Science of Life Explorations

The Three Sisters:

The Haudenosaunee’s Three Sisters
Introduction

The Iroquois CONFEDERACY was an alliance of Native American tribes in New York state and parts of Pennsylvania and Canada. These tribes were the Senecas, Cayugas, Oneidas, Onondagas, Mohawks, and eventually, the Tuscaroraras from North Carolina.

During the Revolutionary War, the confederacy was divided. The Oneidas and the Tuscaroras sided with the Americans. The others were loyal to Britain.

In 1779, George Washington sent General Sullivan and General Clinton on a mission to destroy the enemy-Iroquois. This was later named “Sullivan’s March”.

The two generals successfully burned the villages and fields of the Native Americans. After the war ended and the United States was born, the government took over their land and moved the remaining Iroquois, against their wishes, to RESERVATIONS out west.

Today, little of Iroquois homelands have been returned to them. Modern-day Iroquois wear dress, work and live like we do, but they still use their traditional clothes and crafts in keeping their culture and history alive.

What’s in a name?

What plants did they eat?

How did they use the whole plant?

Who are The Three Sisters?
What’s in a name?

Some people believe that Christopher Columbus called the Native Americans “indians” because he thought he had found a way to India. But we know that the people Columbus found were native to North and South America, not the country of India.

The Iroquois confederacy of New York State have always called themselves the “Hau-de-no-sau-nee” which means “people of the long houses”. Longhouses were long rectangular buildings made of wood that many families shared.

The French named them the “Iroquois”. This is a French form of the Huron words meaning “black snakes”. This was not a nice name.

“Iroquois” was used so often to refer to the Hau-de-no-sau-nee that people forgot that it wasn’t their true name. Today, people are learning more about the history and culture of the Hau-de-no-sau-nee.

Out of respect and friendship with the Hau-de-no-sau-nee people, we should use the proper names they gave themselves.

Why shouldn’t we use the name “Iroquois”? ________________________________

What did the Hau-de-no-sau-nee live in? ________________________________

Think about the Hau-de-no-sau-nee name and how another people gave them the name of Iroquois. How would you feel if someone decided to call you by a different name? What if the new name wasn’t very nice?

Write about your name and what it means to you. ________________________________

______________________________

______________________________
The plants they grew and how they used them...

The Hau-de-no-sau-nee lived all over the New York area. They ate the fruits, vegetables, and animals that grew and lived around them. Take a look at the list of fruits and vegetables below. How many of these do you eat?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Corn</th>
<th>Dandelions</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Beans</td>
<td>Acorns</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Apples</td>
<td>Hickory Nuts</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Potatoes</td>
<td>Mustard</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Squash</td>
<td>Plums</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Strawberries</td>
<td>Mushrooms</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Walnuts</td>
<td>Raspberries</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Peaches</td>
<td>Mulberries</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Onions</td>
<td>Melons</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Maple Sugar and Syrup</td>
<td>...and much more!</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pumpkins</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Asparagus</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Do you have a lot in common? You live on the same lands the Hau-de-no-sau-nee lived on many years ago!

Much of the foods both we and the Hau-de-no-sau-nee eat can be used for other purposes...

The entire corn plant can be used so that none of it is wasted.

- Kernels - used for food or in decoration
- Cob - burnable fuel for smoking meats
- Leaves - sometimes used in cooking other foods and for making husk dolls
- Silk - hair for husk dolls
- Stalk - hollowed out and used to store medicines and other things

Pumpkins are a kind of squash. How can you use a whole pumpkin, inside and out?

Roast the _______, bake a pumpkin ________, and ________ its shell in the fall.
Who are the Three Sisters?

There are many different stories about who the Three Sisters are and what they did for people. A common thread is that the Three Sisters saved the Native Americans from starvation. Here is one version of the story:

The first man and woman created by the Great Spirit were happy with their lives on the newly formed Earth. However, they discovered that they were hungry and could not find anything to eat. The woman cried out to the Great Spirit “Oh Great Spirit! We are hungry and can not find any food. Please help us!”

The man noticed the mound of soil they were standing near. Three women rose out of the soil as if they grew there. The man and woman watched and listened to the mysterious women.

The tallest and oldest woman had silk strings for hair, the beads of her dress were golden yellow, and she wrapped herself in a green, leafy coat. She said to them “Greetings! I am Sister Corn. Eat what I grow for you and you will stand strong.”

The second woman was much smaller and thinner. With her beaded jewelry dangling, she held on to Sister Corn’s waist in order to stand up. “I am Sister Bean. Sister Corn helps me stand up to see the sun. My feet will keep the soil healthy. Eat what I grow for you and you won’t be hungry.”

The third woman lay on the ground. She was rounder than the other two women and she had on an orange dress. Her big leafy hair covered the ground around Sister Corn and Sister Bean’s feet. “I am Sister Squash. My leafy hair protects my sisters’ feet from weeds and animals. Eat what I grow for you and share us with your children.”

(continued on next page)
The man and woman were delighted for the help the Great Spirit had sent them. The man asked “What are we to do when your fruits have all been picked?” Sister Corn replied “Give thanks to us when you pick our fruits. Give thanks to us when you plant our seeds in the soil mound again. Take care of us as we return to you again.”

The three sisters, Corn, Bean, and Squash, changed from their human forms into healthy green plants. Sister Corn’s stalk was tall and strong. Sister Bean’s vines wrapped around that stalk. Sister Squash’s big leaves covered the ground.

The man and woman did what the sisters told them to do. At every planting and harvest, the man, woman, and their children gave thanks to the three sisters and the Great Spirit. They celebrated the first signs of plants growing. They took joy in caring for the plants. And they celebrated the harvesting of their fruits for ages to come.

THE END

Based on this story, why do you think corn, beans, and squash are sometimes called “our supporters”?

What did you notice about what the three women wore before changing into plants?

On page 8, design your own three sisters garden using the cut outs on the next page. Keeping in mind what you’ve learned in the story, make a bird’s-eye-view of where you will plant you corn, beans, and squash. Be creative with the shape and pattern of your garden.
These tall cornstalks, tiny bean leaves, and floppy squash leaves were very important to many Native Americans.
Review

* In 1779, Sullivan’s Campaign moved through New York state, destroying the villages of enemy Hau-de-sau-nee.

* Modern-day Hau-de-sau-nee are do not always wear their traditional clothes. They use them for ceremonies, festivals, and other important occasions within their culture.

* “Iroquois” means “black snakes”, a name that is offensive to the Hau-de-no-sau-nee people.

* Some Hau-de-no-sau-nee lived in big longhouses. You can see pictures and models of them at some museums around New York.

* The people who live in New York state today eat many of the same foods that the Hau-de-no-sau-nee ate before the American Revolutionary War.

* There are many ways to use plants so that nothing goes to waste.

* The Three Sisters are corn, beans, and squash. They help each other grow when planted together.

Vocabulary

Confederacy - the body formed by persons, states, or nations united by a league

Reservations - land set aside by the American government for the Native Americans to live on while the Americans built new towns on the Native Americans' homelands
Test Your Knowledge

1. The Hau-de-no-sau-nee (Iroquois) Confederacy included these nations:
   a. Niagaras, Oneidas, Mohawks, Tuscaroras, Senecas, and Cayugas
   b. Tuscarora, Onondagas, Oneidas, Cayugas, and Senecas
   c. Senecas, Oneidas, Cayugas, Onondagas, Mohawks, and Tuscaroras
   d. Huron, Niagaras, and Mohawks

2. What part of Sister Bean keeps the soil well-nourished for future crops?
   a. hair
   b. dress
   c. the beans she produces
   d. roots

3. Besides the Three Sisters, name three other foods that both you and the Hau-de-no-sau-nee eat?

4. What does the name “Iroquois” mean? ________________________________.
   What does the name “Hau-de-no-sau-nee” mean? ________________________
   ___________________________________.
   What country named them the “Iroquois”? ____________________________.

5. Name the general who launched an attack against the Hau-de-no-sau-nee in 1779.

   ___________________________
Background for teaching this lesson:

Some scholars have a theory that human civilization started somewhere in Mesopotamia (the Middle East) or Africa. The early humans spread from there into Europe and Asia. Some eventually traveled over the once-above-water land bridge between Russia and Alaska and from there, moved down into North America, Central America, and South America.

The Haudenosaunee, or Iroquois, Confederacy finished forming in 1142, the Senecas being the last to ratify the constitution. The Haudenosaunee Confederacy included the Onondagas, Senecas, Cayuga, Oneida, and Mohawks. The Tuscarora fled, from the European colonists in North Carolina, to New York seeking refuge in 1720. They became non-voting members within the confederacy.

The arrival of the Europeans eventually led to discord between the Haudenosaunee and the new settlers. Neighboring settlements sometimes battled against the Native Americans. Competing colonial powers, the French and British, pitted various Native American nations against each other in the struggle over land claims.

When the American Revolution rolled around, the Haudenosaunee were divided. The majority of the nation allied themselves with the British while the Oneidas and Tuscaroras sided with the American colonists.

“The Mohawk and the Cayuga, who were strong allies of the British, today live on reservations in Ontario, and most of the remaining Iroquois, except for the Oneida who live in Wisconsin, are in New York. The Iroquois in Canada and in the United States are either Christians or followers of Handsome Lake, a Seneca prophet of the 18th century who was influenced by the Quakers. The total number of Iroquois in the United States and Canada is around 29,000.” - http://www.nativeamericans.com/Iroquois.htm

The Three Sisters are common vegetable crops to many Native American tribes, not just the Haudenosaunee. Corn, beans and squash grow well together, and benefit each other. They also provide foods when freshly picked or store well when dry. A Three Sisters garden is a great way to introduce gardening to your students.

There doesn’t appear to be one version of the Three Sisters story in Haudenosaunee folklore. It might be assumed that tribes and nations had their own stories which the passed on in the oral tradition. The story featured in the student lesson book was adapted from multiple stories from Haudenosaunee culture.

More information on teaching Native Americans as not only a people of the past but of today, can be found in the interesting web article included in Lesson Supplements at the back of this teacher’s guide. Also, ideas for extension activities are featured in Lesson Supplements.
Pages 1 This page should be read aloud by the class as it covers a considerable amount of history.

Pages 2 and 3 The Plants They Grew
Students may be directed to circle the foods they have eaten.

The entire corn plant can be used so that none of it is wasted.

- Kernels - used for food or in decoration
- Cob - burnable fuel for smoking meats
- Leaves - sometimes used in cooking other foods and for making husk dolls
- Silk - hair for husk dolls
- Stalk - hollowed out and used to store medicines and other things

Pumpkins are a kind of squash. How can you use a whole pumpkin, inside and out?

Roast the ______, bake a pumpkin ______, and carve its shell in the fall.

seeds     pie

Pages 4 and 5 Who Are The Three Sisters?:
An adaptation of the story of the Three Sisters is given on this and the next page. Students then may complete the questions about the story.
The man and woman did what the sisters told them to do. At every planting and harvest, the man, woman, and their children gave thanks to the three sisters and the Great Spirit. They celebrated the first signs of plants growing. They took joy in caring for the plants. And they celebrated the harvesting of their fruits for ages to come.

The three sisters, Corn, Bean, and Squash, changed from their human forms into healthy green plants. Sister Corn's stalk was tall and strong. Sister Bean's vines wrapped around that stalk. Sister Squash's big leaves covered the ground.

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Based on this story, why do you think corn, beans, and squash are sometimes called “our supporters”?

The three crops provide a food source

What did you notice about what the three women wore before changing into plants?

They resembled the crop they became.
Test Your Knowledge

1. The Hau-de-no-sau-nee (Iroquois) Confederacy included these nations:
   a. Niagaras, Oneidas, Mohawks, Tuscaroras, Senecas, and Cayugas
   b. Tuscarora, Onondagas, Oneidas, Cayugas, and Senecas
   c. Senecas, Oneidas, Cayugas, Onondagas, Mohawks, and Tuscaroras
   d. Huron, Niagaras, and Mohawks

2. What part of Sister Bean keeps the soil well-nourished for future crops?
   a. hair
   b. dress
   c. the beans she produces
   d. roots
   X

3. Besides the Three Sisters, name three other foods that both you and the Hau-de-no-sau-nee eat?
   ______ berries ______ fish or meat _____ tree fruit____

4. What does the name “Iroquois” mean? __black snakes______________________.
   What does the name “Hau-de-no-sau-nee” mean?________________________
   ______ people of the long houses______________.

   What country named them the “Iroquois”? _____ France__________________.

5. Name the general who launched an attack against the Hau-de-no-sau-nee in 1779.
   Sullivan
   ___________________