

●●● Iroquois Tribe ●●●

● *How do you pronounce the word "Iroquois"? What does it mean?*

It's pronounced "eer-uh-kwoy" in English. It's an English corruption of a French corruption of an [Algonkian](#) word meaning "real snakes." Originally, this was probably an insulting nickname (the Algonkian and Iroquois Indians were traditional enemies.) The Iroquois tribes originally called their confederacy *Kanonsionni*, which means "people of the longhouse." Today they call themselves the **Haudenosaunee** or **Six Nations**.

● *Who were the Iroquois tribes?*

There were five tribes in the original Iroquois Confederacy: the [Mohawk](#), [Seneca](#), [Oneida](#), [Onondaga](#), and [Cayuga](#) tribes. Later a sixth nation, the [Tuscarora](#) tribe, joined the confederation.

Many other tribes, such as the [Huron](#) and the [Cherokee](#), are sometimes called "Iroquoian" tribes. They are called that because they are distant relatives of the Iroquois Confederacy tribes and speak related languages. However, they were never part of the Iroquois Confederacy. In fact, they were sometimes at war with them.

● *How was the Iroquois Confederacy organized?*

The Iroquois Confederacy, also known as the Iroquois League, was governed by the **Iroquois Great Council**. Each Iroquois nation sent between eight and fourteen leaders to the Great Council, where they agreed on political decisions through discussion and voting. Although these politicians were called "chiefs," they were actually elected officials, chosen by the **clan mothers** (or matriarchs) of each tribe. Each individual nation also had its own tribal council to make local decisions. This is similar to how American states each have their own government, but all are subject to the greater US government. In fact, the Iroquois Confederacy was one of the examples of representative democracy used as a model by America's founding fathers.

The Iroquois Great Council continues to meet in the present day, although today most political matters are decided by the governments of the individual Iroquois nations.

● **Where do the Iroquois Indians live?**

The Iroquois tribes are original residents of what is now [New York state](#). (The exception is the Tuscaroras, who came from North Carolina to join their northern kinfolk.) Some Iroquois people still live in New York today, while others retreated to Canada in the 1700's.

● **What language do the Iroquois Indians speak?**

There were six different languages spoken by the Iroquois nations: [Mohawk](#), [Seneca](#), [Oneida](#), [Onondaga](#), [Cayuga](#), and [Tuscarora](#). These languages are all related to each other, just as the European languages Spanish, French, and Italian are all related to each other. Some Iroquois people could speak more than one of these languages. In particular, important Iroquois men usually learned Mohawk, because Mohawk was the language they usually used at the Great Council and at Iroquois religious festivals.

Most Iroquois people speak English today, but some people, especially elders, still speak the native language of their own tribe. Here is a comparative chart of [Iroquois words](#), a website where you can [hear Iroquois words being spoken](#), and a [Mohawk picture glossary](#).

● **What was Iroquois culture like in the past? What is it like now?**



[Iroquois wampum belt](#)

Here is a link to the [Haudenosaunee Grand Council](#), where you can find information about the Iroquois Confederacy past and present. Here is the website of the [Iroquois Museum of New York](#), where you can see photographs of Iroquois art and artifacts. You can also read simple articles about the Iroquois Indians [here](#) and [here](#).

● **How do Iroquois Indian children live, and what did they do in the past?**



[Iroquois dolls](#)

They do the same things any children do--play with each other, go to school and help around the house. Many Iroquois children like to go hunting and fishing with their fathers. In the past, Indian kids had more chores and less time to play, just like colonial children. But Iroquois kids did have [cornhusk dolls](#), toys, and games, such as one game where kids tried to throw a dart through a moving hoop. [Lacrosse](#) was also a popular sport among Iroquois boys as it was among adult men. Iroquois mothers, like many Native Americans,

traditionally carried their babies in [cradleboards](#) on their backs--a custom which many American parents have [adopted](#).

● ***What were men and women's roles in the Iroquois tribe?***

Iroquois men were in charge of hunting, trading, and war. Iroquois women were in charge of farming, property, and family. These different roles were reflected in Iroquois government. Iroquois clans were ruled by women, who made all the land and resource decisions for each clan. But the chiefs, who made military decisions and trade agreements, were always men. Only men represented the Iroquois Confederacy at the Great Council, but only women voted to determine who the representatives of each tribe would be. Both genders took part in Iroquois storytelling, artwork and music, and traditional medicine.

● ***What were Iroquois homes like in the past?***



[Iroquois longhouse sketch](#)

The Iroquois people lived in villages of ***longhouses***, which were large wood-frame buildings covered with sheets of elm bark. Iroquois longhouses were up to a hundred feet long, and each one housed an entire clan (as many as 60 people.) Here are some pictures of [Indian longhouses](#) like the ones Iroquois Indians used, and a [drawing](#) of what a longhouse looked like on the inside. Today, Iroquois families live in modern houses and apartment buildings, just like you.

● ***What was Iroquois clothing like? Did Iroquois people wear feather headdresses and face paint?***

Iroquois men wore [breechcloths](#) with long leggings. Iroquois women wore wraparound skirts with shorter leggings. Men did not originally wear shirts in Iroquois culture, but women often wore a tunic called an overdress. Iroquois people also wore [moccasins](#) on their feet and heavy robes in winter. In colonial times, the Iroquois adapted European costume like long cloth shirts, decorating them with [fancy beadwork](#) and ribbon applique. Here is a webpage about [traditional Iroquois dress](#), and here are some photographs and links about [American Indian clothes](#) in general.



[Iroquois clothing](#)



[Iroquois moccasins](#)

The Iroquois didn't wear [long headdresses](#) like the [Sioux](#). Iroquois men wore a [gustoweh](#), which was a feathered cap with different insignia for each tribe (the headdress worn by the man in this picture has three eagle feathers, showing that he is Mohawk.) Iroquois women sometimes wore special [beaded tiaras](#). Iroquois warriors often shaved their heads except for a scalplock or a crest down the center of their head (the style known as a roach, or a "Mohawk.") Sometimes they augmented this hairstyle with splayed feathers or [artificial roaches](#) made of brightly dyed porcupine and deer hair. Iroquois Indian women only cut their hair when they were in mourning, wearing it long and loose or plaited into a long braid. Men sometimes decorated their faces and bodies with [tribal tattoos](#), but Iroquois women generally didn't paint or tattoo themselves.

Today, some Iroquois people still wear moccasins or a beaded shirt, but they wear modern clothes like jeans instead of breechcloths... and they only wear feathers in their hair on special occasions like a dance.

🗿 What was Iroquois transportation like in the days before cars? Did Iroquois people paddle canoes?



[Iroquois snowshoes](#)

Sometimes--the Iroquois Indians did use elm-bark or dugout canoes for fishing trips, but usually preferred to travel by land. Originally the Iroquois tribes used dogs as pack animals. (There were no horses in North America until colonists brought them over from Europe.) In wintertime, Iroquois people used laced snowshoes and sleds to travel through the snow.

What was Iroquois food like in the days before supermarkets?



[Iroquois farmers](#)

The Iroquois were farming people. Iroquois women did most of the farming, planting crops of corn, beans, and squash and harvesting wild berries and herbs. Iroquois men did most of the hunting, shooting deer and elk and fishing in the rivers. Iroquois Indian dishes included cornbread, soups, and stews cooked on stone hearths.

What were Iroquois weapons and tools like in the past?



[Iroquois war club](#)

Iroquois hunters used bows and arrows. Iroquois fishermen generally used spears and fishing poles. In war, Iroquois men used their bows and arrows or fought with clubs, spears and shields.

Other important tools used by the Iroquois Indians included stone adzes (hand axes for woodworking), flint knives for skinning animals, and wooden hoes for farming. The Iroquois were skilled woodworkers, steaming wood so they could bend it into curved tools. Some Iroquois people [still make lacrosse sticks this way today](#).

What are Iroquois arts and crafts like?



[Iroquois beadwork](#)

The Iroquois tribes were known for their [mask carving](#), which is considered such a sacred art form that outsiders are still not permitted to view many of these masks. [Beadwork](#) and the more demanding [porcupine quillwork](#) are more common Iroquois crafts. The Iroquois Indians also crafted *wampum* out of white and purple shell beads. Wampum beads were traded as a kind of currency, but they were more culturally important as an art material. The [designs and pictures](#) on Iroquois wampum belts often told a story or represented a person's family.

● **What was Iroquois music like?**



[Iroquois water drum](#)

The two most important Iroquois instruments are [drums](#) and [flutes](#). Iroquois drums were often filled with water to give them a distinctive sound different from the drums of other tribes. Most Iroquois music is very rhythmic and consists mostly of drumming and lively singing. Flutes were used to woo women in the Iroquois tribes. An Iroquois Indian man would play beautiful flute music outside his girlfriend's longhouse at night to show her he was thinking about her.

● **What other Native Americans did the Iroquois tribes interact with?**

The Iroquois Indians were fierce warriors who fought with most of the other eastern tribes, particularly the [Wabanaki tribes](#), the [Algonquin](#) and [Ojibway](#) tribes, and the [Mohican](#) bands. The Iroquois tribes also engaged in trade with their neighbors. Iroquois traders exchanged corn, tobacco and woodcrafts for furs and quahog shells.

● **What kinds of stories do the Iroquois Indians tell?**

There are lots of traditional Iroquois legends and fairy tales. Storytelling is very important to the Iroquois Indian culture. Here is an Oneida story about the [origin of mosquitoes](#).

● **What about Iroquois religion?**

Religions are too complicated and culturally sensitive to describe appropriately in only a few simple sentences, and we strongly want to avoid misleading anybody. You can visit this site to learn more about [Iroquois mythology](#) or this site about [Native American religions](#) in general.

● **Can you recommend a good book on the Iroquois Confederacy?**

[Lacrosse: The National Game of the Iroquois](#) is a lively look at the origins of this traditional sport and Iroquois culture in general, tracing the lives three generations of Onondaga lacrosse players. [Legends of the Iroquois](#) is a good collection of traditional Six Nations stories, retold by a Mohawk author. [Wampum Belts of the Iroquois](#) is an interesting look at the symbolism and significance of the different wampum belt designs used by the Iroquois peoples. [If You Lived With The Iroquois](#) provides a good look at daily life in the Iroquois tribes in the old days. You can also

browse through our reading list of recommended [American Indian books](#) in general.

 ***How do I cite your website in my bibliography?***

You will need to ask your teacher for the format he or she wants you to use. Our names are Laura Redish and Orrin Lewis and the title of our site is Native Languages of the Americas. The site was first created in 1998 and last updated in 2007.

Thanks for your interest in the Iroquois Indian people and their languages!

SOURCE: http://www.geocities.com/bigorrin/iroquois_kids.htm