York State Social Studies Framework Key Ideas & Practices	<p>3. Study about the major social, political, economic, cultural, and religious developments in New York State and United States history involves learning about the important roles and contributions of individuals and groups</p> <p>4.2 NATIVE AMERICAN GROUPS AND THE ENVIRONMENT: Native American groups, chiefly the Haudenosaunee (Iroquois) and Algonquian-speaking groups, inhabited the region that became New York State. These people interacted with the environment and developed unique cultures. (Standards: 1, 3, 5; Themes: ID, MOV, GEO, GOV)</p>
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Activity to generate curiosity about the topic

Wampum flash cards: Listen to the provided video and audio clips to help students understand what wampum is and the vocabulary associated with it. Students can create wampum flash cards with the supplied PDF to build the vocabulary they will need to understand why wampum matters.

Source A: PDF of wampum flash cards

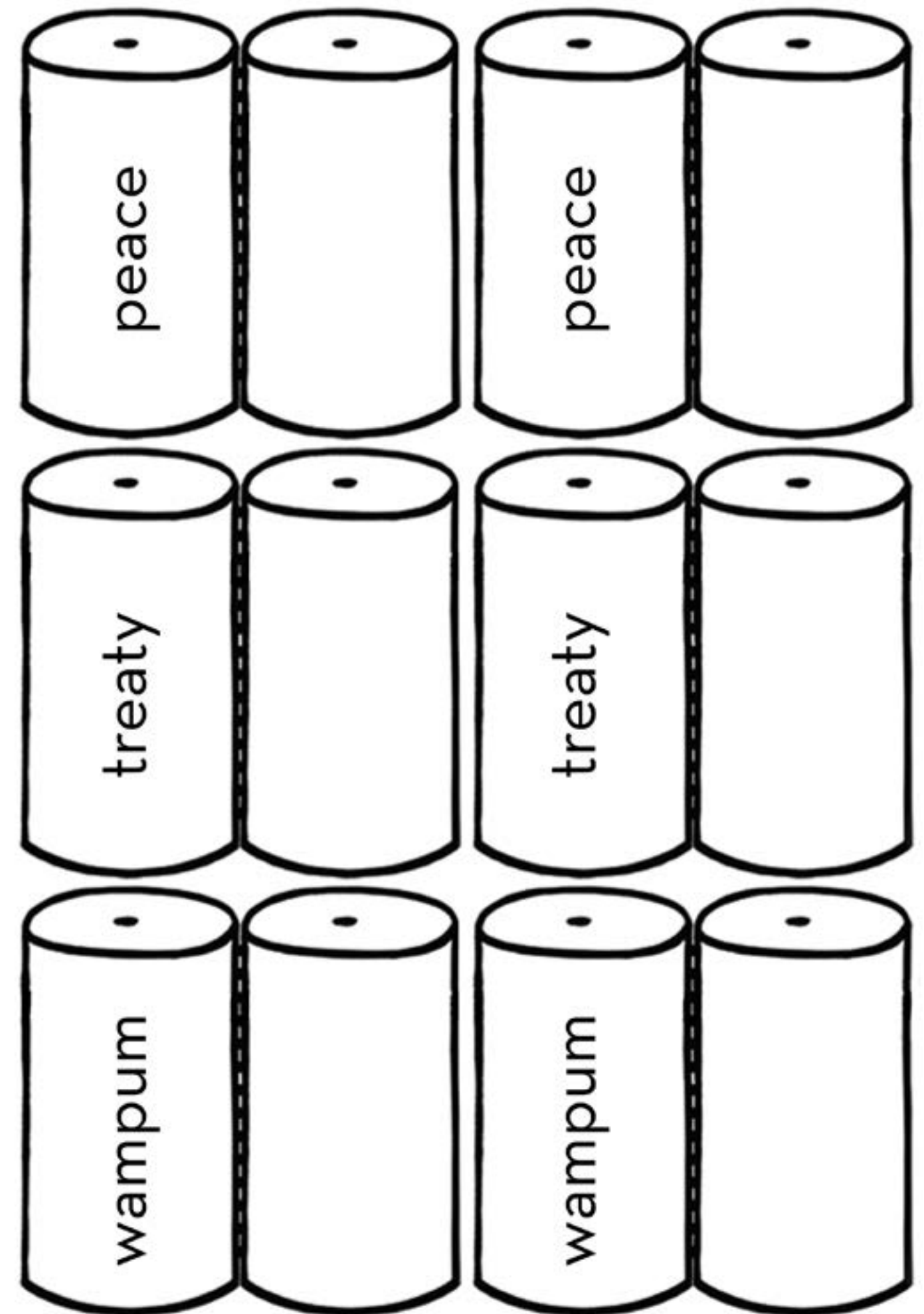
Source F5: Wampum vocabulary defined **Source G:** Glossary

Wampum flash cards Procedure:

- 1) Teacher will break class into 4 groups, providing 2 printouts of the glossary sheet (source H) per group and each student will get one printout of the wampum flash cards (source A).
- 2) Each student will focus on defining the three words: wampum, treaty, and peace. They will paraphrase the glossary definition on the bottom bead.
- 3) Students will then listen to recordings of people talking about the meaning of those words in relationship to wampum (source G5)
- 4) Students will make a second bead with the same word and write a different definition of that word based on what they learned from the recordings.
- 5) They will then cut out each bead and glue or tape them to a piece of string as illustrated below



Potential exploratory questions:
 What did the two definitions have in common? How were they different?
 How can the same words have different meanings to different people?



The inquiry begins with the compelling question, “What have Haudenosaunee people historically used wampum for?” The teacher will display the T-chart that students will use for recording the evidence they find in the featured sources. Students will need a copy of the T-chart and each of the featured sources (hard copy or electronic copy). Students will listen to/read and annotate each source to find answers to the questions. Sample responses have been provided.) When completing the T-chart, students should create a bulleted list of responses. Responses do not have to be in complete sentences. Students should identify the source used for each bulleted item.

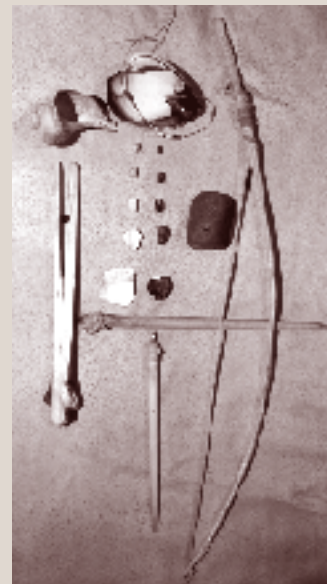
Supporting Question 1	
Supporting Question	What have Haudenosaunee people historically used wampum for?
Formative Performance Task	Students will listen to a read aloud of two texts/ read two texts and use the provided T-chart to record different examples of wampum’s uses.
Featured Sources	Source B: Wampum (excerpt from Haudenosaunee Guide for Educators) Source F3: What is wampum? Source C: T-chart template
Conceptual Understanding	4.2 NATIVE AMERICAN GROUPS AND THE ENVIRONMENT: Native American groups, chiefly the Haudenosaunee (Iroquois) and Algonquian-speaking groups, inhabited the region that became New York State. These people interacted with the environment and developed unique cultures. (Standards: 1, 3, 5; Themes: ID, MOV, GEO, GOV) 4.2a Geographic factors often influenced locations of early settlements. People made use of the resources and the lands around them to meet their basic needs of food, clothing, and shelter. 4.2b Native American groups developed specific patterns of organization and governance to manage their societies. • Students will compare and contrast the patterns of organization and governance of Native American groups such as the Haudenosaunee (Iroquois) and Munsees, including matrilineal clan structure, decision-making processes, and record keeping, with a focus on local Native American groups. 4.2c Each Native American group developed a unique way of life with a shared set of customs, beliefs, and values.
Content Specifications	Students will be able to identify historic uses of wampum by the Haudenosaunee people.
Social Studies Practices	✔ Social Studies Practices Gathering, Interpreting and Using Evidence

Supporting Question 2	
Supporting Question	How does wampum influence people today?
Formative Performance Task	Students will listen to interviews and featured texts from the exhibit and make connections to wampum’s contemporary significance. These answers can be added to the T-chart. Teachers can point out the important use of the correct tense to describe ways that wampum was important in the past and how it is important today.
Featured Sources	Source B: Wampum (excerpt from Haudenosaunee Guide for Educators)
Conceptual Understanding	4.2 NATIVE AMERICAN GROUPS AND THE ENVIRONMENT: Native American groups, chiefly the Haudenosaunee (Iroquois) and Algonquian-speaking groups, inhabited the region that became New York State. These people interacted with the environment and developed unique cultures. (Standards: 1, 3, 5; Themes: ID, MOV, GEO, GOV) 4.2a Geographic factors often influenced locations of early settlements. People made use of the resources and the lands around them to meet their basic needs of food, clothing, and shelter. 4.2b Native American groups developed specific patterns of organization and governance to manage their societies. • Students will compare and contrast the patterns of organization and governance of Native American groups such as the Haudenosaunee (Iroquois) and Munsees, including matrilineal clan structure, decision-making processes, and record keeping, with a focus on local Native American groups. 4.2c Each Native American group developed a unique way of life with a shared set of customs, beliefs, and values.
Content Specifications	Students will be able to identify how and why wampum is significant today.
Social Studies Practices	✔ Social Studies Practices Gathering, Interpreting and Using Evidence

Supporting Question 3

Supporting Question	What different objects can wampum be found in?
Formative Performance Task	Students will look at historic and contemporary objects that incorporate wampum.
Featured Sources	Catalog from the exhibit Wampum: Otgoä; collections search from the National Museum of the American Indian
Conceptual Understanding	<p>4.2 NATIVE AMERICAN GROUPS AND THE ENVIRONMENT: Native American groups, chiefly the Haudenosaunee (Iroquois) and Algonquian-speaking groups, inhabited the region that became New York State. These people interacted with the environment and developed unique cultures. (Standards: 1, 3, 5; Themes: ID, MOV, GEO, GOV)</p> <p>4.2a Geographic factors often influenced locations of early settlements. People made use of the resources and the lands around them to meet their basic needs of food, clothing, and shelter.</p> <p>4.2b Native American groups developed specific patterns of organization and governance to manage their societies.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Students will compare and contrast the patterns of organization and governance of Native American groups such as the Haudenosaunee (Iroquois) and Munsees, including matrilineal clan structure, decision-making processes, and record keeping, with a focus on local Native American groups. <p>4.2c Each Native American group developed a unique way of life with a shared set of customs, beliefs, and values.</p>
Content Specifications	Students will be able to understand the various types of objects that wampum can be found in.
Social Studies Practices	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Social Studies Practices Gathering, Interpreting and Using Evidence

National Museum of the American Indian Education Office, [Haudenosaunee Guide for Educators](#), 2009



(Top) Quahog shell and wampum beads.

Whelk and quahog shell, wampum beads, and bow drill.

NMAI photos by Stephen Lang

Chiefs of Six Nations with wampum belts, September 16, 1871.

NMAI photo P9784

WAMPUM

Wampum (WAHM-pəm) was introduced to the Haudenosaunee by Hayo'wetha (Hiawatha), who used the beads to console himself from the loss of his family. This was the first Condolence Ceremony, which is still practiced today among the Haudenosaunee.

The word wampum means “white shell beads” in the languages of the Narragansett of Rhode Island and Wampanoag of Massachusetts. Wampum are purple and white beads made from quahog (KWA-hog) clam and whelk shells. Native nations that lived along the Atlantic coast collected the shells from their shorelines and produced beads from them. Long before Europeans came to America, the Haudenosaunee traded with their Algonquian speaking neighbors, who lived along the Atlantic coast, to obtain the highly valued shell beads. In exchange for wampum beads, the Haudenosaunee provided furs, corn, beans and squash. The mostly white quahog shells contain a small amount of purple. The rareness of the purple beads makes them much more valuable than white beads. The process of making the beads is very difficult and time consuming. Today, they are made using power tools but formerly they were created using a bow drill.

A very important use for the wampum was to make belts, consisting of rows of interlaced wampum woven on a bow loom. The placement of the purple and white beads in the belt formed symbolic designs and codes. The designs in the belts recorded the laws of the Confederacy, oral tradition used for ceremonies, and important political interactions between Native nations, and later between the Confederacy and Europeans. Wampum belts were presented at Grand Council meetings or other official gatherings.

Wampum belts were never worn as clothing. Though they are all different sizes, the name alludes to the belt-like shape featuring long and narrow bands. Wampum continues to play an important role in Haudenosaunee society.

The Haudenosaunee never used wampum as money. However, due to the scarcity of metal coins in New England, Europeans and Americans recognized the value of wampum and began producing wampum in factories to use for trade among themselves and with Native people. The Narragansetts and Pequots played a critical role in the manufacture and exchange of wampum in the New England area in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. The two tribes collected the shells and produced the beads, which they traded to Europeans in exchange for newly introduced goods. By the 1700s, Dutch settlers established wampum factories, including the Campbell Wampum Factory, founded in Bergen, New Jersey, in the 1780s. The Campbell Wampum Factory continued to operate until the 1880s.



Record different ways the Haudenosaunee people use and used wampum and ways Colonists used wampum.

examples of possible answers

Ways that Haudenosaunee people use and used wampum	Colonists' uses for wampum	Ways that Haudenosaunee people use and used wampum (the source is identified by letter)	Colonists' uses for wampum
		<p>Wampum was or is used:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • to show that the holder is speaking truthfully (D) • to clear a person's mind as part of condolence ceremonies, or to heal those who were or are grieving (B) • to mark an agreement (Video F3: What is Wampum?) • to serve as a record of a significant event (D) • as an invitation, especially to a ceremony or council meeting. (Video F3: What is Wampum?) • as an ornament or part of a person's regalia (D) • as a warning (D) • as a diplomatic tool (D) • as a confirmation of a message (E) • to hold the significance of a message given through spiritual means (E) • to represent the consensus of negotiating nations • As a symbol of the positions hold within the longhouse and council (Video F3: What is Wampum?) • to record history (Video F3: What is Wampum?) • to mark who the leaders are (Video F3: What is Wampum?) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • In the early 17th century, colonists used wampum as a replacement for money when there was a shortage of European currency (F) • Wampum was traded by colonists with Native peoples in exchange for beaver fur pelts (F) • Colonists developed cottage industries making wampum beads. • Colonists commissioned the creation of wampum belts to mark important political events, such as the Canandaigua Treaty.

Iroquoian Use of Wampum

by Ateronhiatakon

On well worn tourist trails, main and back road museums join "made by Indians" traders in describing wampum as "Indian money." However, the use of wampum by the Iroquois as a trade item was of secondary importance at most. Sir William Johnson wrote in 1753, "It is obvious to all who are the least acquainted with Indian affairs, that they regard no message or invitation, be it of what consequence it will, unless attended or confirmed by strings or belts of wampum, which they look upon as we our letters, or rather bonds."*

Onkwehonwe, the original people, have been instructed that, for whatever purpose the people come together, before all else comes the *Ohenten kariwatekwen*, the thoughts which bring our minds together to collectively express our gratitude. We address each other as brothers and sisters of the same creation, as friends and human beings, the way we are instructed to greet one another. We greet each other in peace and goodwill. We say good health to one another, so be it our minds. And the people reply, they will say *to* or *nio*. We give thanks to the earth, the giver of life, to the waters, to the plant life, to all of the animals, the insects and the fish, to the life and forces that are in the sky world, eldest brother sun, grandmother moon, the stars, to the four spiritual beings who guide our people, to the Peacemaker, to Ayonwentha, to Skanietario, Handsome Lake, to Sonkoiatasen, our Creator. We say thank you to Sonkoiatasen for giving us all these things and the continuation of our generations and the assurance that we have this love, that we have this peace, that we have this strength, and that we have this righteousness in our relationship with wherever you are listening to our words. So be it our minds.

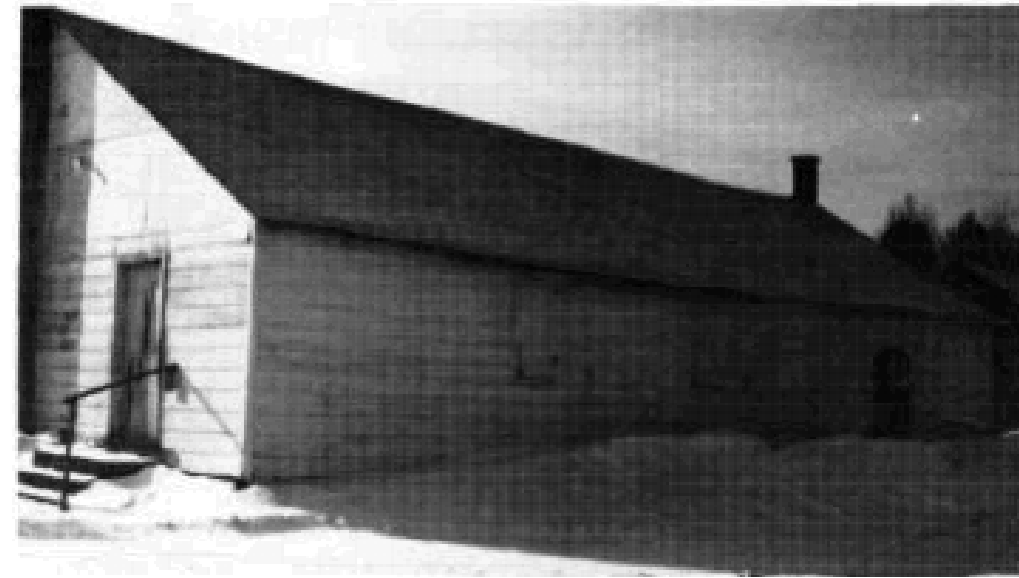
I want to share the words of the people who are no longer with us, who in their teaching of me intended that I should pass on these words to a younger generation. There are many variations of these teachings, but I am going to share a version that I heard while I was growing up and sitting in the longhouse listening. What I saw that impressed me was the respect and honor that my grandparents would show when they handled *ohnikohra*, wampum.

To the *Hodensaunee*, the Iroquois people, wampum held, and holds, the special significance of a message given through a spiritual means. We are told that wampum was given to us a long time ago by Ayonwentha (Hiawatha), one of the very special men among our Iroquois people, who helped the



This drawing by John Kahionhes Fadden represents a Mohawk man, as evident from the three feathers in his *gustoweh*, holding wampum strings. Note the plant design on the shirt neck. (Drawing by John Kahionhes Fadden, reprinted by permission of the artist)

*Letter of Sr. William Johnson. 1753. Doc. Hist. N.Y. . . vol. ii. p. 624.



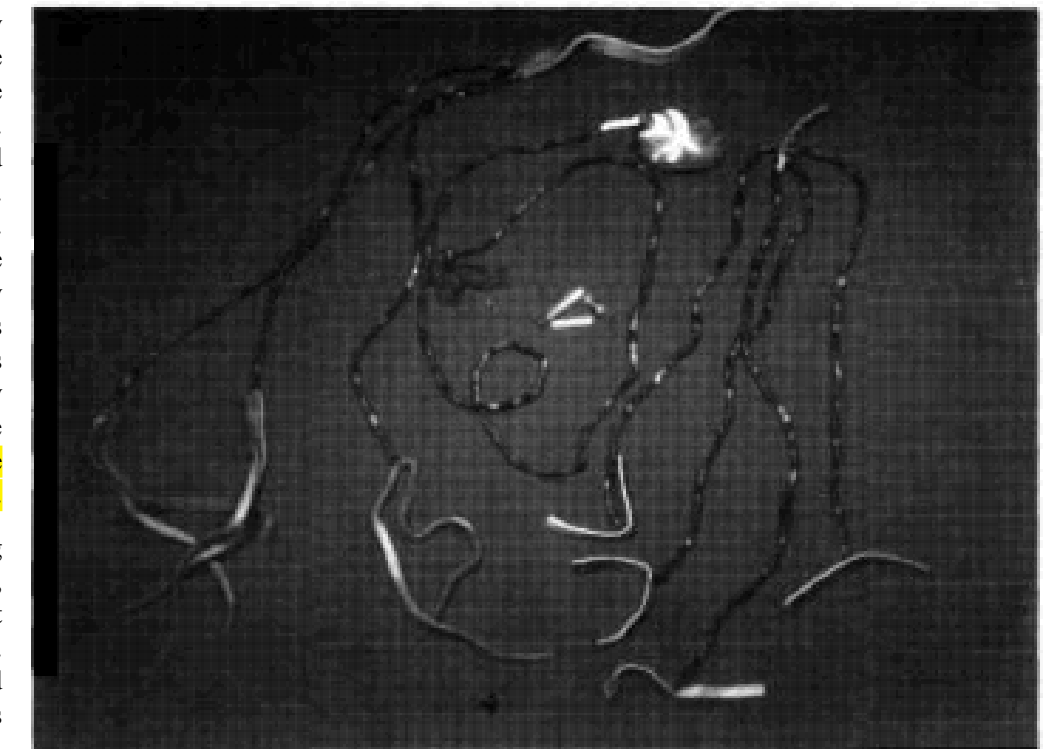
Longhouse, Mohawk Nation at Akwesasne. (Photograph by Barry Montour, courtesy of the Akwesasne Museum)

Peacemaker, establish *Kaianerekowa*, the Great Peace, known as the League of the Five Nations or the Iroquois Confederacy. At the time Ayonwentha received these wampums he had lost his daughters. He was in great sadness, and he did not know what to do next. A message came to him as he was walking beside a lake, and in one version of the story a flock of geese came to this lake and picked up the water. On the remaining lake bed lay strings of wampum. Ayonwentha said, "If I ever meet a man who has this same grief, who has this same loss that I am feeling, here is what I would begin to say to him in condolences." He would say to him that life has to continue. Although we acknowledge a great loss in our life, we have to look at the life cycle that will continue. The sun will shine tomorrow, just as it did today. The moon will continue her direction. The Mother Earth will continue her cycles. And so it was that he found the words that are still used for the condolence messages today when our leaders, both men and women, pass away. Ayonwentha, a great statesman, in his grief, found in his heart what he would say to his fellow man who would be in the same condition as himself. The wampum is the evidence of the sincerity of the condolences.

Ohnikohra is made from the quahog shell. The quahog shell has two colors, an area where it is purely white, almost ivory, and areas that are more purplish. Wampum is made from both the ivory and the purplish areas. There are notations as to how the combinations of purple, white, and purple and white beads are strung. It is the significance of how they are strung that

the interpreter or orator must remember and recite. This requires considerable insight and training. We say that a man who can do this has a gift given to him by a spiritual power, and that gift belongs to the people. It just flows through the orator: the gift does not belong to him, it is a gift that the people have been given through the orator.

The Mohawk, Onondaga, Seneca, Cayuga, and Oneida nations comprise the [original] Confederacy. Each has a string of wampum beads. We refer to that string



Mohawk wampum strings. (Photograph by John Kahionhes Fadden, collection of the Six Nations Indian Museum, courtesy of the Akwesasne Museum)

of beads as the nation's council fire, and it is a symbol present during councils. A fire is burning, and whatever words we use while this wampum is displayed have to be kind and gentle words. The nation council fire wampum is brought out for important national, international, and multi-national meetings. It is known and acknowledged by the people that the bearer of this wampum belt represents the nation's one-minded consensus. When he speaks, he speaks with the collective in mind. That means the men elders, the women elders, the chiefs, the clan mothers, the faith keepers, the children, and even the future generations. And so you can perhaps imagine the commitment, the thorough peace, that wampum bearers must find in their own minds when they take wampum in their hands.

There are many, many different types of wampum. The messenger's wampum, for example, would be used for an announcement of a Grand Council (meeting of all nations of the Confederacy) or a nation's meeting. This wampum string is a short one fastened on a wooden stick, and the man who carries it is recognized by the nation. He is given this wampum and a message announcing a meeting. Often there are marks on the stick which indicate in how many days the meeting will be held. He will travel directly to the nation, where he will deliver



The men would rarely dress as they did for this Grand Council of the Hodenosaunee at Onondaga, 1974. Dr. Mars, representative of President Ford, stands with the Hodenosaunee Chiefs holding the Two-Row Wampum. (Photograph by Ateronhiatakon)

this message, and only this message. Then he will return immediately to the source which sent the wampum out. **The main purpose of the messenger's wampum is to give a specific message about a meeting or an issue which needs to be discussed and relates to the people as a whole.**

Wampum is the symbol of the authority that the women hold, and when there is a specific and important message that is to be exchanged, this wampum is brought out. The people will then know that this person is speaking from a particular family [clan] with an urgent message and that all should hear and adhere to the message that is being given.

Wampum historically was used to record agreements between the Hodenosaunee and other nations or governments. For example, when the Hodenosaunee met with the Dutch, they acknowledged each other's existence and developed a relationship. The Hodenosaunee understanding of that relationship is recorded in a belt called the *Kaswenta*. The *Kaswenta* is also known as the Two-Row Wampum belt, and there is a very special meaning for us in that belt, even today. The Two Row Wampum belt is about 2½ feet long and has two purple parallel lines which run the length of the

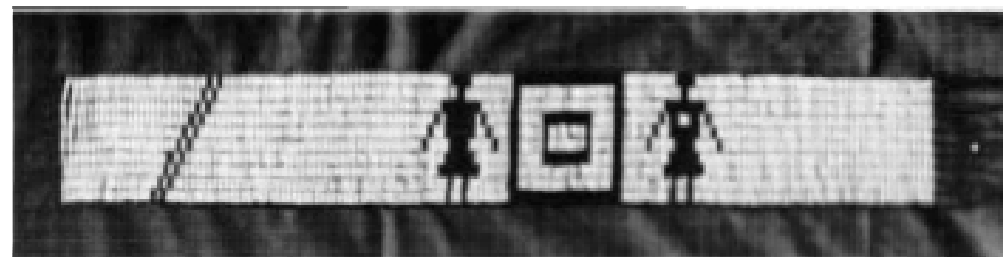
belt on a white background. This particular belt denotes the type of relationship the nations of the Hodenosaunee expected to have with the Dutch and other arriving nations for all time to come.

The *Kaswenta* represents the continuous flow of life. One purple row signifies the Onkwehonwe. In that row would be the Onkwehonwe people, their language, their culture, their customs, and their ways. Whatever is important to their understanding of their own identity is there, complete for future generations. However, the Hodenosaunee acknowledged another row, and in that row would be the vessels of other nations, the Dutch in this case. The Dutch had their own language, culture, customs and ways; their past and future are in their vessel.

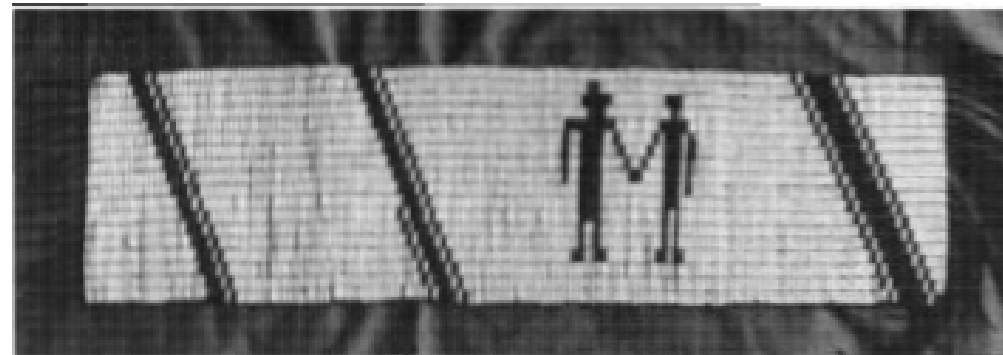
In their agreement with the Dutch, the Onkwehonwe said to them: we are not your son, we do not have a relationship in which your king will be our father, but rather we are equals and we are brothers; we are created as brothers and we can flow down the river of life, each in our respective vessels and canoe. We can have a relationship, a communication, an understanding about one another, but we are not to steer the other's vessel or canoe.

This meant that neither the Dutch nor the Hodenosaunee were to legislate laws or influence in a detrimental way which would re-direct each other's full heritage, language, and culture. The example given is that if anyone crosses from the canoe to the vessel or the vessel to the canoe, there is a concern that there may be rough waters. A wind might come, and if there are people who are straddling these two vessels, there is fear that they might not survive that storm, the people might fall. That message, ancient as it is, has a very important significance today.

There are many, many ways in which the people symbolized words and happenings or future direction through wampum. One of the more common ones, and there are different versions of this, is the *Teiokiokwanhakton*, commonly referred to as the Circle of Unity wampum. This wampum commemorates the establishment of *Kiianorekowa*. The people wanted to remember how important unity is, so they strung two rows of wampum beads and made a circle which has two inter-woven strands. From this circle hang the strings which denote the positions, the authority of *Rotiahneson* and *Iotiahneson*, the Chiefs and Clan Mothers, which is to say the families. In this circle of wampum



Reproduction of the First William Penn Belt. (Photograph by John Kahionhes Fadden, collection of the Six Nations Indian Museum, courtesy of Akwesasne Museum)



Reproduction of the William Penn Belt. (Photograph by John Kahionhes Fadden, collection of the Six Nations Indian Museum, courtesy of the Akwesasne Museum)



Reproduction of an Oneida wampum belt. (Photograph by John Kahionhes Fadden, collection of the Six Nations Indian Museum, courtesy of the Akwesasne Museum)

are the spaced denotations of nationhood. There is a denotation where the strand is much longer. This represents Tadodaho, who is the keeper of the central fire of the Hodenosaunee. Onondaga. The special message in this wampum, we are told, is that there is no issue more important than the peace and unity of the people. We should not allow anything to creep into the minds of the men and women who sit on this council which would be a deterrent or cause destruction to the total unity of the confederacy. The message specifies that

each nation has to maintain unity, has to maintain peace, and their responsibility is expressed in words. Words are what we were given, and words are very important. Oratory is an important part of our teachings.

Very regularly, at Six Nations [the Tuscarora nation was given membership in the Confederacy after 1722] meetings what they are doing is taking the wampum belts and stretching them. This means they are making sure the wampum beads are, in fact, intact. At the same time they make sure that someone has the same strength

as the leather thongs that hold the beads together. This means the orator's strength, the strength of living life that emanates from the wampum, to be able to speak and present the oratory surrounding the wampum belts, beads, and strings. An old piece of leather, as in nature, deteriorates over a number of years. Parts need to be replaced, fresh thongs are necessary, the belt must be made strong continuously. **More importantly, the message that belongs to the belt must be fixed in memory to make sure that someone has that message to hand down.**

Always within the wampum message is the interpretation, and life experiences are included in the interpretation of these messages. And so the wampum is alive from one generation to the next. Today our wampums are in glass cases in museums throughout the world, and many of our own young people, our own Iroquois people, pass by these glass cases and look at our wampum belts in awe, wondering what they could have been used for because the museum did not include the tradition and the words of the belts in the displays. **The wampum belts, beads, and strings are used as reminders for the speaker, but it is the speaker who knows the words. The wampum belts themselves do not speak; one has to know the culture, the language, the words, the feelings, the life around what happened with these wampums in order to understand the real significance, and when wampum belts are in display cases they do not generate that kind of spirituality.** Sometimes I think that historians, although they don't mean to, perhaps want to put us in an historical time and they don't allow us to say "but it is alive today." This oratory is here today and we can still hear these things. We know the words today. Historians perhaps want us to say, well it used to be like that. Yes, it used to be like that, but it still is, and it will be for the future, and I believe this.

Further Reading:
Tehanetorens [Ray Fadden]. *Wampum Belts*. Onchiota, NY: Six Nations Indian Museum, n.d.



About the Author:
Ateronhiatakon is a member of the Snipe clan, Mohawk Nation at Akwesasne.

A Symbol More Powerful than Paper

John Mohawk

The wampum represent the peoples' best thinking put into belts. In fact sometimes it represents the agreement to hold onto an oral tradition. The interpretation of the value of wampum is an interesting one. When people look at Indian relations, one of their questions is about the value. When they look at wampum, they say that wampum was like money to the Indian, that wampum was valuable the same way money was valuable. It took many hours of labor for a person to create a string of wampum beads using a stone drill on a shell. Money actually is a measure of human labor, and the wampums in that regard were also a measure of human labor. There was a difference however; you couldn't accumulate wampums in quite the same way that you can accumulate dollars, and it didn't have quite the same kind of power to buy commodities that dollars have.

In the long time ago past, when they made wampum belts, the wampum belt became treated as a memento: both sides got one. They made a belt out of those wampums. That belt represented the effort of those people sitting down to use their minds to solve the conflict between their peoples and wampum became the symbol of that effort. A symbol more powerful than paper, a symbol more powerful than guns, it was a symbol of a people's successful accomplishment of coming to one mind about how they were going to go on from there in a permanent relationship of peace and tranquility between two sides. The wampum said that all that had transpired to create the conflict had been resolved and all that could be done by human beings using their clearest thinking to

create an environment for the future generations had been put together into that belt.

So those belts, Indians say, were sacred. They are as sacred as our sanity, as sacred as our ability to use our minds to solve our problems, as long as we believe that the principle is inviolate.

We believe that agreements that we make between people using their intelligence to solve their problems is something that is part of our heritage. It is something that is part of our grandchildren's heritage as long as the belt lasts. And you'll notice that the belt is all but indestructible; only the sinews can rot, the belt beads would last for centuries. They are a record of people's good will, a record of their thinking, a record of how we came to be the way we are, in a state of peace and tranquility with another people.

So the wampum went beyond money; it was more of an important kind of thing than dollars. When later, treaties were signed, they seemed to be much less permanent. They are signed on paper and many times they involve dollars. The treaties were written down in the tradition of American scholastic thinking: that somehow the written word is more sacred than if you speak it. This is obviously only believed by people who don't know anything about treaty history in the United States. In this context, the written word has been, I think, the most easily forgotten, the most consistently violated that there has been.

The first Europeans who were present wrote down the happenings they saw at the meetings when Indians got together to discuss

issues of conflict. There was a protocol that took place that was written down again and again and again, and the protocol was that the Indians extended to each other strings of wampums. The protocol required that the hosting party initiate the process by offering these wampums and speeches. The way they offered them was in a series of salutations, and the salutations are, I think, important to understand the significance of the wampum.

The first salutations are there to clear people's minds so that they can conduct business. The words that go with this salutation offered that they brush off the bench on which the people were going to sit and then they brush off the person's clothing and take off the stickers and the things they acquired in the forest while on their way. Then, in a series of symbolic discussions, they wipe the blood from the clothes and the tears from their eyes and they take the lump out of their throats and the tightness out of their chests. And these are the words that are carried with the wampum. It's an interesting oral tradition in that the other side is required, in the protocol, to return the salutations with the words in acknowledgment not just that they heard but that they understood.

The reason for this protocol can be seen clearly in the political ideology of the North American Indians. People cannot come to clear thinking if they are immersed in negative emotions, and when people are in the business of coming to a peaceful conclusion of a period of warfare or conflict, it is necessary that they first address their negative emotions so that they can think clearly.

Text Highlights

Source B (Wampum: excerpt from the Haudenosaunee Educators Guide):

"A very important use for the wampum was to make belts, consisting of rows of interlaced wampum woven on a bow loom."

"The designs in the belts recorded the the laws of the Confederacy, oral tradition used for ceremonies, and important political interactions between Native nations and later between the Confederacy and Europeans."

Source D (Iroquoian Use of Wampum) :

"The use of wampum as a trade item was of secondary importance at most."

"It is obvious to all who are the least acquainted with Indian affairs, that they regard no message or invitation, be it of what consequence it will, unless attended or confirmed by strings or belts of wampum, which they look upon as we our letters or rather bonds."

"It is known and acknowledged by the people that the bearer of this wampum belt represents the nation's one-minded consensus."

"Always within the wampum message is the interpretation, and life experiences are included in the interpretation of these messages. And so the wampum is alive to the next."

"Wampum belts themselves do not speak. One has to know the culture, the language, the words, the feelings, the life around what happened to these wampums in order to understand the real significance, and when wampum belts are in display cases they do not generate that kind of spirituality."

Source E (A Symbol More Powerful Than Paper):

"The wampum represent the people's best thinking put into belts."

"You couldn't accumulate wampums in quite the same way that you can accumulate dollars, and it didn't have quite the same kind of power to buy commodities that dollars have."

"So the wampum went beyond money: it was more of an important kind of thing than dollars."

TEACHING ABOUT WAMPUM

RESOURCES FOR ELEMENTARY SCHOOL EDUCATORS

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BACKGROUND INFORMATION FOR TEACHERS

VIDEOS AND ARTICLES FOR STUDENTS TO WATCH AND READ



F1: Voices From Here: Richard Hill

This video covers the various uses of wampum, as well as the meaning behind the symbols in the Hiawatha belt.

source: NY State Museum



F2: The Living Tradition of Wampum video by Katsitsionni Fox

This video can be viewed as part of the Otgoā exhibit through August 2023

source: Ganondagan



F3: What is Wampum?

This video covers the various uses of wampum, as well as the meaning behind the symbols in the Hiawatha belt.

source: NY State Museum



F4: Haudenosaunee's Legendary Founding

This animation provides an overview of the Great Law and show how Hiawatha used wampum to heal when he was mourning the loss of his daughters.

source: PBS



Wampum Otgoā Exhibition Guide

Interpretation of wampum objects from the exhibit Otgoā by Indigenous collaborators.

source: Ganondagan



Article by Ateronhiatakon: Iroquoian Use of Wampum

source: The Quarterly; Official Publication of the St. Lawrence County Historical Association 1988



Article by John Mohawk: A Symbol More Powerful Than Paper

source: Northeast Indian Quarterly



F5: The Use of Wampum Belts

Former Ganondagan State Historic Site Manager, Peter Jemison discusses Wampum and three Treaty Belts that are still in use today, the Hiawatha Belt, the Two Row, and the George Washington Belt.

source: Ganondagan



Wampum: Page from Haudenosaunee Guide for Educators

Overview of the meaning of wampum

source: The National Museum of the American Indian

Glossary:

alliance: a bond or connection between families, states, parties, or individuals

confederacy: a group of people, countries, organizations, etc. joined together for a common purpose or by a common interest

consensus: reaching a decision where all parties are in agreement

diplomatic: of, relating to, or concerned with the art and practice of conducting negotiations between nations : of, relating to, or concerned with diplomacy or diplomats

Haudenosaunee: a confederacy of 6 Native nations originally of New York consisting of the Cayuga, Mohawk, Oneida, Onondaga, and Seneca and later including the Tuscarora

law: a binding custom or practice of a community : a rule of conduct or action prescribed or formally recognized as binding or enforced by a controlling authority

Truth: the body of real things, events, and facts

Peace: a state or period of mutual concord between governments

Console: to alleviate the grief, sense of loss, or trouble of

negotiate: to confer with another so as to arrive at the settlement of some matter

procedure: a traditional or established way of doing things

protocol: a code prescribing strict adherence to correct etiquette and precedence (as in diplomatic exchange and in the military services)

one-minded

treaty: a contract between two or more political authorities (such as states, nations or sovereign) formally agreed upon by authorized representatives and usually ratified by the lawmaking authority of the state

wampum : wampum are beads made from various white and purple mollusk shells which were and are still used by various Native nations throughout northeastern North America for ornamental or ceremonial use

wampum belt: wampum beads were woven together into belts that commemorated significant historic events such as treaties, alliances, or declarations of war. These belts served as mnemonic devices that designated readers could read to recount the details of whichever event it represented.

wampum string / strand: A string of wampum is used to show that the person who carries it holds a title in the longhouse as either a chief, a clanmother, or in communities that have gone over to an elected form of government, to designate who the faithkeepers (people who are responsible for the continuation of ceremonies being put through)